A Practice-Based Approach to Defining Maximalism

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by

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Declaration:

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

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Abstract

This practice-based Ph.D. is an exploration of the concept of maximalism in the field of visual arts. Previous studies of maximalism in disciplines such as literature and architecture signalled a lack of rigor surrounding the use of the term maximalism with regard to various cultural productions. In addition, the relative scarcity of works addressing maximalism in visual art drove the development of this research, which aims to clarify the definition of maximalism through the practice of art.

Through critical interrogation, the body of work developed within this project revealed insights into the nature of artistic maximalism. During the development of the project, a methodological research gap was identified as the absence of a set of procedures enabling the understanding and use of the concept of maximalism. To address this methodological gap, a theoretical framework describing maximalism in terms of formal parameters was constructed.
Maximalism was investigated through the exploration of a variety of new and traditional media: holography, virtual reality (VR) artmaking, 3D printing, printmaking and drawing. The study revealed the intrinsically maximalist nature of holography in conjunction with VR artmaking. VR holography, a new art form resulting from this research, expands physical space by using a flat surface to render potentially infinite 3D content. It also connects the realms of the virtual and the real. Other forms of artistic maximalism revealed by this study include: the expansion of the space of art through para-artistic devices, intensity maximalism explored through miniature drawing, chromatic maximalism, durational maximalism and narrative maximalism.
Maximalism as an artistic practice reflects an engagement of the artist in a continual process of becoming, as a method to access and explore new tools for artistic expression.

The main contribution of the research is a twofold definition of maximalism. On the one hand, maximalism is defined as a mode of artistic expression intrinsic to the artwork, a definition which lends itself to a type of art analysis partially grounded in formalism. On the other hand, maximalism is proposed as a characteristic of the process of artmaking, referring to a strategy which the artist employs as a means of decentralising the artistic self.

Investigating these forms of maximalism showed the potential usefulness, to art theory and criticism, of a theory of maximalism based on aesthetic formalism. The clarification of the concept of maximalism constitutes a contribution to the vocabulary and discourse of art.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Rationale for the proposed research

The word 'maximalism' is frequently used today to describe various cultural productions, yet the lack of a rigorous definition makes it difficult to grasp the full meaning of the term. This undertheorisation of maximalism has been identified as a gap in the literature, which this thesis and the body of work accompanying it seek to address. The aim of this study therefore is to arrive at an understanding of artistic maximalism through the practice of art.

The concept of Maximalism, along with various artworks and practices which can be described by this term, including the body of work developed within this project, are reflected upon and analysed using a theoretical framework developed specifically for this study, in order to give shape and clarity to the concept, and to situate it within the field of contemporary art.

Various studies have attempted to describe maximalist tendencies in literature (Colangelo, 2014), music (Deville and Norris, 2005) and architecture (Templeton, 2013). The rationale for these studies, again, was based on the lack of the proper discursive tools to describe what could be regarded as maximalist practices in their respective disciplines. Together with the few existing references to maximalism in art (Pincus-Witten, 1977 & 1983; Flores, 2007; Davis et al., 2019), these studies have been instrumental in shaping my own theoretical framework for reflecting on the concept of maximalism in the context of contemporary art. Most importantly,

they served as a model for establishing certain parameters of maximalism, for example spatial, durational and narrative, and how these may be applied in scrutinizing specific artworks and art practices, including the body of work developed as part of this project.
In virtue of the practice-based nature of this study, the interplay between the creation of the body of work submitted with the thesis and the aforementioned theoretical framework is considered a crucial tool for approaching the research questions.

The importance of this research lies in the necessity to articulate the concept of maximalism in the field of art, given the increasing number of artists whose practice, in recent years, manifested maximalist tendencies (e.g.: Anish Kapoor, Forensic Architecture, Superflex, Martin Creed etc.). By proposing firstly, a structured definition of maximalism and secondly, a set of artworks which embodies it, this thesis contributes a tool for utilising maximalism as an operative concept within the vocabulary and discourse of art.

1.2. Research questions

The main research question of this study is 'What constitutes a maximalist artistic practice in the context of contemporary art?'
Before approaching this overarching question, it appeared necessary to answer two secondary questions, namely:
'How can a definition of artistic maximalism be derived from the practice of art?'
and
'How relevant is this concept in the field of contemporary art?'

Changes to the initial research questions

The initial research question was whether and how it is possible to create a body of work around the theme of *horror vacui* through the medium of holography, with the aim of enhancing the value perception of both within the sphere of the art

world. Subsequently, I decided to replace *horror vacui* with maximalism, understanding that the former constitutes a subset of the latter and also that the term maximalism expressed more clearly the type of imagery present in my artworks. In addition, I realised that using holography as the sole artistic medium for representing maximalism was an unnecessary limitation which could narrow the potential outreach of my research; also, the initial literature research revealed a number of academic works that had already been published by holography practitioners with long experience in the field. These works gave a comprehensive description of holography as an art medium (Richardson, 1988; Pepper, 1989; Benyon, 1994) and highlighted the challenges it continues to encounter (Benyon, 1989; Pepper, 1989; Lightfoot, 1989). Realising that holography by itself was insufficient to cover the complexity of maximalism, I decided to expand my artistic 'toolbox' so as to include various other media, alongside holography. Finally, I considered that focusing on a particular medium would not sit naturally in the landscape of contemporary art where medium specificity is no longer a primary concern, but rather an investigative and explorational tool.

1.3. Objectives generated by the research questions

The gaps identified in the literature review which my research aims to address are epistemological and methodological (according to the taxonomy of research gaps proposed by Miles, 2017). The absence of a clear definition of artistic maximalism is seen as a knowledge gap, while the absence of a set of procedures that enables the understanding and use of the concept of maximalism in art can be regarded as a methodological gap.

Identifying the absence of a definition of maximalism in art raised certain concerns: albeit rarely and rather unsystematically, the term is used in various writings about art; the question arises whether this lack of theorisation is an indication that the concept is just too trivial to be worth consideration. This possibility signalled the necessity to determine the relevance of maximalism to art in general and to contemporary art in particular.

A first objective therefore sought to address the methodological gap as an initial step in approaching the knowledge gap. This objective was the construction of a theoretical framework which could be applied in the analysis of existing artworks and practices, including my own. Then, an equally important objective, addressing the epistemological gap, would therefore be to use this theoretical framework to arrive at a better understanding of maximalism, firstly as a specific type of artistic practice and secondly as an operative concept for the vocabulary of art.

To articulate, in a practical way, how artmaking can generate knowledge, the most important objective was to create a body of work which could be reflected upon to derive an understanding of the concept of maximalism.

Secondary objectives set to approach the main objectives outlined above are:

- Identifying existing definitions of maximalism in art;
- Identifying existing definitions of maximalism in other disciplines;
- Establishing a working definition of artistic maximalism as a starting point in approaching the epistemological gap;
- Producing new knowledge on maximalism through the practice of art;
- Identifying theories that would be relevant to constructing a new theoretical framework for describing maximalism in art;
- Distinguishing key characteristics of maximalist art in order to establish a set of formal parameters for analysis;
- Analysing artworks with maximalist tendencies using these parameters;
- Determining the relevance of maximalism to art based on this analysis;
- Scrutinising my own artworks using these parameters;
- Synthesising the findings of this practice-based research.

1.4. Ontology, epistemology, methodology

The methodology employed throughout the development of this study is based on the constructivist paradigm of inquiry as described by Gray and Malins in *Visualising Research* (2017).

The main research question – what constitutes a maximalist art practice in the context of contemporary art - refers to the nature of reality and therefore establishes the ontological position of this research as speculatively determining the nature of maximalist art and art practice. Operating under the constructivist paradigm means that this ontological position is relativist (Gray and Malins, 2017, Fig. 1.2, p. 20). From the point of view of epistemology – the relationship between reality and 'the knower' – the practitioner who also adopts the role of researcher approaches the research from a subjectivist perspective.

To answer the ontological and epistemological lines of inquiry opened up by the research questions, a pluralist approach was considered most suited, combining practice-based and hermeneutical methodologies.

Since artmaking is both the driving force and the core of this study, research is undertaken primarily through a practice-based methodology. In parallel, art theories such as formalism, particularly the strand of formalism developed by Graham Harman (2020) under the theory of Object-Oriented Ontology, and iconography as an interpretive method, constituted the foundation for a theoretical framework of maximalism, as a new method of art analysis suited to the purpose of this study.

1.5. Contribution to the field of art

The exploration of maximalism through art practice led to my developing an original technique – virtual reality holography – a new art form that synthesizes the qualities of traditional hand-drawing with the unique features of holography and virtual reality art, having the unique ability to showcase VR artworks outside of VR space, without the need of a headset (the significance of this is developed in Chapter 5 of this thesis).

Another contribution of this project was the construction of a theoretical framework for analysing maximalism, based on spatial, durational and narrative parameters. This framework was grounded on the one hand in prior studies on maximalism from disciplines other than art, and on the other hand in the strand of formalism proposed by object-oriented ontology. This new tool was used for discussing a number of contemporary artworks and practices with maximalist tendencies, as a means to gauge the relevance of maximalism in the landscape of contemporary art. The artworks developed for this project were also analysed with reference to this theoretical framework and further findings with regard to the nature of maximalism were generated.

Amongst these, the most important was a twofold definition of maximalism. On the one hand, maximalism is defined as a mode of artistic expression intrinsic to the artwork, a definition which would lend itself to a type of art analysis partially grounded in formalism, i.e., a discussion of how an artwork functions as a self-contained aesthetic object. On the other hand, maximalism is proposed as a characteristic of the process of artmaking, referring to a type of strategy which the artist chooses to employ as a means of decentralising the artistic self.

1.6. Summary of chapters

Chapter 2 presents a literature review which situates this research in the context of current literature and indicates how this project aims to address the existing gaps. Chapter 3 details the methodology and theories which this study draws upon to arrive at a definition of maximalism through practice-based research. The theory of constructive learning (Gray and Malins, 2018) guides the methodological approach. The thread of formalism developed by Graham Harman’s object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2020) is used as a model for discussing the appearance of artworks, and how their sensory qualities influence audience perception.

The artworks produced during the development of this project are described in Chapter 4, each in three parts: an introduction outlining the context and initial ideas behind the project; 'the making-of' – a factual description of the process of artmaking; and a 'presentation' which examines issues regarding the display of each artwork in the context of an exhibition.

Research findings are presented and discussed in Chapter 5, including the relevance of each of the art projects to the theme of maximalism.

Conclusions drawn from this research are outlined in Chapter 6 along with questions for further research.

Chapter 2: Maximalist art – a contextual review

This chapter situates the research in the context of current literature on maximalism and indicates how the aims of this project address the identified knowledge gaps.
The first section consists of an overview of artworks I developed prior to the beginning of this research, where my propensity for maximalism was identified through critical interrogation.
The second section of this chapter will give a brief overview of some of the media I have used in my art projects, namely: holography, VR and 3D printing.
Further on, key works around the concept of maximalism will be discussed. Academic writings on the topic are sparse, some of them come from disciplines such as literature, architecture and music. Although this thesis builds on the knowledge they generate, their scarcity determined me to also allow brief mentions of non-academic sources such as mass-media and blog articles. The reason for including these sources is that they are part of a context which has developed in recent years, where the term maximalism has been used freely and vaguely to describe certain cultural productions characterized by an aesthetic of excess. This indeterminate use of the term created a climate where the meaning of maximalism is supposed to be understood or inferred, without actually being rigorously defined. This tendency is observed both by Templeton (2013, p.2) and Colangelo (2014, p. 65) in their overviews of maximalism with reference to architecture and literature respectively. Yet the increasing occurrence of these informal mentions of maximalism is indicative of an equally increasing tendency towards the production of maximalist objects in various sectors of visual culture.

2.1. Background information

My artistic training at the University of Arts in Bucharest (2005-2010) focused on fine art drawing. After graduating, as an art practitioner, I found it difficult to justify a traditional, non-contemporary practice which was in line with the values advocated by my tutors, but conflicting with what I considered to be a valid art practice. Nevertheless, to repudiate the knowledge and skills acquired during my art education felt like an unnecessary renouncement. Therefore, in the years after graduation, doodling was the temporary solution I found to this impasse: while continuing to generate visual products, I made a conscious decision to refrain from analysing and conceptualizing these productions. I became a drawing machine, an art-making automaton, and refrained from making any claims to an intellectual component of my art works. The process of art-making that characterizes this period bears a certain resemblance to generative art, in the sense that it is purely visual, devoid of any intentional meaning and generated by a pre-programmed entity. In my case, the pre-programming was established by many years of training in traditional drawing.

The imagery characteristic of my art during this period consisted mainly of pseudo-realistic machinery and eerie architectural structures, with an abundance of detail reminiscent of *horror vacui*, a stylistic approach often found in ancient and medieval art, whereby the entire surface of an artwork is filled up with minute detail.

A series of four artworks titled *Sad Giants* (2010, Fig. 1), marks the beginning of my interest in horror vacui imagery. Each ink drawing in this series depicts a human character buried under massive architectural structures that only leave the feet and faces uncovered. Scaffolding poking at the characters' faces announces the imminent disappearance of these human representations and their assimilation by the architectonic structure.

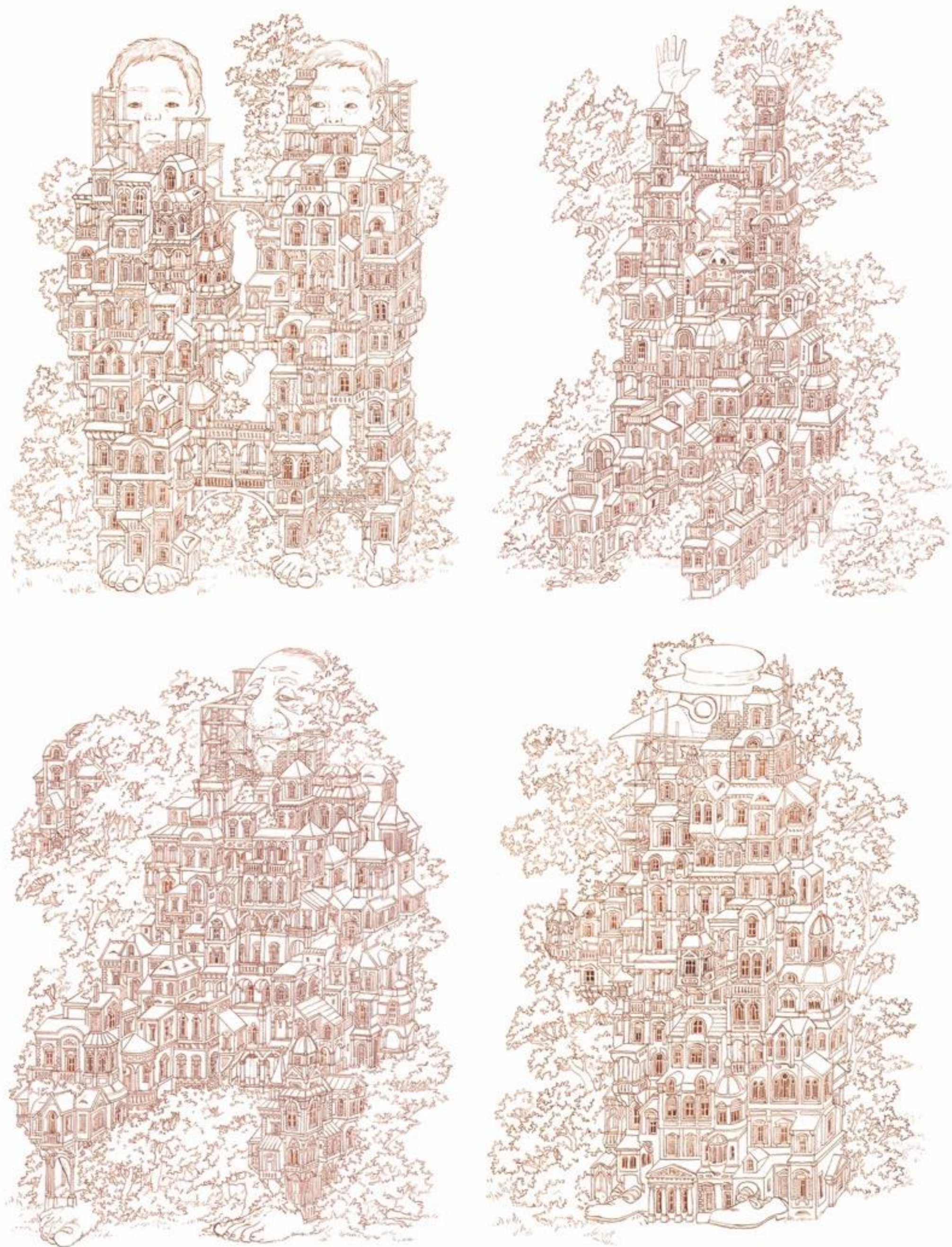

Fig. 1. *Sad Giants* (2010), four ink drawings on paper.

In the series of drawings *Small Things* (2014) and *Flux* (2014) (Fig. 2 & 3), the architectural and machinic imagery starts taking up more and more space, while vivid colours and eerie lighting become the energy which enlivens these settings. Instead of feeding on an entity internal to the artwork, the complex structures depicted in these series draw their vigour from my own creative energy and

endurance, while connotation replaces description. The *horror vacui* quality is proportional to my ability to carry on the repetitive and often unbearably dull task of the creative process, a trait of durational maximalism.

Fig. 2. *Flux* (2014), drawing installation, AnnArt Gallery, Bucharest.

Fig. 3. *Small Things*, markers on paper (concertina sketchbook), 2014.

Another artwork that precedes the beginning of my doctoral studies is the drawing titled *A* (2014) (Figure 4) – loosely referencing Arthur Rimbaud's poem *Vowels* (Rimbaud, 2009). In his search for a universal language, the poet attributes a certain colour to each vowel of the alphabet, through free or subjective

association. In my interpretation, the letter is “split” into two colours denoting my incapacity or unwillingness to fix the letter into one single chromatic signifier. The letter is isolated, oversized and decorated with abundant detail, it is dislocated from its typical context, in an attempt to turn an overfamiliar sign into a new, unsettling entity.

Fig.4. *A* (2014), markers on paper.

In the series of drawings titled *Insectarium* (2015), a collection of small machinic units arranged into different labyrinthine patterns, the idea of the drawing feeding

on my energy becomes even more obvious – each machinic cell becomes an ideogram, an extension of the mind into the realm of representation, an image of the thought that produced it and the death of that thought, since these structures are unplanned, unique and unrepeatable. The energy that brings these machines into existence is an uncanny mix of randomness, intuition, precision and habit, an uninterrupted flux that short-circuits the mind and the hand. The drawing-machine flows out of the mind-hand-machine, alive and pulsating while unfinished, then paralysed as the last stroke of ink encloses it in its final configuration.

Fig. 5. *Insectarium* (2015), drawing installation, AnnArt Gallery, Bucharest.

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To summarise, certain themes and features are characteristic of these early works: the obsessive abundance of details, the use of illusion and ambiguities of perception, the economical use of a surface to render a maximum amount of content, a predilection for fauvist colours. My subsequent preoccupation with maximalism can be traced back to these early points of interest and forms the basis of this research.

2.2. Media review

Admittedly, in a post-medium era, as defined by Rosalind Krauss in *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (2000), a discussion of media in and by itself may appear to be of little relevance as a subject of investigation for contemporary art and the philosophy of art. However, since this study is concerned with the production of knowledge through a practice-based approach, the art medium deserves attention as it is part of the 'toolbox' employed by this type of methodology.

Furthermore, the impulse to 'sample' various ways of making art which characterises my practice is symptomatic of a maximalist approach to artmaking. While the focus of the research is not on medium specificity, media-related aspects are investigated in order to construct a more rounded image of what constitutes a maximalist art practice.

For this reason, I will scrutinise some of the media employed in the art practice phase of this project, namely: holography, virtual reality art and 3D printing.

2.2.1. Brief overview of holography as an artistic medium

In simple terms, a hologram is a photographic recording of a light field, on either film or glass, resulting in a seemingly three-dimensional image which can be seen with the naked eye. Holography can be either analogue, when it captures something which exists in reality, or digital, when it displays computer-generated objects or scenes. Both types of holograms require a special, dedicated illumination system in order to be viewed and in the absence of which they appear as dark, indistinct, flat surfaces. The two main types of holograms are reflection holograms, which are replayed with a light placed on the same side of the hologram as the viewer, and transmission holograms where the illumination comes from the side of the hologram opposite the viewer (Bjelkhagen and Brotherton-Ratcliffe, 2013).

There are a number of techniques and optical illusions which are commonly and mistakenly referred to as 'holography', such as Pepper's Ghost (Muth, 2020). Although holography practitioners will reject these as mere tricks, the general public is perhaps more familiar with such techniques than with holography itself,

due mainly to the fact that they are often employed in fun fairs, in theatre and in other on-stage acts. Arguably the most notorious use of Pepper's Ghost was Tupac Shakur's virtual appearance at Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, in 2012, alongside Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg. August Muth marks the distinction between these optical devices and holograms by using the term 'true hologram' to describe the latter, which he defines as 'multidimensional manifestations of material light' (Muth, 2020).

Although primarily a scientific field, holography has a high potential of being used as an art medium and, as a consequence, is a domain that appeals equally to artists and scientists. Since its invention by Denis Gabor in the 1940's, holography has drawn the attention of a number of prominent artists, amongst whom Salvador Dali, Bruce Nauman and Louise Bourgeois are the best known (Dinsmore, 2019). Whilst these artists have briefly used holography as an addition or further exploration of their existing practice, a number of other artists have dedicated their entire career to the medium of holography, for example Margaret Benyon or Melissa Crenshaw.

Catalogues, photographic documentation and generally any type of literature on holography don't really do justice to a medium that doesn't lend itself easily to two-dimensional reproduction. However, articles on holography written by practicing artists, curators or critics are useful for understanding how holography was and is perceived and experienced first-hand.
Two volumes of the *Leonardo* art and science magazine, dedicated to holography art, comprise numerous articles in which holography art practitioners, amongst whom Margaret Benyon (1989), Andrew Pepper (1989) and Georges M. Dyens (1989) express their dissatisfaction with how the art world receives their work. Perhaps the most striking idea that comes across from these texts, and others written later on, is that holography and the art establishment still don't feel comfortable with one another. The medium of holography has encountered constant criticism and dismissal from the art establishment, the main points made

against it being vulgarity of colours, awkwardness of display and lack of a proper critical and conceptual vocabulary (Pepper, 1989). In a study titled *Contemporary Art World Bias in Regard to Display Holography* (Lightfoot, 1989), the author interviews several curators and directors of important art galleries in New York, trying to understand their opinions on holography art and how they justify the constant rejection of this medium by the establishment. The main conclusion of the study is that major museums and galleries don't necessarily dismiss the medium itself – they base their rejection on the status of the artist, claiming that, if an artist who has previously gained recognition by working with other media decided to take up holography, they (the art venues) would not hesitate to show their work. If this is the case, one might infer that holography artists simply face the same problems as any other artist approaching a venue. Indeed, a recent text by Sydney Dinsmore – *Reviewing the Inclusion of Artists' Holograms in the Permanent Collection of Fine Art Museums* (2019) reveals the fact that the tendency of mainstream galleries to only exhibit holograms by established artists still continues today.

There seems to be an ongoing struggle amongst holography practitioners to be accepted and valued or sometimes even considered by major art venues, in spite of long years of sustained efforts and obvious developments, both in the field of holography as a whole and within the individual practices of different artists. During a presentation at the International Symposium for Display Holography in Aveiro, 2018, August Muth confessed that, when approaching a gallery to propose a collaboration, he simply steers away from using the word 'hologram' in reference to his artworks, in order to avoid the immediate negative reaction and consequent rejection which are usually triggered by the mere mention of this word.

That said, it must be acknowledged that, still today, the medium has certain limitations that make holographic artworks unconvincing and could be the reason for recurring negative responses. For instance, brightness and colour balance, the complexity of arranging good replay illumination, blurring in the rear of a scene, vertical nonuniformity of colour, digital pixelization and the lack of a good archival-

quality recording material. These are technical issues which distract the viewer from the content of the hologram, admitting that the content and conceptual aspects are worthy of consideration.

Holography – A critical Debate within Contemporary Visual Culture is a salutary editorial project initiated by Andrew Pepper (2020) which sought to establish a critical framework for discussing holography art. Artists, curators and writers were invited to reflect upon and question their own practice and involvement with holography through a critical discussion, as a means to challenge the generalized opinion that holography lacks the vocabulary and critical values necessary to demonstrate its validity within the field of art.
A conclusion common to a few of the texts in this collection is that, in order for holography to gain recognition as a valid art medium, practitioners need to downplay the novelty factor and scrutinise the artwork with the same kind of critical pressure as one would any other media. In the absence of a proper, critical understanding of holography, there is always the risk of being seduced by its visually enticing qualities. Thus, the temptation of using the novelty and specificity of holography as a purpose in itself can (and often does) lead to the production of trite objects with no real artistic value. As Angela Bartam observes:

> “The “oohs” and “ahs” need to be ignored to get to the core of the hologram’s possibilities and potential. It can be a part of contemporary practice, but it needs to be treated as a process such as any other” (Bartram, 2020).

Similarly, Sydney Dinsmore notes that

> “If holography as an art form is to mature, its artistic integrity has to be paramount and supersede questions about the technology that creates it.” (Dinsmore, 2019).

Andrew Pepper observes the same interest to dissociate holography art discourse from purely technical aspects in the decision taken by the organisers of the 2018 International Symposium for Display Holography (Aveiro, 2018) to separate, for the first time in this event's history, scientific or technical holograms from artistic holograms. The latter were carefully curated in an exhibition hosted by the Aveiro City Museum which was open to the public during and after the Symposium (Pepper, 2019).

The few venues around the world which show holography art consistently, for instance Gallery 286 in London or the Centre for the Holographic Arts in New York (Holocenter), are actively seeking to further the 'emancipation' of holography through critical investigation, in thoughtfully curated shows. Artworks from the Jonathan Ross Hologram Collection are regularly exhibited by Gallery 286, yet the venue's scope was from the outset much wider: by showing holograms alongside various other types of art, holography is presented to the public as "just another art medium and not something weird that only belonged in a theme park" (Ross, 2018). The Holocenter organises exhibitions featuring holography alongside other light-based visual media, either in its own space on Governor's Island or in collaboration with other venues (e.g. On Canal and Parallax Gallery) as a means to expand the outreach of art holography. The centre aims to facilitate the production and exhibition of holography by setting up the Holographic Art Grant, in collaboration with the Hologram Foundation, and an Artist in Residence program. Furthermore, the Holocenter promotes holography to a wider public through various educational and research initiatives, such as the online course *Understanding Holograms* by Linda Law or the *Make a hologram* workshops by Martina Mrongovius.

The inclusion of holography within a formal academic environment, as in the case of The Holographic Research Group (HRG) at De Montford University, is another step towards establishing holography's validity within the artworld on the one hand, while facilitating its technical and scientific development in an institutional

setting on the other hand. The practice-based doctoral program offered by HRG, led by holography artist and academic Martin Richardson, enables artists and scientists to research and experiment with holography under the exacting pressure of academia. Artist Pearl John's doctoral thesis (2018), developed at De Montford University, exemplifies how an institutionalised practice-based research of holography is capable of generating knowledge through rigorous self-reflectivity.

Other initiatives for opening holography research centres in the near future reflect a continuing interest in advancing holography. The Geola research lab in West Sussex, U.K. (formerly the Centre for Ultra-realistic Imaging) is expected to be in operation in 2021. A new large format digital holographic printer as well as a recording setup for analogue holograms are being installed. Southwood Holographics (U.S.A.) run by Hart Perry plans to expand the existing laboratory and launch a new art residency program in collaboration with the Holocenter in New York (Holocenter, 2020).

Individual practitioners show an ongoing engagement in realising the potential of holography as a fine art medium. Melissa Crenshaw's concern with the display conditions of holographic artworks, which she discusses in a recent article (Crenshaw, 2019), is evidenced by the thoughtfulness invested in the setting up of her holographic assemblages, for example the *Optics Vanity* series (Crenshaw, 2018, p. 64-65). As a result of her endeavour to optimise these display conditions, including colour, angle of view and replay illumination, the artworks are presented in the best possible light and are able to focus the viewer's attention on the content of the art rather than medium specificity.
In Mary Harman's work, concrete objects and materials reminiscent of the gritty roughness of arte povera are juxtaposed with ethereal holographic figures to create eerily beautiful assemblages. Artworks like *Body and Soul* (2008) and *Anthropos* (2017-2018) join together, in the same confined space, analogue holographic images and the clay models from which they were recorded. While many artists shy away from an obvious use of the mimetic function of analogue

holograms (in their quest to find the 'true nature' of holography), Harman boldly upholds this function and imbues it with new meaning – the reception of the artwork relies precisely on the clear identity between the physical and the illusory, as well as their proximity, to cast the latter as the unsettlingly visible ghost of the former.

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The scope of this review does not allow for a discussion of all the artists who have successfully distanced themselves from a simplistic use of holography. As a general conclusion though, what makes their practice stand out is a deep commitment to creating artworks of irreproachable technical and visual quality. This may appear to contradict an equally solid interest in the work's conceptual strength. However, with a medium such as holography, this is possibly the only way to allow the viewer to engage with the content without being distracted by imperfections caused by the limitations of the medium.

2.2.2. Virtual reality (VR) art

In the context of this media review, I define VR art as the type of artistic content created directly inside the VR environment using an application designed specifically for the purpose of artmaking, rather than computer-generated content presented in VR.

VR art-making software such as Tilt Brush (developed by Google) or Gravity Sketch are impressive tools for creating digital 3D imagery, offering great new possibilities for art and the creative industries. They stand out amongst other VR applications due to the fact that they allow users to generate virtual reality content, as opposed to simply consuming it. This unprecedented combination of painting and sculpture, not bound to physical laws, with its lack of spatial limits and highly intuitive interface, offers a very satisfying immediacy that materializes gestures instantly. The handheld controllers of a VR system allow the user to draw or paint in three

dimensions by releasing ‘virtual ink’ on a trajectory which follows the movements of the hand. When I first started using Tilt Brush in 2017, I was fascinated by the ease with which one can combine the principles of drawing and those of sculpture – I saw a similarity with the concept of sculptural drawing that I had been exploring in some of the projects developed before the start of my PhD.

With its impressive variety of brushes often accompanied by special visual and sound effects, Tilt Brush was designed with the intention of offering the user not just an art tool but a fully immersive VR experience, entertaining in and by itself. Gravity Sketch, with its focus on creating geometry in the VR environment, has proved a real game-changer, by providing a level of editability and precision much superior to Tilt Brush, features which appeal greatly to design-oriented creatives (Pioaru and Stokes, 2019). More recently, the team behind the VR animation tool Tvori aim to create a powerful, immersive and intuitive tool for crafting visual stories, which anyone can use, regardless of their previous experience with either 2D or 3D animation (Feltham, 2018).
As a result, in recent times, an increasing number of artists have expressed their interest in this medium and have started adding VR artmaking to their ‘toolbox’. Rachel Rossin is an artist who uses VR to reflect on the ‘disembodied state of consciousness’ (Oertlet, 2017) experienced while sculpting in VR. In earlier works using VR, she connects her physical abstract painting with the digital environment. In the work titled *Lossy* bits of paintings and images from the artist’s studio are scanned and integrated in a VR setting wherein, as art critic Martha Schwendener observes, the sensation of inhabiting a painting and constantly colliding and intersecting with floating images is simulated (Schwendener, 2015). Conversely, a project from 2017, *Peak Performance*, extracts imagery made in VR to create physical paintings and sculptures for a gallery space. The sculptures consist of contorted sheets of transparent plastic covered with VR paintings that appear to be floating in the air.
The possibilities offered by this new artistic tool seem endless. However, there is a clear limitation in the fact that perceiving the three-dimensionality of VR artworks

depends on wearing a headset to access the virtual space where the work resides, which restricts the number of people who can view the work (Judah, 2018). Otherwise, due to the fact that VR art is still in its infancy, but also because of the difficulties associated with showcasing these productions outside of VR space, the works realised in this medium are only accessible to the wider public in a flattened version, via online 2D galleries. This prompted the connection I made with holography as a means to display these creations outside VR while also preserving their volumetric appearance.

2.2.3. Discussion of 3D printing and its impact on art and culture

Sometimes referred to as additive manufacturing, 3D printing is a process through which a three-dimensional object is obtained from a digital model with the use of a computer-controlled 3D printer. This is done through a variety of methods, the most common being fused filament fabrication (adding successive layers of material onto a build platform), stereolithography (producing a solid part from a liquid through photopolymerisation) and selective laser sintering (similar to stereolithography in that it uses a laser to obtain a solid, but in this case the medium is a powder rather than a liquid)

The history of additive manufacturing goes back to the 1980s and has developed constantly since its emergence. However, it is only in the 2000s that 3D printing has become widely accessible and affordable, due mainly to the expiry of the monopolistic patents held by the first developers of this technology (Schoffer, 2016).

Several intrinsic features of additive manufacturing are believed to have a positive impact on the environment as well as resulting in positive social change: the efficient use of materials reflected in 3D printing's capacity to create objects by only printing relevant parts (as opposed to subtractive techniques that carve parts out of large blocks of material, often disposing of the excess), reduced use of power and transportation, the ease of sharing new designs across the world, open source knowledge of how to build and use a 3D printer etc.

The capacity to rapidly produce intricate structures makes 3D printing a valuable tool for prototyping and manufacturing, which led to its having an impressively wide (and ever increasing) spectrum of applications, ranging from medical (e.g. prosthetics, reconstructive surgery, dental implants), industry (replacements and spares of mechanical parts for the automotive and aeronautics), fashion (shoes, jewellery), food (designed for astronauts' dietary requirements), culture (restoration of museum pieces, recreation of missing or damaged artefacts), education (enhancing student learning experience through active participation (Gallou and Abrahams, 2018) etc.

David Staley points out how 3D printing can be used as a tool for academic research in the field of Humanities, in a study titled *On the 'Maker Turn' in the Humanities* (Staley, 2017). The author presents a series of visualisations of data sets (some of which are 3D printed), to demonstrate the importance of making physical objects to generate and embody meaning, as an alternative to the scholarly accepted written text. Staley identifies design as playing a crucial part of interpretation for the humanities, showing how, in the absence of any templates which the designer/researcher can follow, 'meaning is instead derived from context and the material itself' in the making of these hermeneutic objects (Staley, 2017). In a discussion about the dialogic nature of objects, (works of art, their copies or even mere everyday objects), Susan Garfinkel (2014) reveals the importance of 3D printing in 'driving meaning forward' and reshaping our world:

> "The ease with which 3-D–printed copies of cultural artifacts invite us to engage the object's dialogic nature is striking: by virtue of heightened circulation they are ready sites of discourse; moving broadly among and across contexts, they allow for the flexible dissemination, amplification, and re-creation of meanings. They are souvenirs, miniatures, remixes, recreations, memories, and inventions. They are technologically immediate yet affectively timeless, melding the past with the present with the future

according to the needs and knowledges of their makers, users, and viewers." (Garfinkel, 2014, p. 210).

An interesting example of how 3D printing brings out the dialogic nature of objects is an exhibition organised in 2014 by the Sir John Soane Museum in London, of 3D printed Piranesi furnishings (reviewed by Ramchurn, 2014). The 18th century Italian artist Giovanni Batista Piranesi designed a series of decorative objects in the neoclassical style, which were never rendered into physical objects in his lifetime. Soane Museum collaborated with Madrid based studio Factum Arte to bring to life Piranesi's vision in the form of 3D printed artefacts, thus realising the potential of the artist's 2D concepts and establishing a dialogue across centuries which hadn't been possible before.

Similarly, a group of researchers took on the challenge of creating physical objects (using 3D printing), from drawings by Escher in order to highlight the relationship between mathematical functions, visualisations and object fabrication (Pasko et al., 2011).

Yet another (otherwise unlikely) dialogue was enabled by the artists Nora Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles who, in 2016, released a printable 3D dataset of the famous Nefertiti Bust owned by the Neues Museum in Berlin. Al-Badri and Nelles' project proposed a 'repatriation' of Nefertiti by means of a 3D printed version that would allow her to become visible for the first time since her discovery and removal by German archaeologists in 1912. The artists declared that they illicitly scanned the bust during a museum visit, although this claim was contested by artist Cosmo Wenman on the grounds of the scan being too accurate and also too similar to the museum's own scan of the artefact (Wenman, 2016). Wenman's conviction that Al-Badri and Nelles' heist was a hoax, indirectly stemming from 'bad institutional practices regarding secrecy', led him to request the Museum to release the data which rightfully belonged to the public domain, and after a three-year legal debate, he finally won (Machemer, 2019). The case is mentioned by Haidy Geismar in a text

analysing the relationship between digital and analogue in the context of cultural heritage, showing through a series of compelling examples how 'digital technologies are deeply entangled in the contemporary production of material culture' (Geismar, 2018).

The examples above highlight the importance of 3D printing technology in enabling the production of copies and replicas and focus on its significance in opening up new dialogues between objects and contexts. However, the appeal that 3D printing has had for artists and creatives in recent years resides in its capacity to facilitate the creation of new objects, of rapidly materialising ideas and concepts that up until recently required extensive knowledge of various manufacturing techniques and the use of specialised equipment.
Benjamin Dillenburger and Michael Hansmeyer's *Digital Grotesque*, (also a prime example of maximalism), is a tremendously intricate architectural space, suggesting but nor directly referencing any existent style or natural form. The algorithmically generated geometry was turned into a human scale installation made up entirely out of 3D printed sandstone (Hansmeyer and Dillenburger, 2013).
Philippe Gentet's 'zerotrope' uses 3D printing to create the frames for a stop-motion animation of a figurine, subsequently turned into an analogue hologram. Similar to a zoetrope, when illuminated by a strobe light, Gentet's zerotrope replays the animation (Gentet et al., 2019).
Interested in materialising the invisible, Gilles Azzaro generates 3D printed sculptures out of sound recordings, from voiceprints of various celebrities to the magnetic waves emitted by the sun (Dehue 2013).

3D printing's function in embodying meaning and materialising concepts, its capacity to activate or enhance the dialogic nature of objects, coupled with its recent affordability, makes it an unprecedentedly empowering tool for artists, designers, architects and other practitioners working across the creative industries.

2.3. Maximalism: a contextual review

This section gives an overview of the current use and understanding of the term maximalism in the landscape of contemporary cultural productions and locates it in the context of art theory discourse.

The two works upon which my own study is built – Patrick Templeton's *Defining Maximalism: Understanding Minimalism* (2013) and Jeremy Colangelo's *The Grotesque Gigantic: Stephen Hero, Maximalism, and Bakhtin* (2014) – sought to define maximalism in architecture and in literature respectively, so their content and the knowledge derived from them are discussed in more detail and used bearing in mind the scope and objectives of this research.

2.3.1. Introduction to the concept

Historically, the term maximalism has been used to describe cultural productions characterised by excess or, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'extremism in any sphere'.

In the case of visual arts, that would translate primarily as decorative overload. Formally opposed to the qualities of minimalism, but without having been pinned down in a canonical definition as yet, maximalism can, at a first glance, be regarded as a manifestation of the post-modernist aesthetic, and drawing heavily from the heritage of the Baroque, Rococo and the Beaux Arts.

Maximalism in literature designates a style of prose where digression, sub-stories and minute elaboration of details take up a large part of the text, as in the novels of Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace or Zadie Smith, which have recently been referred to as 'hysterical realism' by critic John Wood (2000).

In contemporary music, maximalism is anchored in diversity and eclecticism, devices used for stretching the limits of what can be considered music. In the words of musician David Jaffe,

> "the maximalist attitude, in which any aspect of experience may become basic material, opens expressive vistas of great expanse. It also enables a

particular brand of radicalism that stems from a willingness to embrace the strange and unfamiliar" (Jaffe, 1995, p17).

The work of Frank Zappa is the subject of a book on maximalism by Michel Deville and Andrew Norris, *Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart and the Secret History of Maximalism* (2005), where Zappa's xenochronous experiments (the technique of overlapping two distinct pieces of music to obtain a completely different one) are described as an indication of his predilection for a maximalist style.

Charlote Rivers' 2007 daring project on maximalist design – *Maximalism, the Graphic Design of Decadence and Excess* – although published in book format, functions as a maximalist work of art in and by itself and constitutes a prime example of maximalist synaesthesia. Its layered approach to visual presentation confronts the viewer-reader with an explosion of information where clouds of words, graphic elements, patterns, isolated words in fanciful, exotic fonts, fragments of drawings and photographs, compete for primacy. Cacophony sets the tone but due to the skill of the designer, the spectacle is not without charm. The reader is lured in an infinite game of distractions – strangely shaped, broken images pull him away from the textual information, asking to be contemplated and deciphered. The text itself, although it follows a narrative thread, is so dense with informative content and so deeply entangled with the visuals, that it invites to be explored freely, selectively, as in a game of hopscotch, or simply according to one's own fancy. The composition of each page mirrors the author's and designers' enthusiasm for the return to decoration manifested in contemporary culture, a culture which the book seeks to illustrate with numerous relevant examples (Rivers, 2007).

Indeed, maximalist tendencies are becoming more and more pronounced within the creative sector, as evidenced not only by Rivers' book, but also by the ever-increasing number of online articles identifying maximalism as one of the top trends in graphic design, interior design and fashion. As a reaction to decades of minimalist rule on the one hand, and austerity and the current grim political

climate on the other hand, people give in to their ‘decorative’ impulses and choose maximalism as a lifestyle (Bramley, 2018). Suzanne Carpenter, member of the Patternistas creative studio, identifies certain aspects of contemporary culture which may have led to the maximalist movement: globalisation and ease of travel, affordable and accessible technology, consumers’ growing confidence and desire to express their individuality, nostalgia for the comfort and luxury of a past where political and economic turmoil did not have such an obvious impact on private life (Bryan, 2018).

2.3.2. Maximalism in art discourse

The first art theorist to have used the term maximalism in a formal discussion about art was Robert Pincus-Witten. In *Postminimalism* (1977) and then later on in *Entries (Maximalism)* (1983), he uses the term in reference to a group of artists associated with neo-expressionism in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, amongst whom David Salle and Julien Schnabel, to describe figurative tendencies expressed by these artists in reaction to the rigors of minimalism and conceptual art. The overall whimsical tone of the book, structured as a series of diary entries, loosely and subjectively commenting on art events and artists prominent in that period, leave a lot of room for discussion and clarification. However, strictly from the perspective of this study, the relatively narrow scope of Pincus-Witten’s inquiry into maximalism, the fact that it refers to such a specific period and group of artists, did not incite further development in this direction.

Unrelated to Pincus-Witten’s maximalism, a lengthy analysis of the concept can be found in *Maximalism and Visual Delight* by Courtney R. Davis, Melissa Hempel and Rebekah Wilson Monahan, a book dedicated to the work of Jeanne Leighton-Lundberg who is, according to the authors, the first artist to identify herself as a maximalist, in the ‘80s (Davis et al., 2019). The book provides a good overview of maximalism, with a few of the chapters aiming to define the concept and place it in the frame of contemporary culture. Nevertheless, the discourse is, understandably, shaped by the specific content of Leighton-Lundberg’s work who, although a self-

proclaimed maximalist, is only one example of the forms which maximalism can take in terms of visual expression and artistic practice.

In 2000, Artist Duggie Fields wrote a maximalist 'mini-treatise' in which he defined maximalism in the following words:

> 'MAXIMALISM = MINIMALISM with a PLUS PLUS PLUS.... MAXIMALISM Involves the Individual use of order to create chaos, and vice-versa, In the tradition of the high/low art experience of life-force through self and surroundings, both Inner and outer be It In gallery or gutter, expressed through Images/sounds that haunt the Imagination through colour/form and content, to growth both personal and societal, In the acceptance and celebration of the on-going change that Is the only constancy of life/death .whose logic Is witty, sometimes. MINIMALISM, less is less more or less, leads to stasis. It is overcome by gravity, overdue for the inevitable change. MAXIMALISM, it's bigger little brother, is the new cause celébre. INCLUDE ALL EXCLUSIVELY. CONQUER DIVISIVE IDEOLOGY. MAXIMISE TO THE MAX.'
>
> (Fields, 2000, no page)

Characterised by clashes of primary colours and crudely drawn figures, announcing the 'Microsoft Paint aesthetic' before digital painting was actually invented, Field's visual language combines pop art with surrealism. However, it is rather in his approach to art in general that the maximalist character of his work resides: to Fields, art and life form a continuum where one becomes indiscernible from the other. In his own words: 'I don't see any separation between my art and my life (…) I live inside a painting' (Elephant, 2021).

Artist John Walter's practice-based PhD thesis (2016) uses a 'maximalist aesthetic' to address current representations of HIV in art. The premise of his research is that representations of HIV have been predominantly minimalist ever since their emergence in the '80s (e.g., Felix Gonzales-Torres) and are therefore outdated, as they haven't kept up with scientific developments in HIV treatments, social

contexts, attitudes etc. Walter suggests that maximalist art is better suited to represent HIV-related issues, yet acknowledges a lack of theorisation of maximalism. He adopts a working definition of maximalism and approaches his research questions through a curated, multidisciplinary exhibition combining principles of art, science and architecture.

In the introductory text accompanying the exhibition *Maximalist tendencies in Recent American Painting* (2007), curator Tatiana Flores claims the impossibility or, rather, the futility of pinning down maximalism either in terms of its formal attributes or its content. In *The Ism in Maximalism*, Flores identifies *diversity* as the common thread of maximalist art practices, and states that:

> "In the context of this exhibition, Maximalism should be understood as a loosely-bounded critical category, not as dogmatically demarcating an artistic movement or as a rigid aesthetic." (Flores, 2007, p. 17)

As Flores observes, there are certain limits to how the works in the exhibition she curated can be described, and these limits are evident from the title – 'recent', 'American', 'painting'. Yet, such constraints are arbitrary. There is clearly a maximalist overtone in each artwork which justifies their inclusion in the exhibition, but each work is maximalist in a different way, and this seems to point to the fact that the term is more useful as a critical concept than a designator of an artistic movement.

2.3.3. Definitions of maximalism in the context of architecture and literature.

A most ambitious definition of maximalism within academia is proposed by Patrick Templeton in a thesis titled *Defining Maximalism, Understanding Minimalism* (2013). Although this study sets out to investigate the possibility of a maximalist architecture, its rigorous approach to the subject and engagement with the

relevant philosophical concepts render it useful to any discipline wherein maximalist tendencies become manifest and demand reflection.
Templeton's investigation is prompted by the lack of a structured, academic definition of maximalism. This echoes similar concerns expressed by the authors of *Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart and the Secret History of Maximalism*, who signal the absence of the term from academic vocabulary and deplore 'the lack of serious attention to the development of maximalist aesthetics' (Deville and Norris, 2005, p. 7). Likewise, literary critic Jeremy Colangelo (to whom I will return shortly) notes that 'although the term maximalism has been used regularly for several decades, there has never been a sustained critical tradition of maximalism, as such' and that 'its usage in art and literature has been very diffuse' (Colangelo, 2014, p.65).

Starting with an analysis of the theoretical foundations of minimalism, Templeton points out its preoccupation with objecthood, literalness and minimalism's imbuement with the modernist ethos, whence the aspiration toward pure forms is derived. Unencumbered by inessential content, the minimalist object meets the viewer in complete silence and 'approaches a state of pure presence in space' (Templeton, 2013, p.19). Conversely, maximalism is described as an 'inundation of totalizing noise' (p. 50) and 'a critical degree of complexity that is abstruse and irreducible' (p. 28). Through dichotomies such as silence and noise, simplicity and complexity, he underlines the relation of opposition between minimalism and maximalism. However, the originality of Templeton's contribution consists in pointing out their adjacence with regard to their inimical relation to the viewer: both the opaque minimalist object refusing to communicate anything except its own presence, and the overwhelming white noise of the maximalist utterance have the function to alienate the subject.[1]
Elegant and compelling though it is, the definition of maximalism at which Templeton arrives is exacting to the point of becoming impractical. It proposes

[1] John Barth observes a similar alienation of the subject induced by the excessive length of the maximalist novel, in the essay *It's a Long Story. Maximalism reconsidered* (Barth, 1995).

maximalism (as well as minimalism) as an extreme condition, the embodiment of which may only exist in theory or in the imagination, while real objects may only *aspire* to that condition. By this criterion, only a very small number of artworks may be justly labelled either minimalist or maximalist. Indeed, the author's conclusion is that, due to its practical nature, or at least to 'the long valued dialectics ingrained in the discipline' (Templeton, 2013, p. 50), architecture cannot attain the sublime complexity suggested by the maximalist condition.

In an essay examining the maximalist character of James Joyce's work – *The Grotesque Gigantic* (2014) – literary critic Jeremy Colangelo mentions three academic articles of literary theory whose authors (Mendelson, Kellman and Ercolino) propose definitions of maximalism similar to Templeton's hypothesis. The common thread which traverses these three articles, according to Colangelo, is the necessity for a 'deliberate pursuit of completeness' (Colangelo, 2014, p. 65) in a maximalist (or minimalist) work. In other words, for a text to truly embody the maximalist condition, it must realise a totalising representation of the world. Such an ambitious objective, which puts the literary text at odds with the physical limitations of a book, is of course always bound to failure, because, as Colangelo observes, 'no text can be literally about everything' (Colangelo, 2014, p. 66).[2] By an exercise of 'reductio ad absurdum', Colangelo suggests that the absolutist imperative which marks out such definitions of minimalism or maximalism would entail the practical impossibility of an object thus designated: 'the book of everything would require an infinite number of pages, and the book of nothing could not be a book at all' (Colangelo, 2014, p. 66).
It is easy to see how the same argument could be extended to a discussion of art objects. Granted, the mechanisms which put literature and art in motion may be fundamentally different. So, although a perfect maximalist book would be a book of everything, it doesn't necessarily follow that a perfect maximalist artwork is, say, a perfect replica of the world, yet following the same absolutist logic, that is the

[2] Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Ercolino stresses the difference between openness and incompleteness (Ercolino, 2012, p. 248).

form it *would* take. Therefore, the absurdity of the maximalist artwork in these terms is itself a good indication that an absolutist definition is unworkable. Returning to Colangelo's essay, the hypothesis therein is that a text becomes maximalist as it engages with the physical limitations inherent to the printed book (Colangelo, 2014, p. 66). Colangelo identifies *the gigantic* and *the grotesque* as the fundamental principles of literary maximalism. The concept of the gigantic, borrowed from Heidegger, is (perhaps unintuitively) linked to an awareness of the small detail – 'the increasing detail provided by our growing knowledge of the subatomic has invested the world around us with a feeling of the gigantic' (Colangelo, 2014, p.69). From this perspective therefore, the scope of maximalism appears to exceed the (inferred) concern with large scale, to encompass an equal engagement with the very small. It is true that no amount of detail will give a complete representation of that which is being described or signified, but this inherent incompleteness, rather than a failure, is the essence of the maximalist text, and expresses its condition as a synecdoche of the world (Colangelo, 2014, p. 69).
Colangelo explains the link between maximalism and the grotesque as the latter's abandonment of the unity and purity of form which characterises the classic aesthetic. By contrast, the grotesque embraces the specificity of the profane and reduces the sacred to the level of the real. A quote from Dominick Lacapra expressing the difference between the classic and the grotesque is a mirror image of the minimalism / maximalism contrast: 'the classical aesthetic . . . fashions perfectly rounded-off forms in which the apertures are sealed and the protuberances flattened,' whereas the grotesque 'emphasises orifices and bulges in larger-than-life forms that make them ecstatic' (Lacapra, 1983, cited by Colangelo, 2014, p. 71).

Although, as shown above, Colangelo rejects the definition of maximalism offered by Stephano Ercolino, it is worth mentioning the latter's text, *The Maximalist Novel* (2012), for its rigorous approach to formulating a theoretical framework for analysing a maximalist work of literature. Discussing several novels of Western

literature written between 1973 and 2005, Ercolino identifies ten characteristics that define and structure the contemporary maximalist novel: length, encyclopaedic mode, dissonant chorality, diegetic exuberance, completeness, narratorial omniscience, paranoid imagination, inter-semiocity, ethical commitment, and hybrid realism (Ercolino, 2012, p. 242). The first seven elements organise the internal dialectic of the novel around centrifugal and centripetal forces: length, the encyclopaedic mode, dissonant chorality and diegetic exuberance represent the 'chaos function' that increases the narrative entropy of the novel, whereas completeness, narratorial omniscience and the paranoid imagination, enacting the cosmos function, ensure that the maximalist form is manageable (Ercolino, 2012, p. 251). The remaining three characteristics show the novel's engagement with the outside (i.e., the real world, as opposed to the novel's fictional world): the incorporation of the visual sphere through references to painting, television, cinema (inter-semiocity), the interest in social and political issues that define contemporaneity (ethical commitment) and the recuperation of traditional forms of literary realism (hybrid realism) (Ercolino, 2012, p. 251-254). It may not be obvious how these features of the maximalist novel are useful in a discussion of maximalism in contemporary art, and indeed some of them may altogether resist transference. However, this set of elements can work as a model for compounding a similar framework that would be relevant to the field of art.

2.4. Summary of contextual review

Prompted by my own interest in maximalism, this contextual review brings to attention the increasing number of references to a maximalist style in visual culture, in parallel with the relative scarcity of academic texts approaching the subject.

Robert Pincus-Witten (1977 and 1983) is the first to indicate an opposition between minimalism and maximalism, but the specificity of his scope narrows the potential reach of the maximalist concept. Tatiana Flores proposes an exhibition as a loose definition of maximalism and suggests that the term is more useful as a

critical concept than a designator of an artistic movement (Flores, 2007). The authors of *Maximalism and Visual Delight*, too, offer an insight into how the term can be practically used to analyse art (Davis et al., 2019).

The definitions coming from architecture and literature are exemplary in terms of academic rigor, yet pose the challenge of adapting their knowledge to the field of art.

The gaps identified in this literature review are epistemological, indicating the absence of a clear definition of artistic maximalism. The following chapter starts to address the methodological gap as the absence of a set of procedures enabling the understanding and use of the concept of maximalism in art.

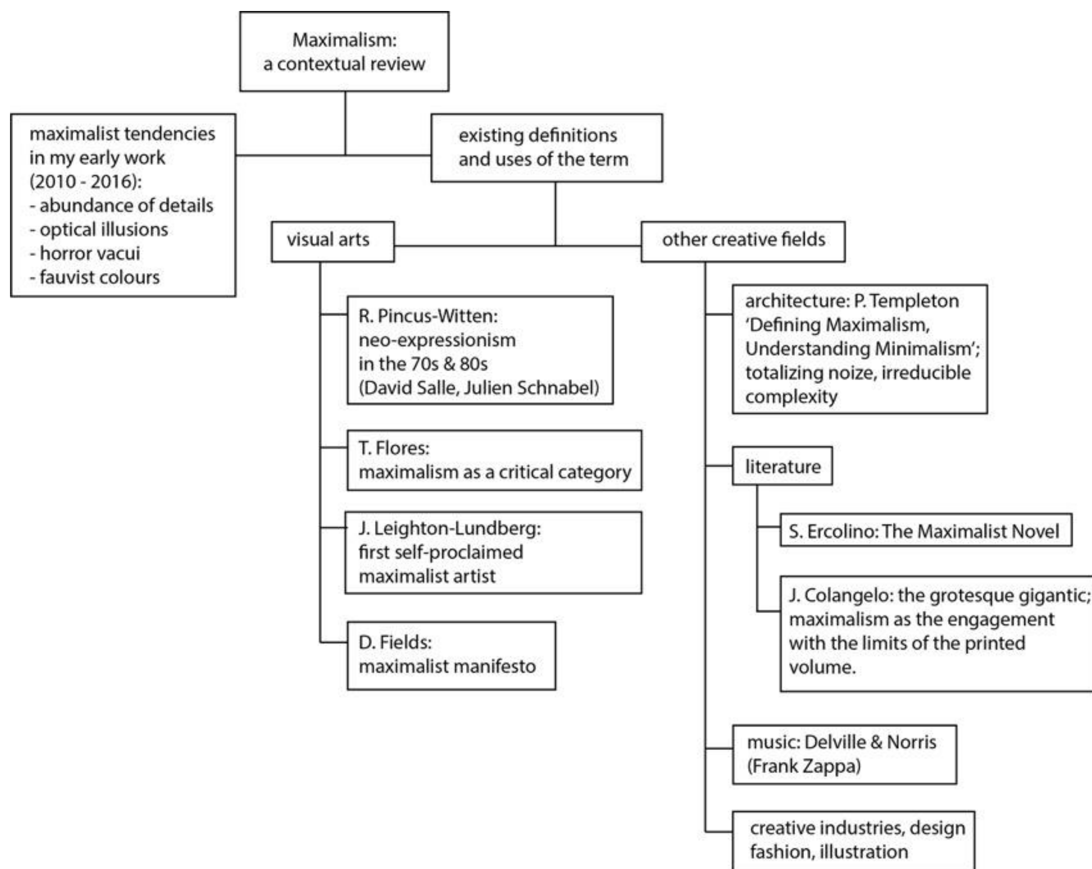

Diagram 1: Summary of contextual review

Chapter 3: Methodology and theoretical framework

In outlining the theoretical basis of this research, it became apparent that two lines of inquiry had to be followed. The first, which largely makes use of the theory of constructive learning, was related to the principal hypothesis of this project, namely that knowledge (in this case, a definition of maximalism) can be generated through the practice of art. In this respect, although closely linked to the second thread and instrumental in creating it, this constitutes the methodology established by the choice of a practice-based approach.

The second line of inquiry brings into discussion a number of ideas and theories of art and philosophy which either served as a model, or provided the basis and tools for formulating a theory of maximalism. Certain threads of aesthetic formalism developed by Graham Harman's theory of an object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2020) were used in discussing the artworks submitted with this thesis from the point of view of their appearance and how the nature of their sensory qualities influences reception.

3.1. A methodology based on constructive learning

Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (1960) advances the idea that artistic creation has certain similarities to the scientific method, in that the artist setting out to produce an artwork will first turn to tradition and try to determine how a similar task was dealt with previously, and thus identifies a set of methods for approaching the task

at hand. These methods are then tested out and, if they are deemed inappropriate or insufficient, the artist will propose a different approach which, in turn will be considered by other artists as a possible tool for making a certain type of art (Gombrich, 1960).

This theory was criticized for undermining the complexity of artistic creation and reducing it to a mere technological process based on problem-solving (Wood, 2009). Yet from the point of view of knowledge production, Gombrich's proposition, echoing the hypothesis of constructive learning, is not without merit: provided it is not considered in exclusive terms (i.e., as the only way to analyse the process of artmaking or explain the evolution of art history), it makes a good case for how art can generate knowledge and how this knowledge can be analysed and evaluated based on objective criteria.

The methodologies employed throughout the development of this study are based on the theory of constructive learning and aim to touch on what Gray and Malins identify as the key principles of constructivism: to build on individual experience and prior knowledge, to generate new knowledge through active exploration and to expand this knowledge in a social context (Gray and Malins, 2017).

Artmaking is at the core of this study and therefore the active exploration research is undertaken primarily through a practice-based methodology, by means of developing new artworks and reflecting upon the process of artmaking.

3.1.1. Research methods

Qualitative research in the form of a literature and contextual review was carried out to identify existing definitions and understandings of maximalism. This was later on continued with an overview of some of the media used for the realisation of the art projects; the addition of this section was prompted by the findings generated through the art practice, and included reading relevant published materials, talking with experts and visiting national and international art exhibitions.

To arrive at a general definition of the concept of maximalism, a prerequisite was to create a theoretical framework indicating the various dimensions of maximalism that could be applied as a means to analyse various artworks or practices. The creation of this framework draws from various theories of art and art history, amongst which formalism and object-oriented ontology are the most prominent. The newly created theoretical framework was applied to a series of examples from art history and contemporary art, by means of data and practice analysis. The aim of this analysis was to speculatively position maximalism in the context of contemporary art and artistic practices, to analyse it in parallel with related visual arts concepts and also to assess the usefulness of the concept of maximalism to a broader field, given that recently the style has become increasingly influential in other creative fields, as revealed by the literature review.

The method of practice analysis was applied to examine the body of work produced for this study, using the findings of the theoretical approach outlined above as a structural framework. Chapter 4 (*Art Practice*) gives detailed accounts of how each art project included in this study was developed, from the preliminary stages to their preparation for inclusion in a gallery exhibition. Explanatory texts are accompanied by sketches, diagrams, and photographs illustrating the process and the final artworks installed in a gallery setting.

Since many of the ideas and techniques employed in this research are either very new or, in some cases, have never been used before, a certain portion of my research inevitably borders problem-led methodology and makes use of positivist experimental methods. For example, the tools and methods required for VR holography have not, to date, been fully defined and it was therefore necessary to actually develop new tools and techniques prior to and in parallel with my practice-based research.

The experimental nature of the research in the field of VR holography (detailed in Chapter 4) required close collaboration with scientists and engineers from Geola,

who helped clarify and resolve some of the technical issues related to digital holography. Being very new to holography, my intention was not necessarily to master all the technicalities of the medium, since this requires a great amount of time and almost exclusive dedication to this endeavour. This is demonstrated by practitioners who devoted their careers to working with holography, undertaking the difficult task of making their own holograms (e.g., Benyon, 1994). Geola's constant technical support was instrumental in allowing me to focus on the content of the holographic artworks created and on their presentation in an art gallery context – a topic more closely related to my research questions.
Another project included in this study (*Meditation on a Machinic Cube*, Chapter 4) entailed acquiring knowledge of digital 3D modelling and some experience in operating a 3D printer. Using additive printing technology for the production of artworks presented a series of challenges with regard to the visual and structural quality necessary for displaying the artworks in a fine art gallery over a period of several weeks. A significant amount of time was put into experimenting with this technique, in order to understand how the equipment works and how changing different parameters affects the outcome; often, more than one method had to be tried out in order to obtain the desired result.

At the same time, the development of this body of work as a method of practice-based research was used to trigger new ideas about maximalism, to help outline the theoretical framework mentioned above, and then to test out and evaluate the usefulness and coherence of this theory against the final artworks. This means that the two methodologies – theoretical and practical – were used in conjunction and constantly shaped one another. The main challenge posed by this approach was the constant necessity to revise and sometimes radically modify the content and structure of the thesis in light of the findings generated by the artmaking. However, it is hard to imagine how this difficulty could have been avoided, and whether it was even desirable to avoid it, because it proved to be instrumental in reaching the objectives of the project.

The body of work developed during this doctoral project is presented in the form of an exhibition catalogue and a presentation video. Through each individual project included in this exhibition I aimed to highlight a certain dimension of maximalism, whilst suggesting my seemingly disjointed and non-specialised way of practicing art as a manifestation of a maximalist approach to artmaking.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that this study benefited from my participation in various group exhibitions and academic conferences throughout the duration of my PhD. My conference papers and presentations (Cyberworlds 2017, ISDH 2018, SPIE OPTO 2019 and EVA 2020) were all centred on the idea of VR holography and how I came to refine it over the course of this research period. This is perhaps the most obvious original contribution to knowledge contained in this study. However, the other artistic activities carried out in parallel to or as part of my research and presented in national and international exhibitions or simply online, are a good illustration of maximalism as a type of artistic practice. This is exemplified by the multitude of artworks produced during this period, realised in a variety of media, ranging from traditional drawing and printmaking to 3D printing and the aforementioned VR holography.
Although exhibitions and conference presentations are not research methods per se, the work ethic and other rigors imposed by such occasions had a positive impact on the development of this project.

3.2. Theoretical framework. Defining an elusive term

There is an obvious difficulty associated with trying to define a term which, at a first glance, seems to loosely and undiscriminatingly designate anything and everything.
As evidenced by the literature review, although maximalism positions itself semantically as the opposite of minimalism, it lacks the clear connotations and set of attributes which minimalism holds in relation to works of art as a result of the abundant critical and theoretical work dedicated to it since its emergence (Meyer,

2004). It also suggests a wealth of subtle nuances and potential which promises to establish it as much more than a vague counterpart of minimalism.

3.2.1. A formalist approach to defining maximalist art

A sound starting point in determining the nature of maximalist art is describing the artworks and practices under scrutiny in terms of their appearance. Thus, certain strands of formalism were considered suitable to this aim, particularly the non-traditional formalism proposed by Graham Harman in his theory of an object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2018 and 2020) which will be briefly outlined below.

A definition of the artwork as the meeting place of the art object with the beholder is elegantly defended in the book *Art and Objects* (2020). This 'third object' proposed by Harman's theory of art seems, to a certain extent, to echo Roland Barthes' 'Third Meaning' of art: the obtuse meaning, the 'je-ne-sais-quoi' of art irreducible to either denotation (semiotics/the informational/communication) or connotation (neosemiotics/the symbolic/signification) but instantiated in the meeting of the object and the viewer (Barthes, 1977a, 1977b, 1982).
In contrast to what is championed by modernism and traditional formalism, Harman posits that the artwork is irreducible to an autonomous art object indifferent to the beholder: it is impossible to conceive of art in a scenario devoid of human beings, since without a human mind to experience art as art, an artwork is just 'material stuff', or literalness, or a collection of its sensory qualities. The artwork is also not 'the context' or anything and everything outside of it, contrary to what poststructuralism vigorously professes. For instance, in *Forgetting the Art World* (2009) Pamela M. Lee suggests that separationist definitions such as those advocating the autonomy of art no longer reflect contemporary realities where 'the activity performed by the object [of art is] utterly continuous with the world' (Lee, 2009, p. 8). But according to Harman, if there is no limit to what art can be then the same can be said about any other entity, and by implication the world would be an

amorphous mass where everything can pass as anything else. Seductive as it may sound, it is not a useful concept (Harman, 2020).
Another point where Harman distances himself from traditional formalism as represented by Fried and Greenberg is in his understanding of autonomy. For Kantian philosophy and its successors (Fried and Greenberg included) autonomy takes the very specific meaning of a split between humans and the world (Kant, 1987), whereas object-oriented ontology 'is committed to a flattening of the Kantian human-world divide' (Harman, 2020, p. 8). More precisely, expanding the notion that just as the reality of things cannot be fully grasped or exhausted by the human mind, the same is valid for non-human objects in their interactions with each other (with the observation that there is no claim to a mental life of objects). With his affirmation of the role of the beholder in the definition of art, Harman designates the artwork as a specific case of a hybrid, autonomous object from which the human factor cannot be excluded. The difference is that, instead of having the role of 'privileged beholder' attributed both by formalism (Fried, 1967) and relational aesthetics (Bouriaud, 2002), the human, as a necessary component of every artwork, cannot grasp it exhaustively.

> "The artwork is actually a compound made up of myself along with the independent object outside me that common sense thinks of as the artwork. This compound exceeds both parts individually and is not exhaustively knowable by the human beholder who forms part of it. Rembrandt's Nightwatch is not a painting if no one experiences it, yet it does not follow that Nightwatch is nothing more than whatever I or some other person might make of it; this is enough to ensure its autonomy, despite its need for a beholder." (Harman, 2020, p. 45).

Object-oriented ontology is relevant to this project from at least one point of view: its rejection of literalness, or the assumption that an object is the sum total of its views, and that it can be paraphrased through a description of its sensory qualities.

This argument is somewhat counterintuitive in the context of an academic text seeking to make a contribution to knowledge, since literalness and paraphrasing, as Harman observes, are some of the most reliable tools used by science in its quest for knowledge (Harman, 2020, p. 31). However, one of the crucial ideas of this theory is that, unlike science, art relies on 'the non-literal character of its objects' and, although knowledge can be derived from art as a 'side-effect', it is not a primary condition of art (Harman, 2020, p. 30). A description of sensory qualities is a convenient starting point for presenting art, but it does not exhaust the significance of what is being presented, nor does it account for the centrality of the art object and artmaking in the context of this research project.

What does hint at the importance of artwork and artmaking is their condition as real objects (in the OOO sense), withdrawn from the realm of the sensory and encountering the observer through sensory qualities. The artworks submitted with this thesis precede the attempt to describe them in terms of their maximalist qualities; it may be that their maximalist character, identified as a unifying feature, prompted this research as a means of extracting knowledge, but this knowledge and the definition of maximalism derived from it does not exhaust their significance.

The two main ideas extracted from OOO to constitute the theoretical foundation of this practice-based research are, thus, the affirmation of the autonomy of the artwork and the understanding of the artwork as 'the disappearance of the real object behind its sensual qualities' (Harman, 2020, p. 24).

3.3. Summary of methodology and theoretical framework

Finally, it is important to briefly describe the relation between the written thesis and the body of work created for this research project.

The two were developed in parallel. The premise of this project was that artmaking can generate knowledge; thus, the artworks being produced have constantly shaped and reshaped the theoretical arguments contained in the thesis. Although in principle a positive feature of this approach, this was also problematic,

in that the incessant changing of even the most basic elements of the thesis questioned the possibility of ever fixing on a specific structure and accomplishing the project.

It can be difficult to understand that finding a better methodology, i.e., addressing the methodological gap mentioned in the introduction, is itself a contribution to knowledge and not an error in the initial approach. In the case of my research, the theoretical framework which I will present in Chapter 5 had, for a long time, been placed at the beginning of this thesis. As a result, it appeared that the work I had done by linking various ideas and theories to find a structured way of thinking about maximalism was a premise, and that my effort consisted simply in illustrating with artworks an already existing theoretical framework. The actual dynamic of the process had in fact been the opposite: a problem-led approach to artmaking guided me towards relevant theories which then helped me structure my thinking around the concept of maximalism.
A similar dynamic is described by Katie MacLeod in a study titled *The functions of the written text in practice-based PhD submissions* (2000), where she identifies three types of practice-based research. Specifically, the third type, defined as 'revealing a practice' is relevant to this project. MacLeod observes the 'seesaw effect' of working on the thesis and artmaking in parallel:

> "what appeared to be happening in this type of research was that after the completion of one phase of the written text, when the seesaw was high in the air, the ensuing work on the art project would destabilise what had been achieved to the point that when the researcher returned to the next phase of research on the written text, the seesaw was firmly down on the ground and the text had to be completely reconceived; when the next phase of research on the written text was completed and the seesaw was high in the air, it was only to descend again when the work on the ensuing art project was underway. Thus, the written text was instrumental to the conception of the art projects but the art projects themselves exacted a radical rethinking of what had been constructed in written form because

> the process of realising or making artwork altered what had been defined in written form.” (MacLeod, 2000, p. 3)

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the rigor imposed by academic research provided a solid structure for addressing the main premise of this study: the possibility to derive knowledge from the practice of art.

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The pluralist methodological approach outlined in this chapter was considered most suited to answer the ontological and epistemological lines of enquiry imposed by the research questions, i.e., determining more or less speculatively the nature of maximalist art and art practice (ontology) through the subjectivist perspective of the art practitioner-researcher (epistemology). By building upon prior experience, but also through reflexivity upon and engagement with the field of study, the practitioner-researcher can gain an informed, privileged position from which to generate new knowledge through a combination of practical and theoretical methods.

By using the theoretical framework to examine existing works of art which manifest maximalist tendencies on the one hand, and, in parallel, by acknowledging the importance of creating new work and reflecting on the findings generated through practice, this mixed method approach led to unique insights into the concept of maximalism.

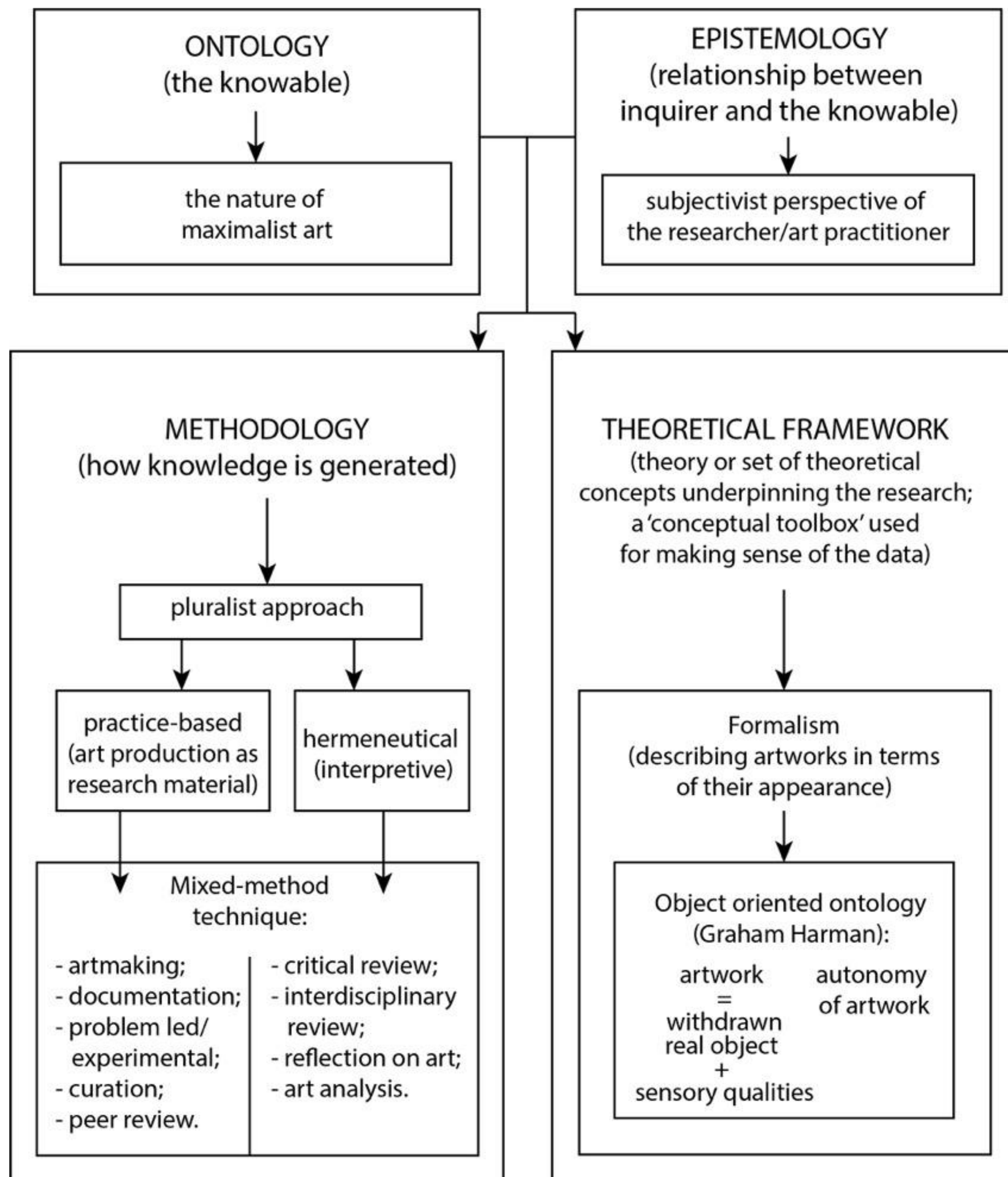


Diagram 2: The structure of this artistic research based on the constructivist paradigm of inquiry.

Chapter 4: Art practice

The six art projects submitted with this thesis are each presented in three parts: first, an introduction which outlines the context and initial ideas behind the project; secondly, a factual description of the process of artmaking, titled ‘the making-of’; finally, a ‘presentation’ section discusses issues regarding the display of each artwork in the context of an exhibition.
The reason for structuring the presentation in this way is that, in the absence of a clear definition of Maximalism, insights into the nature of maximalism can be gained by speculatively describing my art practice as ‘instinctively maximalist’ and through analysing the process of artmaking and the resulting artworks. This is why I consider the artworks presented in this chapter, alongside the process of their creation, to constitute the core and driving force of this research project.

A discussion of how the artworks relate with the theme of maximalism will be developed in detail in Chapter V.

4.1. *Spectral Figures* – VR Holography

4.1.1. Introduction

As I mentioned in Chapter I, the initial aim of this Ph.D. was to explore and expand the qualities of drawing and *horror vacui* imagery through digital holography. The reason for choosing to work with holography was its intrinsic maximalist nature: its capacity to visually expand space without resorting to the traditionally accepted convention of treating a 2D surface as an interface for 3D content, which differentiates it from any other media.

However, the problem of how to create *horror vacui* content compatible with the medium of holography, particularly through drawing, immediately arose.

The first solution which came to mind was the conventional use of 3D modelling software to create the image data that would be required by a digital holographic printer. However, this posed two further problems: first of all, my knowledge of 3D modelling was too basic for the task of creating the type of imagery that characterised my art. Secondly, as 3D modelling is closer to sculpture than to drawing, it did not seem to be quite the right tool for an exploration of drawing.

VR artmaking fortuitously presented itself as a perfect solution for both problems. It was an intuitive tool, with a user-friendly interface, capable to generate 3D content much faster and easier than 3D modelling; furthermore, it had a perfect overlap with sculptural drawing – a concept I had been developing before the start of my Ph.D., which refers to expanding the characteristics of drawing to create sculptural objects (e.g., Insectarium, 2012).

Being very new to holography, it was never my intention to master the technical aspects of the medium – I understood that this required a great amount of time and almost exclusive dedication to this endeavour, as demonstrated by practitioners who devoted their careers to working with holography, undertaking the difficult task of making their own holograms (e.g., Margaret Benyon). Instead, I chose to leave the technicalities to holography experts while I focused on the

content of the artworks and on issues related to their presentation in an art gallery context.

At the beginning, I found the limitations inherent to holography rather daunting. Yet it was precisely these limitations which stirred my interest and encouraged me to channel my research towards finding adequate solutions.

4.1.2. The making of VR holograms

This section presents my exploration of the VR holography (VRH) medium and the resulting artworks: *Van Gogh by Pioaru*, my first VRH project, and *Spectral Figures*. The second is an ongoing project divided into three subprojects: 1) a series of four full-parallax reflection holograms representing portraits of philosophers and artists influential to my practice; 2) a continuation of the same portrait theme through surface relief holography, as a solution to some of the technical issues identified in the previous works; 3) a series of VRH sculptural drawings of endangered species of animals, which encapsulates all of my findings in VRH artmaking and holographic displays.

Van Gogh by Pioaru

My first VRH project was inspired by Van Gogh's 1889 self-portrait (Van Gogh, 1889). It was created using Tilt Brush, a VR artmaking software developed by Google, and an HTC Vive VR system consisting of a headset and two handheld controllers. The VR output was post-processed in 3DS Max, a 3D modelling software that generates the image data necessary for creating a digital hologram. From this image data, a full-colour reflection hologram was printed by Geola Digital in Lithuania, with a digital holographic printer.

A digital copy of the Van Gogh project was imported in the virtual environment of Tilt Brush and used as a model for my volumetric rendition of it.

The handheld controllers of a VR system allow the user to draw in three dimensions by releasing 'virtual ink' on a trajectory which follows the movements of the hand.

Fig. 6. Drawing in Tilt Brush with an HTC Vive VR system

There is an obvious difficulty in trying to derive a three-dimensional structure from a flat image, so much of the work was rather speculative. Below is a capture made in Tilt Brush of the final sculptural drawing.

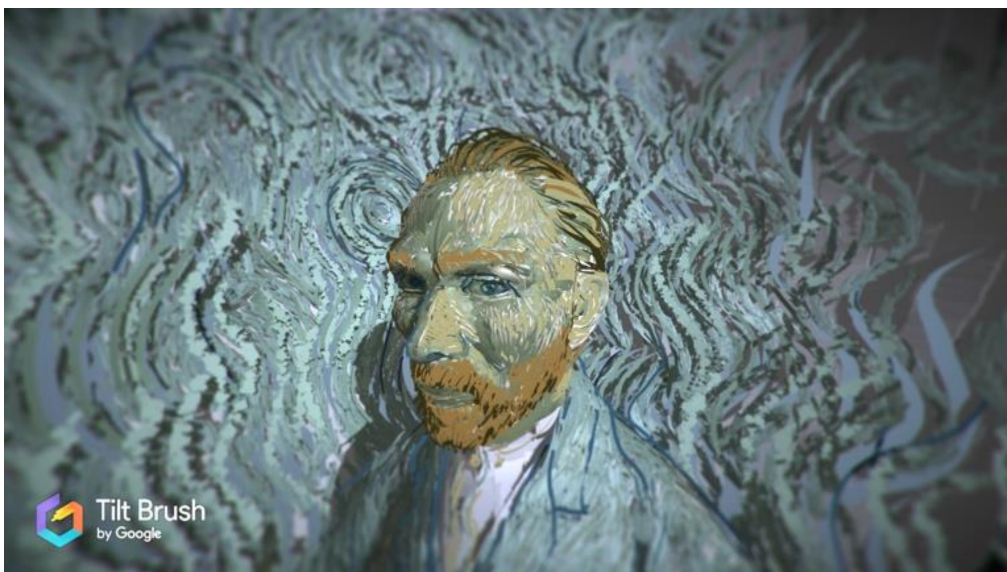


Fig. 7. Snapshot from Tilt Brush

The VR project was imported in 3D Studio Max. A full description of the process can be found in Visualising VR Imagery through Digital Holography (Pioaru, 2017). As it turned out, due to software incompatibility, some of the data in the original VR drawing, including colour and the texture of the brush strokes, could not be read by 3DS Max. This meant that the model had to be completely recoloured. This resulted in significant differences between the appearance of the initial VR drawing and that of the 3DS Max edited version, as can be seen by comparing Fig. 7 and 8.

Fig. 8. Rendered image of the scene re-coloured in 3ds Max.

When the post processing was completed, a (virtual) camera was set up in 3DS Max to record the perspective views necessary to create a hologram. This method is described by Bjelkhagen and Brotheron-Ratcliffe (2012, pp. 357-368). The image data thus generated was sent to Geola who, with the use of a direct-write digital holographic printer, made a 30 cm x 40 cm, single parallax, colour reflection hologram on silver halide coated film (Fig. 8).

Fig. 9. Photographs of the hologram from three angles.

The hologram, when properly illuminated using a 50W halogen spot-lamp produces a relatively good impression of the original VR subject. However, with the use of an array of LED lights the brightness of the hologram improves significantly.

Fig. 9. Custom-made illumination and display system for single parallax hologram.

Van Gogh by Pioaru was presented during a poster session at the Cyberworlds International Conference (Chester, 2017). For this presentation, I prepared a display system consisting of a modified tripod with an extended arm. The arm supported a 3D printed box containing 5 LED lights and illuminated the hologram at an angle of 45 degrees (Fig. 9).

This method was a success insofar as it allowed for the transfer of a VR project onto holographic format – an important achievement in itself. However, it is worth pointing out that it significantly restricts one's freedom in using the range of tools offered by Tilt Brush, in that one must refrain from using features that would be impossible or too difficult to recreate in the post-processing stage. It also means that, due to human error or depending on the complexity of the project, various differences may appear between the original VR project and the final hologram.

Spectral Figures – full parallax reflection holograms

Notwithstanding the technical difficulties encountered, *Van Gogh by Pioaru* (2017) was an encouraging first step. It confirmed the possibility to display VR art through digital holography; but the obstacles prompted by this first experiment determined me to adapt my next project, *Spectral Figures*, to the limitations of the transfer process.

The next project consisted of a series of black and white VR portraits of artists and philosophers influential to my practice.

Fig. 10. *Spectral Figures*, 2018 – a collage of snapshots taken in Tilt Brush: Nietzsche, Duchamp, Warhol and Deleuze.

I chose to draw them in black and white in order to reduce the issues associated with recolouring the scene, which I mentioned above. I used thin black strokes set against a white background to emulate the characteristics of drawing on paper. As a consequence, possibly the most striking aspect of the resulting images is that, although effectively they are sculptures, every viewing angle gives the illusion of a 2D line drawing.

The decision to restrain the use of the available VR tools, albeit a compromise, brought me a step closer to my preferred artistic media – drawing, and particularly sculptural drawing.

Just like *Van Gogh by Pioaru*, this first series of *Spectral Figures* portraits demonstrated how direct-write (reflection) digital holography can be used successfully to display VR art, and in addition showed the possibility to explore sculptural drawing through VR art-making tools. However, the resulting holograms also emphasised the limitations of this medium. Most importantly, the relatively low brightness characteristic of full-parallax reflection holography meant that the flat white backgrounds of my VR portraits appeared dim, red- or blue-tinted and uneven in the holograms. Furthermore, the fine strokes characteristic of hand drawing, which looked so sharp in VR, were partially lost in the holograms due to the resolution allowed by the holographic printer – the 0.8mm hogel size caused visual pixelation (hogelisation).

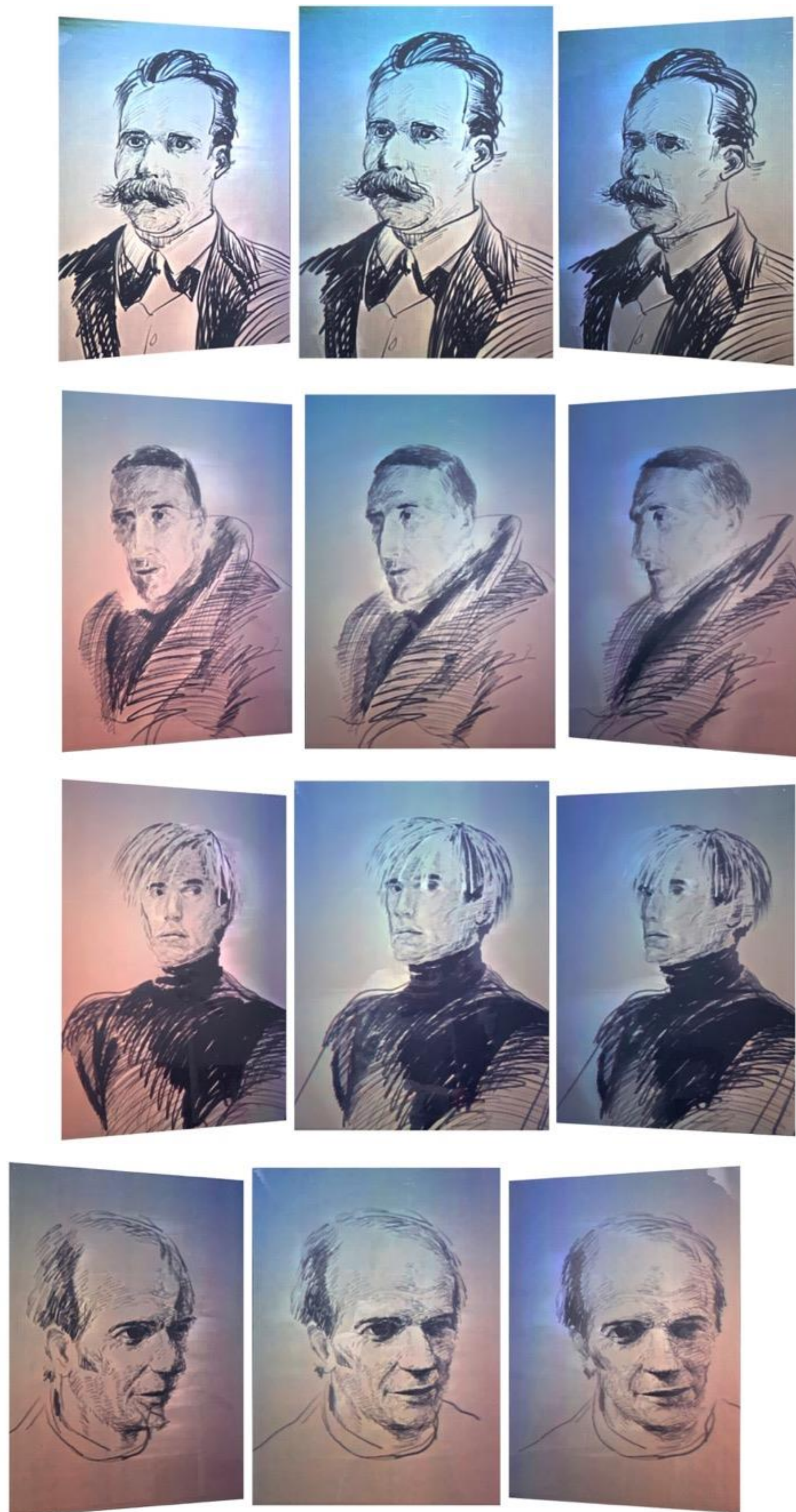


Fig. 11. *Spectral Figures* – the holograms, seen from three different angles.

Spectral Figures – surface relief digital holographic portraits

In 2019, I was invited by the Centre for the Holographic Arts in New York to take part in an exhibition titled *Holographic Embodiment*. The theme of the exhibition suggested that holographic portraits such as the *Spectral Figures* would be an appropriate subject. However, I decided to take this opportunity to make a new set of artworks which would resolve some of the issues encountered previously.
I identified surface relief digital holography (SRD) as a possible solution to the limitations described above. Transmission holograms made with this technique are in general significantly brighter than the reflection holograms presented above, due to their intrinsically more efficient use of the illumination light. Geola's SRD holographic printer, normally used for making masters for embossed holograms, is capable to produce a hogel size of 100 microns – practically imperceptible to the naked eye, which solves the hogelisation issue. By using a relatively limited horizontal field of view of +/-30 degrees, the image brightness is notably increased. Moreover, SRDH is an outstanding medium from the point of view of archivability as it is based on a glass rather than film substrate.

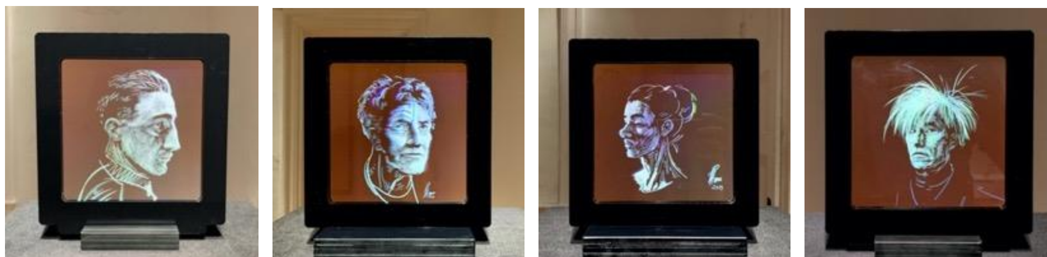


Fig. 12. *Spectral Figures* for 'Holographic Embodiment': Marcel, Elaine, Ioana, Andy.

In addition to choosing a more appropriate holographic technique, I also adapted my VR artmaking method to the specificity of holography: instead of drawing on a white background with black strokes, I realised that a much better result would be achieved by drawing with white lines in a dark environment. This method routes the light energy available from the hologram into the drawing lines more effectively; since the drawing lines usually occupy a much smaller solid angle in total than the background, the relative brightness of the lines can be much higher.

The bigger challenge was to adapt my drawing technique, which normally consists of black ink or graphite on light coloured paper – an intuitive way of rendering shadows and describing shapes based on 'imaginary outlines' – to a reverse method of drawing light. As it turned out – this was much easier to do directly in VR, so the sole function of my preparatory sketches was to familiarise myself with the volumetric structure of the model.

***Spectral Figures* – SRD holographic portraits of endangered animals**

In my next project, a series of artworks depicting critically endangered species of animals, I decided to apply all the lessons I had learned from my previous experiments with VRH: the use of SRD as a means to improve brightness, resolution and archivability, drawing with light strokes on a dark background to further increase brightness, and in addition I gave much more consideration to the 'dispositif of holography' (Desbiens, 2019), i.e. to display-related issues and how to optimize the presentation of the artwork.

Below I describe the process of making the SRD VR holograms in the series *Spectral Figures: Endangered Animals.*

The first step was to become familiar with the appearance and proportions of the subjects through a series of preliminary 2D sketches and drawings (Fig. 13). I personally consider this stage to be very important, as I am interested in the likeness between the subject and the VR sculptural drawing rendition, but it is by no means essential to the process in general – it is a matter of personal preference and approach to artmaking.
Some of these sketches were then imported into the VR environment and used as a reference, in a similar way that one would draw from a model or 'from life', in real space.

Fig. 13. Preparatory ink drawings: *Pangolin* and *Sea Turtle*.

The difference is that, while in real space the 3D information from the model is compressed into a flat 2D rendition of it, in virtual space the visual information from the 2D sketches gives an idea of how to create the sculptural drawing.

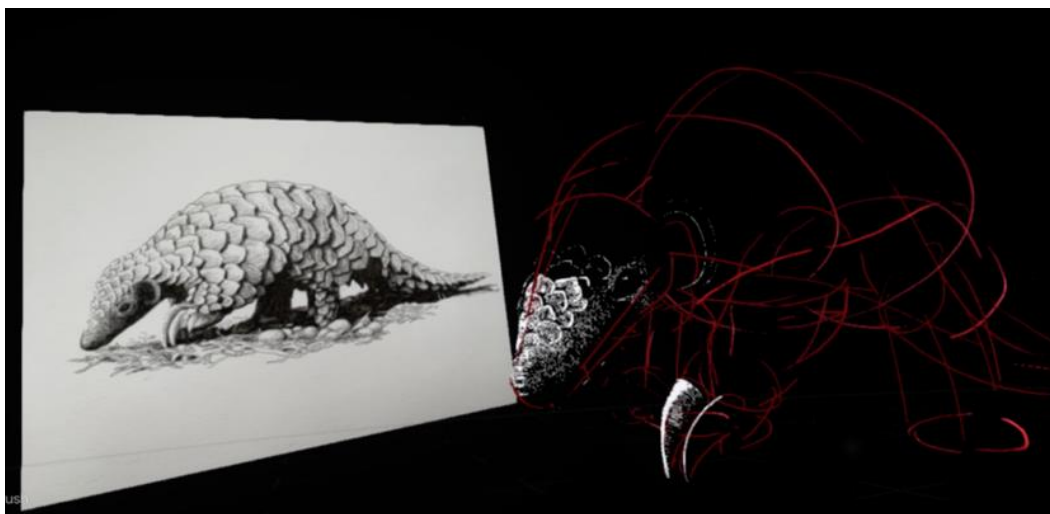


Fig. 14. Snapshot from Tilt Brush showing a 2D sketch used as a reference in VR.

When the VR project is finished, I take a snapshot of it with the inbuilt camera from roughly the same perspective as the hologram main viewpoint – this will later help to set up the camera which will generate the image data for the holographic printer.

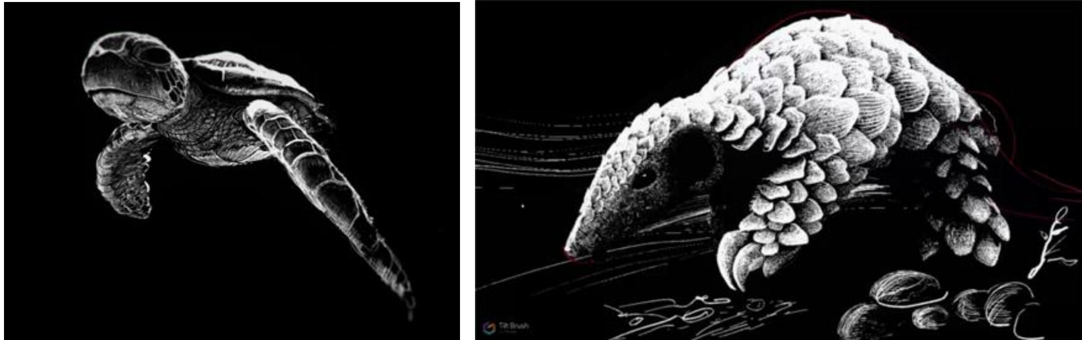


Fig. 15. Tilt Brush snapshots of *Sea Turtle* and *Pangolin*.

After deleting the reference images, I export the project and then open it with Blender. The next stages of the process are done in collaboration with Geola who are currently developing a tool for automating this postprocessing phase so as to enable artists to easily prepare the files for being printed. Briefly, this consists of reapplying the correct colours to the volumes, setting up the 'holoplane' (a virtual plane that simulates the holographic plate) and positioning an animated camera at the correct distance from the holoplane using a method described by Bjelkhagen and Brotherton-Ratcliffe (2012).

The data produced by the Blender camera is for a single parallax, 150 mm x 150 mm, SRD hologram with a hogel size of 100 microns, printed on glass sheets coated with photoresist, using a DWDH transmission printer with a blue pulsed laser. The hologram can be replayed with an array of either halogen or diode lights. The advantage of the array is that they increase the angle from which the drawing appears to be black & white at the same time as increasing brightness. Outside this angle, the appearance is that of a rainbow hologram.

A comprehensive comparison between SRD and reflection holograms as exemplified by the Spectral Figures series can be found in Virtual Reality Art Visualised through Surface Relief Digital Holography (Pioaru, 2020).

Fig. 16. *Spectral Figures: Snow Leopard*: double-sided SRD transmission hologram.

Fig. 17. *Spectral Figures: Pangolin*: double-sided SRD transmission hologram.

Fig. 18. *Spectral Figures: Sea Turtle*: double-sided SRD transmission hologram.

4.1.3. Presentation

In order to emphasize the uniqueness of the SRD holograms consisting in being able to be seen from both sides simultaneously, I chose to display these artworks in double-sided frames, on top of plinths.

Fig. 19. Still from a video taken during the opening of *Holographic Embodiment* at the Holocenter, New York, showing visitors looking at the holograms form both sides.

Fig. 20. Studio setup of the artworks.

The illumination system was specially created for this project by Geola and consists of a compact, track-mounted luminaire. This contains a 9w LED, a specially 3D-printed aperture customisable for any geometry, and a lens held in an anodised black cylindrical tube. With the use of the aperture integrated into the luminaire, the light is able to be focused exclusively on the hologram plane which significantly reduces the amount of light reflected by ambient surfaces and thus increases the perceived luminosity of the hologram. In order to avoid the rainbow effects characteristic of SRD holograms and also to further increase brightness, two luminaires are used for each artwork. They can be placed either on the same side of the hologram (Fig. 21, green lines) or on opposite sides (Fig. 21, red lines).

Fig. 21. Two views of the studio setup. The green lines indicate the geometry of luminaires placed on opposite sides of the hologram. The red lines mark the lights placed on the same side of the hologram.

4.2. *Meditation on a Machinic Cube* – Installation

4.2.1. Introduction

In 2015, as I was drawing the “machinic cells” of the *Insectarium* (presented in Chapter2), I noticed how the illusory third dimension seemed to make the drawings pop out of the surfaces they were placed on. This prompted me to think about how I could add real depth to the cells.

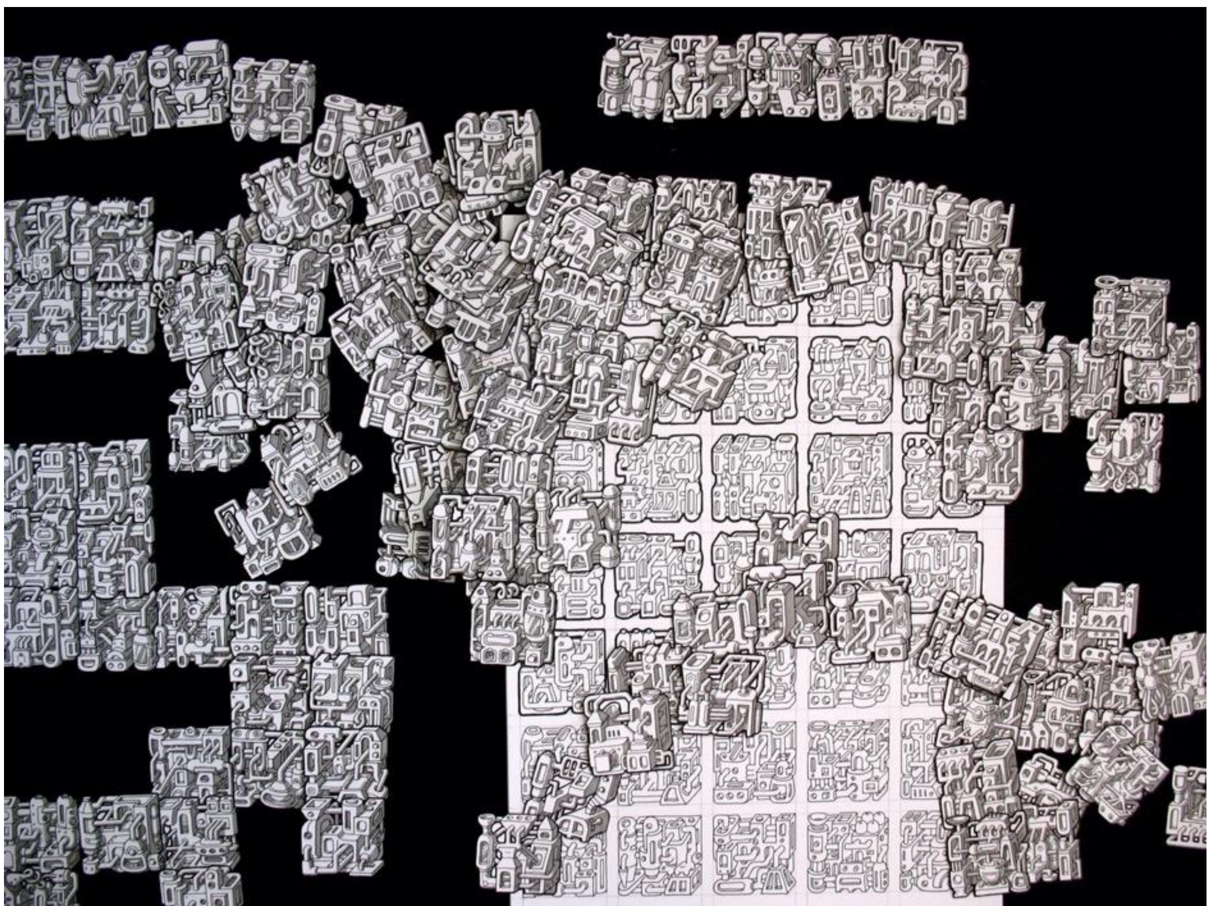


Fig. 22. *Insectarium* in progress

I was tempted by the idea of turning one of the 2D ‘cells’ into a sculpture, but the intricate topology which such an object would have and my lack of knowledge of and practice with sculpture discouraged me. A year later, after the beginning of my

doctoral studies, I had the chance to experiment working with a 3D printer and realised that this might be the ideal medium for concretising my idea. Originating from one of these machinic cells, *Meditation on a Machinic Cube* has grown incrementally and has finally taken the shape of an installation.

4.2.2. The making of *Meditation on a Machinic Cube*

The first step in the conception of my artwork was quite traditional – a pencil drawing representing the six faces of what was to be my machinic cube, in other words – a cube net template, which helped me, to a certain extent, to visualise the object in its three-dimensionality, a process rather unfamiliar to me to that date.

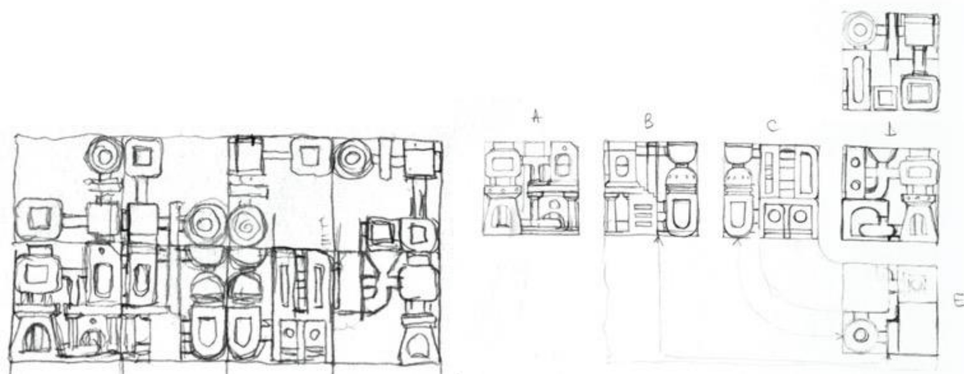


Fig. 23. Pencil sketches of the Machinic Cube

Then followed a meticulous rendition of the same design in Adobe Illustrator, a 2D drawing software.

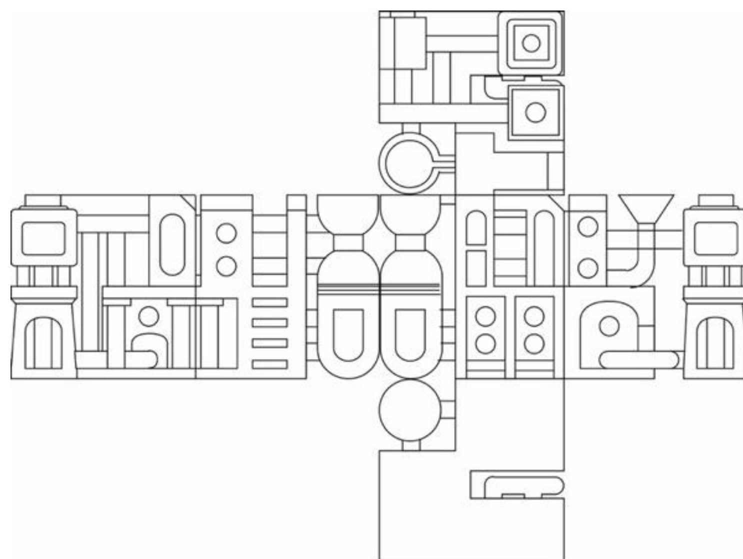


Fig. 24. Two-dimensional design of the cube net template

This allowed me to print out the design and use the printed paper to construct an actual cube – the first 3D mock-up of my artwork.

Fig. 25. Paper mock-up of the Machinic Cube

The importance of a palpable mock-up, however crude, should not be underestimated. Being able to explore an object with an extra sense, to turn it around and see it from different perspectives in rapid succession, acts like a prop for the mind, who is partially liberated from having to corroborate abstract information from exclusively visual material in order to make sense of the object. The activation of the tactile sense helps these mental processes and plays a key role in driving thinking forward.

In the case of the Machinic Cube, the paper mock-up was instrumental for the next stage of the artistic process which was creating a digital model. Having a 3D printable model is one of the necessary steps when working with computer-controlled additive manufacturing. So, the endeavour of creating a 3D object with a 3D printer entailed my acquiring basic knowledge of digital 3D modelling using 3DS Max and also some experience in operating a 3D printer.

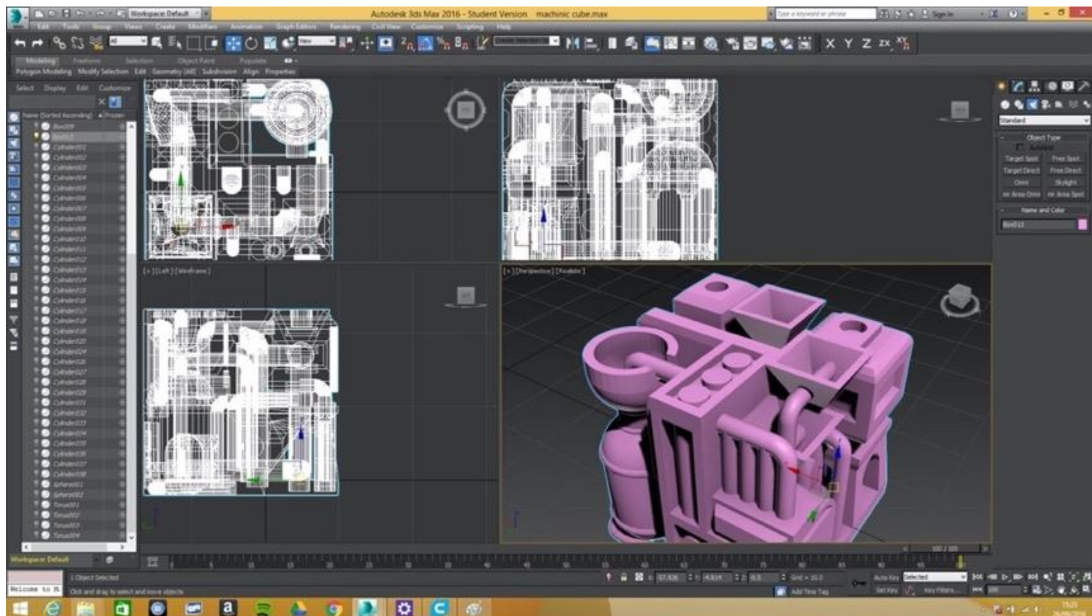


Fig. 26. Digital model being constructed in 3DS Max

The digital model created in 3DS Max was exported as an 'STL' – a file format which can be read by a 'slicing' software, in this case Cura. This software then produces a 'gcode' file, that the 3D printer needs in order to produce the object.

From a technical point of view, experimenting with 3D printing proved to be quite tricky, neither as straight forward as expected, nor as easy as advertised by manufacturers of 3D printers. It took a lot of patience to understand how the equipment works, how changing different parameters affects the outcome and had to try out more than one method in order to get the desired result.

The Machinic Cube (Figure 20) was printed in PLA with an Ultimaker 2+ and measures 5 cm x 5 cm x 4.5 cm

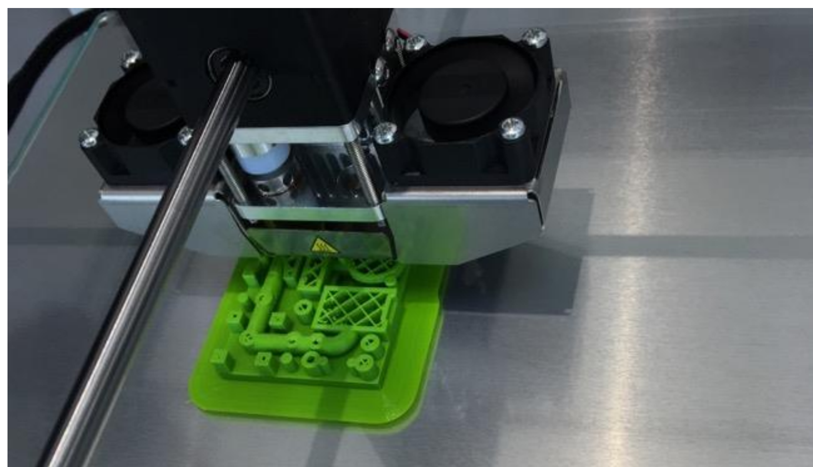


Fig. 27. Machinic Cube being printed

Fig. 28. 3D printed Machinic Cube

The effort that I invested in these preliminary steps made me think that I could somehow use my preparatory designs as artworks. I decided to produce a series of linocut prints that I could exhibit together with the Cube.

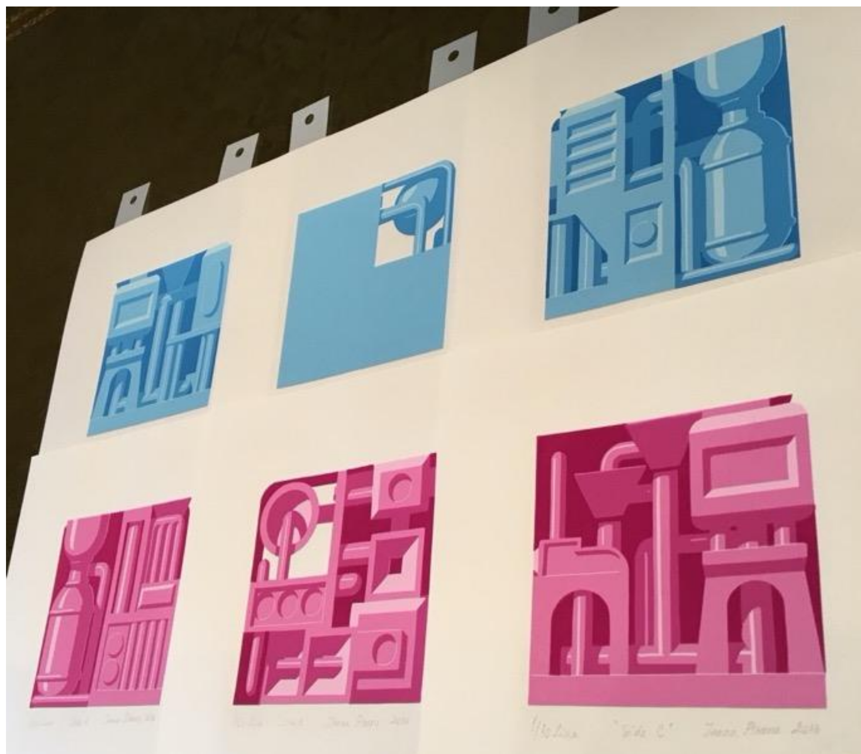


Fig. 29. Hand-made linocut prints portraying the faces of the Machinic Cube

This is how the idea that the Machinic Cube could constitute the centre piece of an installation came to mind.

The next step was to find a solution to display the linocut prints in a way that complements the particularity of 3D objects to always be only partially visible. In other words, the question was how to represent the ‘hidden face’, how to reveal it and conceal it at the same time. Consequently, I came up with the idea of double-sided frames, which allowed for prints representing opposite sides of the cube to be displayed back-to-back, and thus to make it impossible for the viewer to see opposing faces of the cube simultaneously.

I designed the double-sided frames directly in 3DS Max. I started with the overall structure in order to determine the best way to assemble it since, unfortunately, the 3D printer I was using was neither large enough, nor capable to print such a structure in one piece.

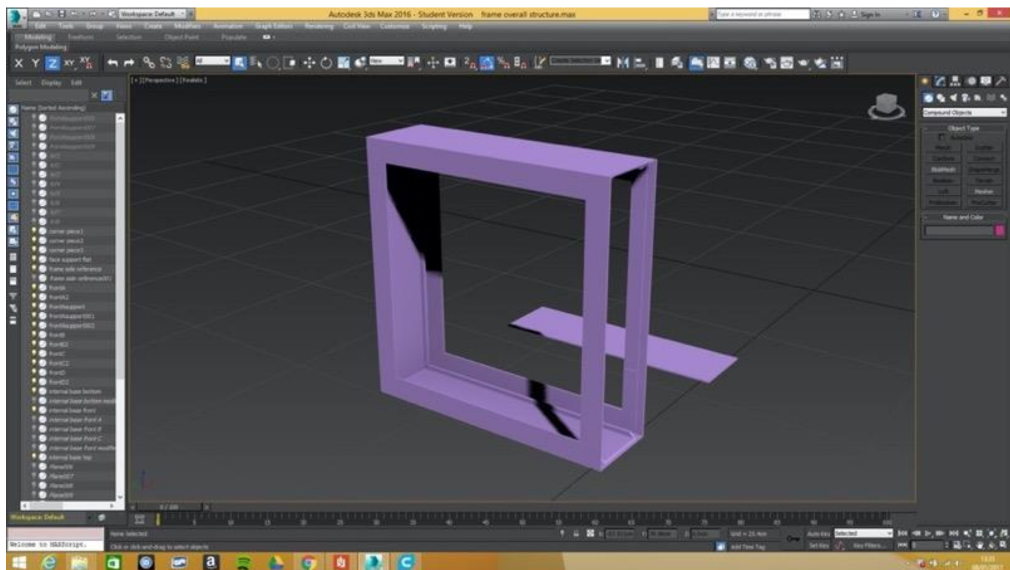


Fig. 30. Internal structure of a double frame, designed in 3DS Max

As it turned out, the frames needed a lot of interior components (not visible on the outside when the frames are assembled) to confer the strength and sturdiness necessary for displaying the artworks in a gallery over a long period of time. Most of these components have also been 3D printed.

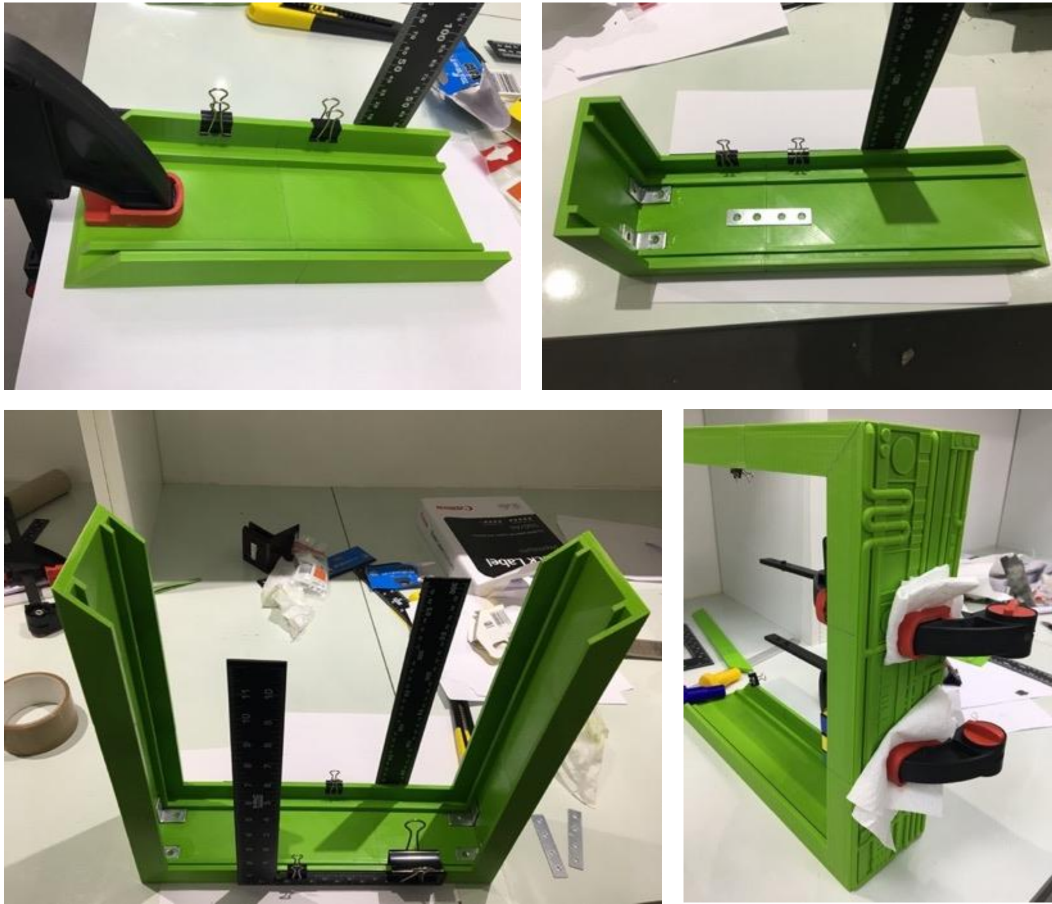


Fig. 31. 3D printed frame being assembled

The central piece of my installation consisted of the 3D printed machinic cube which served as a model for the linocut prints, floating on a 3D printed base, by means of electromagnetism. This was achieved with the help, knowledge and technical support of Dr. David Brotherton-Ratcliffe from Geola.

Fig. 32. Machinic Cube floating over a horror vacui base

4.2.3. Presentation

The first view of the installation one ought to get is a frontal one.

Fig. 33. Frontal view of the installation

The different perspective views in the pictures below show how moving around the installation reveals a chromatic dialogue between the central piece and the wall-mounted frames.

Fig. 34. The installation viewed from different angles.

Projector lights similar to those illuminating the *Spectral Figures* holograms were used for this project too. The effect is that of a lightbox – the pictures appear to be lit from the inside. There is virtually no direct light hitting the wall, which means that the surrounding space is dark enough so as not to affect the holograms with too much ambient light.

The space between the three frames, and that between the wall and the plinth allows the viewer to see the framed linocuts and to move around the installation without difficulty.

4.3. *The Horror Vacui Wall* & *Techno Pop*! – Printmaking

4.3.1. Introduction

This section describes the making of two printmaking projects which I decided to present in one section, due to the similarity of the technique used and the ideas they emerged from.

The first is a wall-based piece titled *The Horror Vacui Wall,* the size of which can be adapted to the space where it is to be exhibited. It consists of a digitally printed, patterned wallpaper. The design which makes up the pattern is also the subject of a hand-printed linocut, framed and mounted on the wall.

The second, *Techno Pop!* is a series of linocuts printed in very vivid colours, exploring the concepts of horror vacui and optical illusions and combining architectural structures with industrial imagery.

A linocut print is made by pressing a carved piece of linoleum, covered in ink, against the printing surface to obtain an impression of the design carved into the block. For multiple-coloured prints, the two most common methods used in linocut are multi-block printing, where the design corresponding to each colour is carved on a separate plate, and reduction printing, where the same plate is used for all the colours.

The second method is succinctly described by Catharine Abell:

> "[reduction prints] are often produced by applying separate inkings of a matrix for each color, starting with the lightest and cutting away sections of the matrix between each inking so that the color last printed will be visible in certain sections of the completed print and will not subsequently be overprinted." (Catharine Abell, 'Printmaking as an Art')

The advantage of the reduction method is that it circumvents many of the issues related to registration (i.e., the alignment of the different layers), ensuring that the

colours overlap properly. However, the disadvantage is that the process is irreversible, in that one cannot go back to reprinting or modifying an earlier layer, should it be necessary. It also means that if one aims to obtain a certain number of copies in their edition, many more copies will need to be printed from the beginning, in case any errors occur along the way.

Multi-block linocut is a means to avoid these issues but requires much more care and attention with regard to registration, as well as being more time-consuming, depending on the number of plates used.

It is also possible to use a combination of the two methods, and although the planning involved is more laborious, some artists do this as a way to make use of the advantages offered by both techniques.

4.3.2. The making of *The Horror Vacui Wall*

This project started with designing the wallpaper motif using digital software. The motif consists of a baroque ornament overlaid on an isometric abstract pattern which I designed.

Fig. 35. Components of the horror vacui wallpaper motif

While the resulting image is meant to give an idea of what the final linocut should look like and to serve as a model, its two components were actually used in marking the lino sheets prior to carving. As I wanted to maintain the possibility of actually hand printing the entire wallpaper should I choose to, I had to use the

multi-block technique, as opposed to the reduction technique which is often preferred when printing multiple layers of colour.

Fig. 36. Carved lino sheets used for printing

I used the digitally designed motif to create a linocut (Fig. 36). The production of this linocut, based on the multi-plate technique, took nearly a month. I tried my utmost to make a perfect edition, yet despite my efforts, no two of the resulting hand-pulled linocuts were exactly the same.

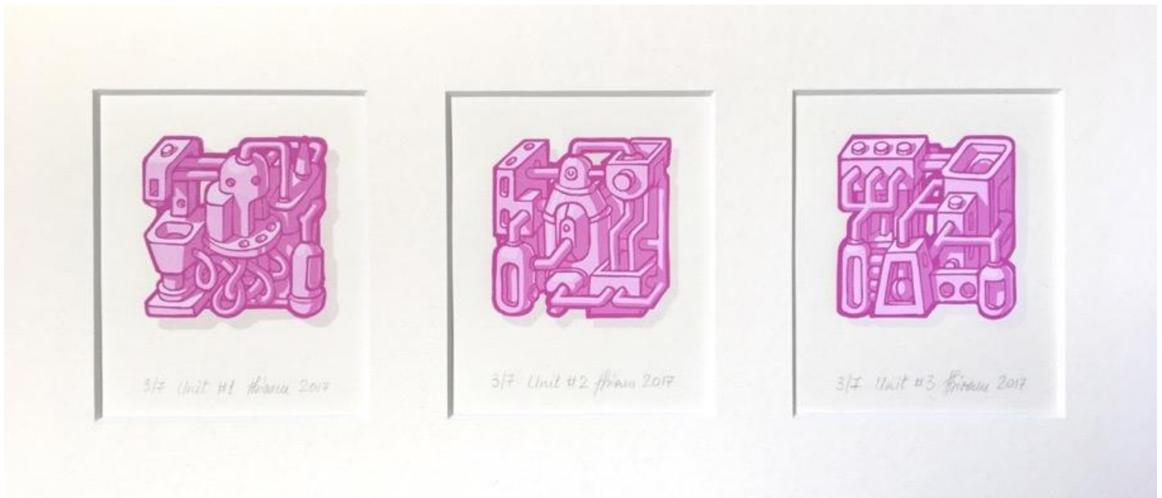
Fig. 37. Scan of hand-pulled linocut

I made the horror vacui wallpaper by digitally seaming together scan copies of the linocut prints, preserving the imperfections and even creating more, where necessary, so as to generate a seemingly hand-made wall-size artwork and thus make it difficult to discern whether the wallpaper is digitally/mechanically produced or hand printed.

4.3.3. The making of *Techno Pop!*

Of the eleven artworks included in this series, five were made using the multi-block technique described above – *Cubic Maze 1* & *2* (2016), *Heterotopia 1* & *2* (2018) and *Heterotopia: San Francisco* (2019) (Fig. 37), three were made with the reduction technique, which I will detail below – *Pink Machines* (2017), *Macondo* (2017), *Illusion* (2017), and *Crowd* (2018) (Fig. 38); and two were a combination of the reduction and multi-block – *Extrusion* (2016), and *Façade* (2017) (Fig. 39).

Fig. 38. *Techno Pop!* artworks realised with the multi-block method



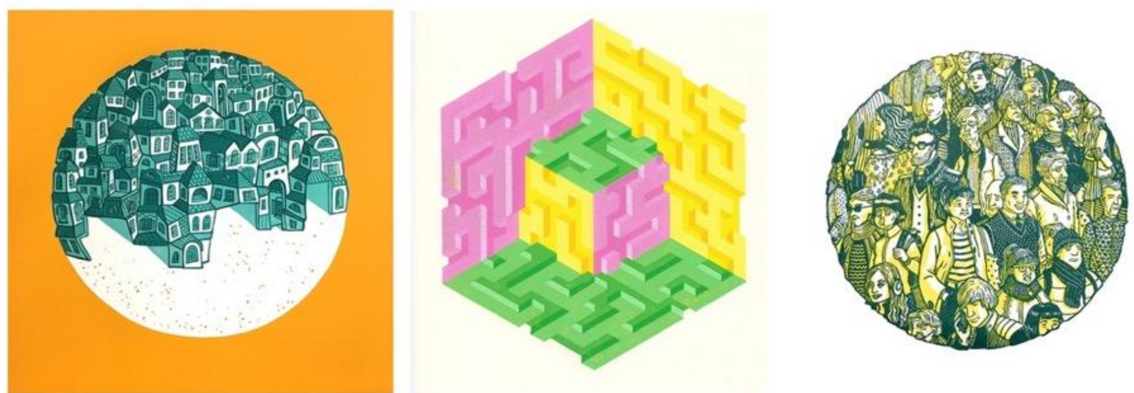


Fig. 39. *Techno Pop!* artworks realised with the reduction method

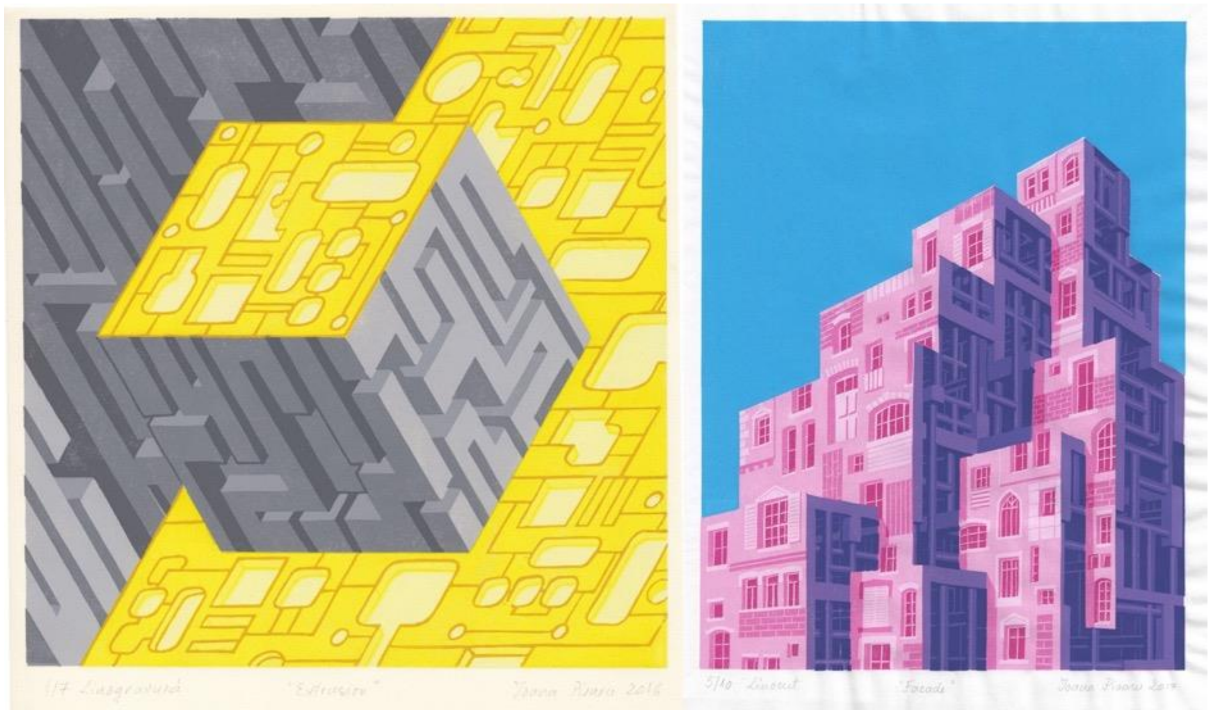


Fig. 40. *Techno Pop!* artworks realised with a mixed method

Illusion (2017) is a twelve-layer reduction linocut and further exploration of how 2D media can be used to create 3D effects.
Below is a series of images showing the 12 stages of the printing process. Two additional layers of white ink, which are not shown here, were applied after layers 4 and 8 respectively to compensate for the slight transparency of the inks. This prevented the orange of layer 4 from dimming the light green of layer 5, and the green of layer 8 to darken the light pink of layer 9.

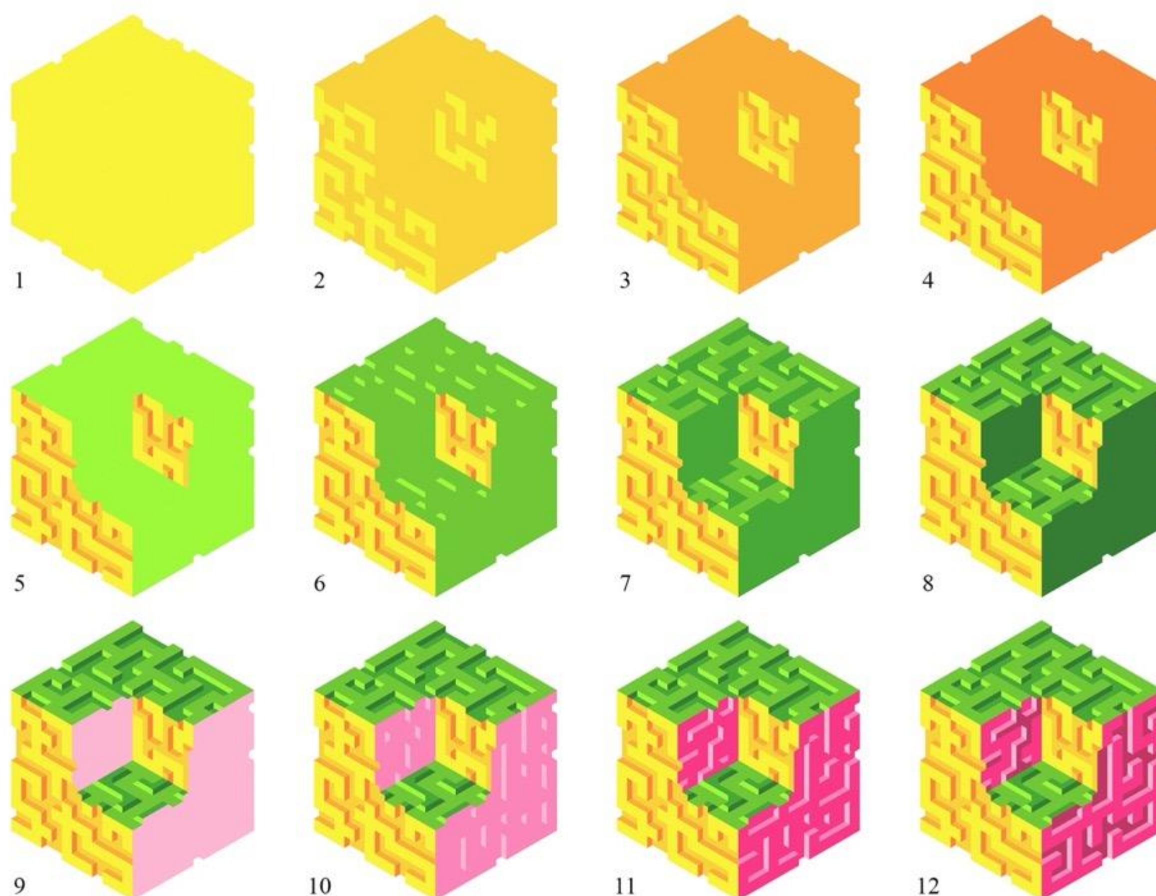


Fig. 41. *Illusion*, 2017 – printing stages (digital simulation).

The complexity of the subject was a challenge for the reduction technique, particularly because the flatness of the print surface was reduced with each new layer of ink. This means that the flat colour fields that are representative of this series were increasingly difficult to attain. Nevertheless, this method was preferred to that of the multi-block, due to the necessity to obtain a perfect overlap of the

layers, so as to preserve the precision of the lines and thus create the desired optical illusion. After printing all the layers, I decided that the illusion was more effective when turning the image upside down, so I signed the edition accordingly.

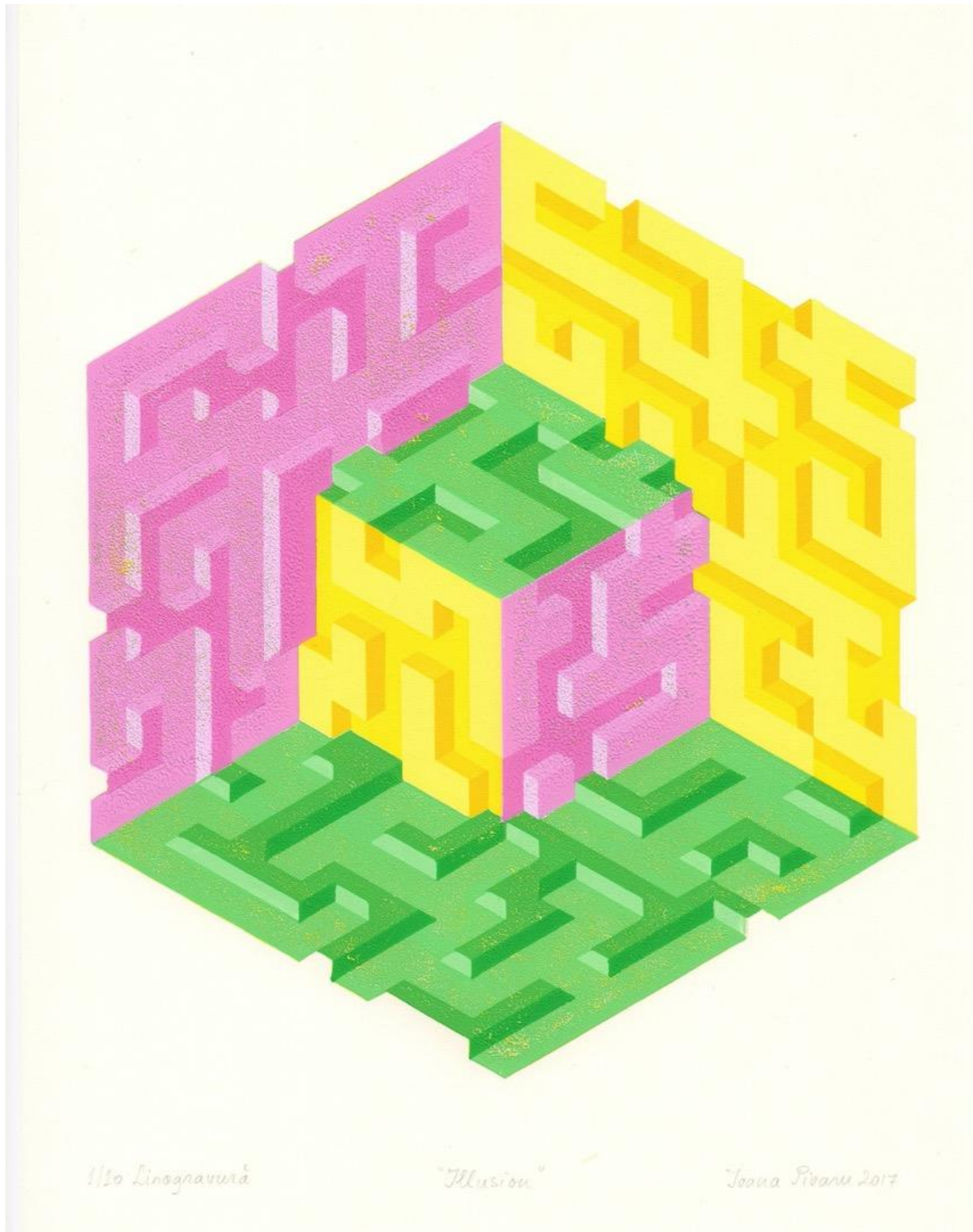


Fig. 42. *Illusion*, 2017 – final print

The illusion created consists of an interplay between two different images: the first, in which the light comes from the top right, is a large cube floating in the air, seen from below, with one corner (or one eighth) missing. The second, where light comes from the bottom left, is a smaller cube seen from above, placed in the corner of a larger cubic space.
Several people who saw the print identified a third perspective which is that of a small cube floating in front of a larger one. However, in this scenario the light source is not consistent.

4.3.4. Presentation

The Horror Vacui Wall installation can be adapted to the space where it is to be displayed. A wall or a section of a wall is covered in the digitally printed wallpaper. The hand-printed linocut is farmed with a double mountboard (yellow top board and blue accent board) and a white frame.

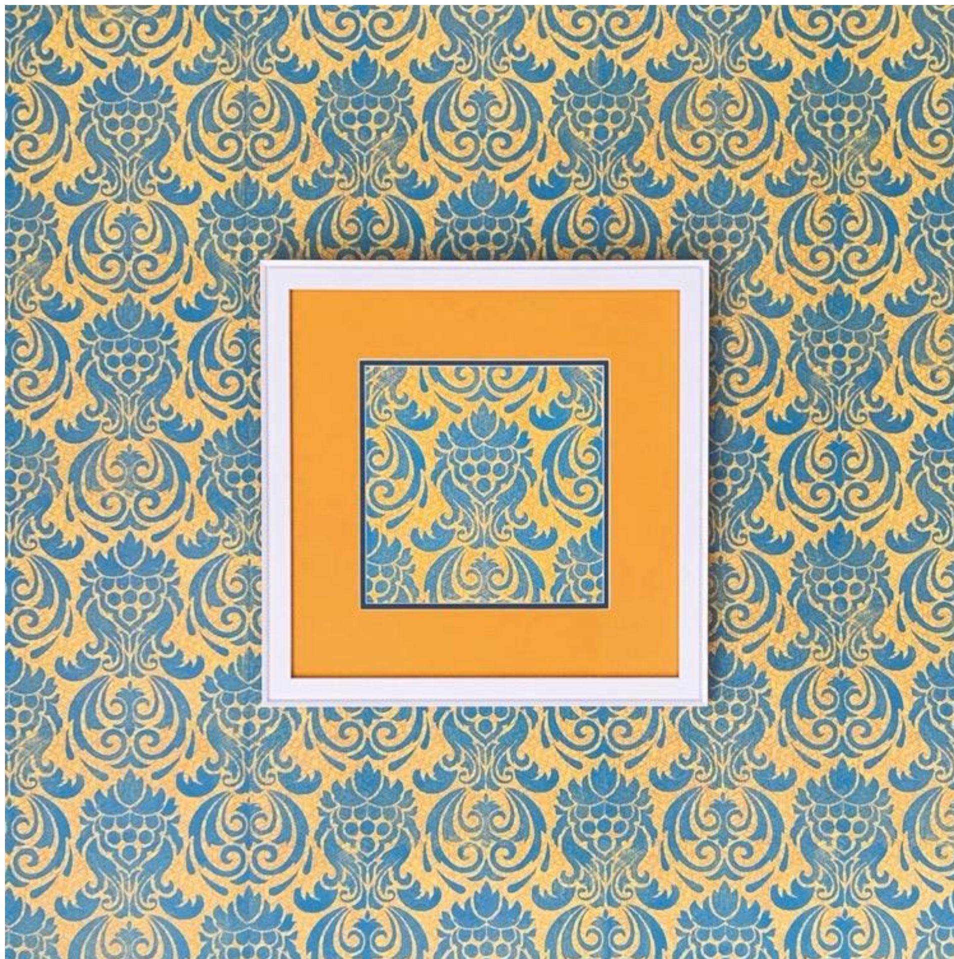


Fig. 43. *The Horror Vacui Wall* – detail.

The framed print is mounted over the wallpaper, aligned to the pattern on the wall so as to create the impression that an empty frame is placed directly over the wallpaper and that it is the wallpaper which is visible through the glass.

Fig. 44. *The Horror Vacui Wall* – studio setup.

The frames and mountboards used for the artworks in the *Techno Pop!* series are considered an integral part of the artwork; they are chosen so as to match the fauve colours in the prints and thus contribute to conveying the overall impression of chromatic vividness. The series is mounted in a cluster, on a warm green background. The coloured background too was chosen for its ability to bring out the vibrancy of the colours in the artworks.

Fig. 45. *Techno Pop!* – studio setup

4.4. *Heterotopia: Pubs of London* and *A Map of West Sussex* – *Drawing*

4.4.1. Introduction

I decided to present these projects in the same section after identifying certain structural and content-related similarities between the two: first of all, both of them are explorations of maximalism through the medium of traditional drawing; secondly, in both cases the many individual parts making up the overall projects are also artworks in their own right; thirdly, the subject matter in both projects is architecture.

Heterotopia: Pubs of London is a series of 30 miniature illustrations combining architectural drawing with industrial/steampunk elements: 15 drawings of London pubs and 15 drawings of anthropomorphic characters (animal heads and human bodies, dressed in the Victorian fashion), each illustrating the names of the pubs (e.g. The Golden Eagle, The Flying Horse, The Pocket Watch). This is another ramification of the type of imagery I started to draw around 2012 (Flux, Insectarium), and a continuation of the idea of combining industrial elements with architecture visible in *Techno Pop!* (*Façade*, *Heterotopia #1, #2* and *San Francisco*) Since moving to the U.K in 2012 I noticed how the architecture of pubs stood out among the other buildings of a neighbourhood, their style and decoration appealing to my sense of architectural beauty. Their appearance somehow evoked an image of England that predated my actual arrival in England, an image which started to form in my mind when I was a child, through the books I read and films I watched. This 'idea of England', not quite realistic and rather romanticised, seemed somehow to be encapsulated in the image of the public houses, starting with their names and signs suggestive of mythical creatures or epic richness.

As with *Heterotopia: Pubs of London*, my passion for traditional architecture was the driving force behind *A Map of West Sussex*. It marks a new chapter in my life which coincides with my moving out of London into the countryside and trying to

adapt to a different context and lifestyle. What I aimed to achieve with this project was to sample the houses and cottages of West Sussex and to put together a collection of drawings that would illustrate the stylistic diversity of this region's traditional architecture. Although each piece of the series is an artwork in and by itself, it also seemed appropriate to combine them together to create a map.
Two recent drawings from 2019, *Pubs Near Me* (Fig. 44) and *Pubs of Dulwich* (Fig. 45), not included in my PhD project, show my ongoing passion for the subject of traditional British architecture.

Fig. 46. *Pubs Near Me*, A4 drawing, 2019

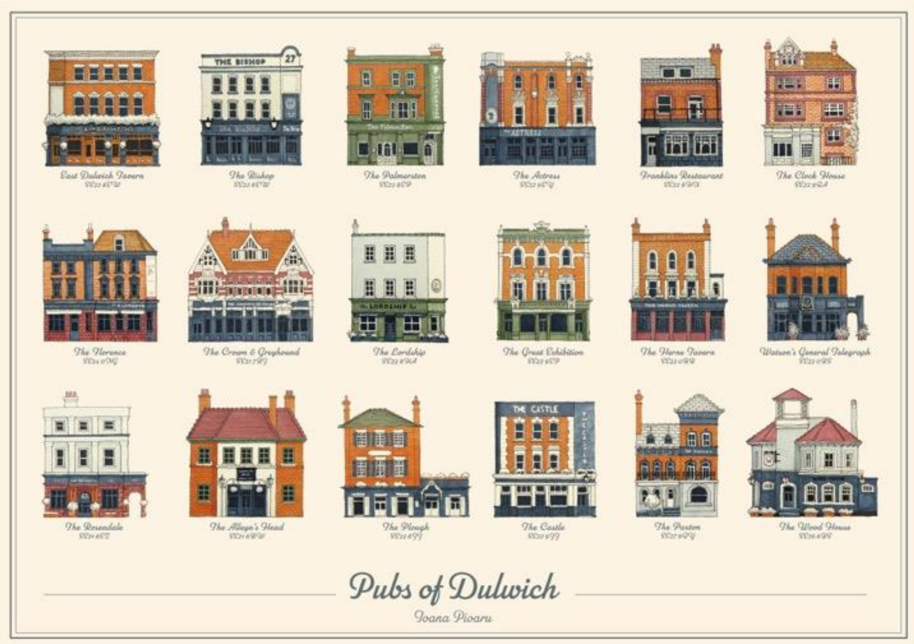


Fig. 47. *Pubs of Dulwich*, digital illustration from an original A3 drawing, 2019

4.4.2. The making of *Heterotopia: Pubs of London*

The project started with putting together a rough list of pubs. The selection of subjects continued throughout the development of the series. What I knew from the outset was that I wanted the pubs to be more or less uniformly distributed on the map of London, and that they had to be corner pubs, so that I could draw two sides and the top of the buildings using isometry.

Below is a sketch (fig. 38), showing the region where the pubs would be located. The crosses indicate that I had identified a suitable subject (listed separately). The circled regions mark finished drawings.

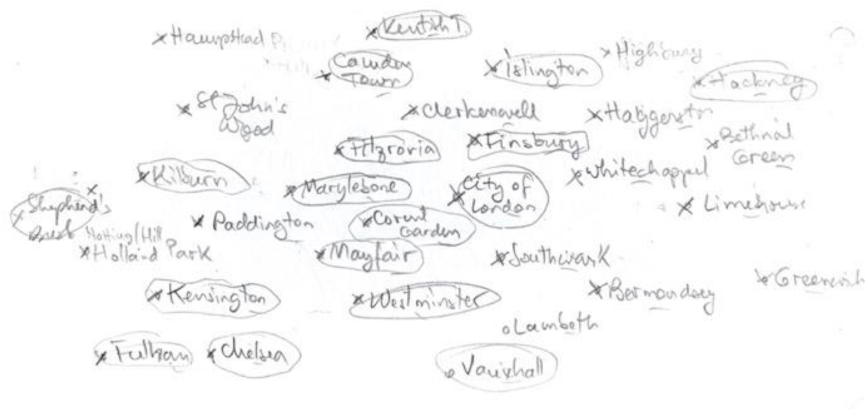


Fig. 48. Sketch of the Map of London

The choice of subject was influenced not only by the geographical position but also by the name of the pubs, in the sense that I had to select those pubs whose names could be represented as anthropomorphic characters.

Fig. 49. Initial sketches of anthropomorphic characters

(The Jugged Hare, Cat & Mutton, The Camden Eye)

Composition

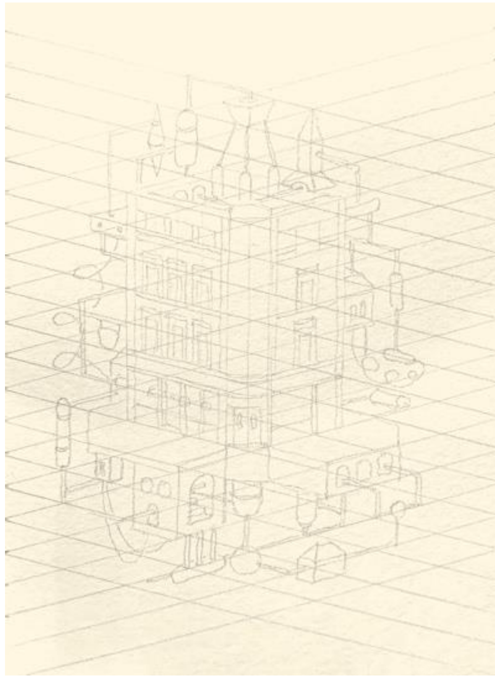
The format of each drawing in the series is A7 – 75mm x 105mm.

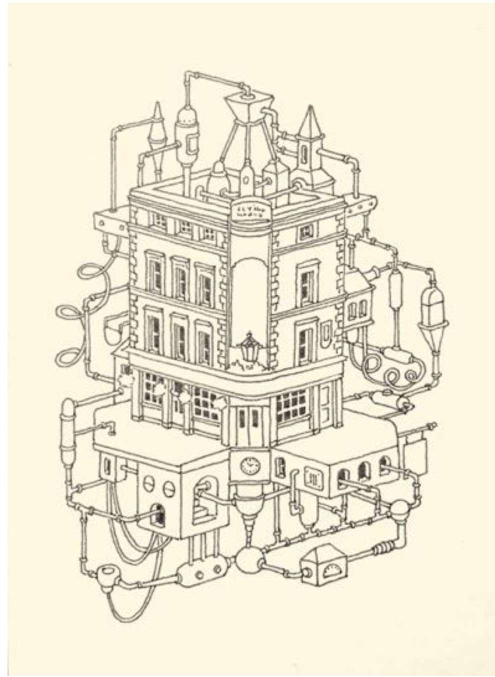
In the initial sketches (Fig. 40), where I was trying to decide on the style and concept of the series, I used frontal or two-point perspective.

Fig. 50. Preliminary sketches

However, due to my fascination with cartography, I wanted to keep open, for later on, the possibility of assembling these drawings in the form of a map, which is why in the end I opted for an isometric perspective. Furthermore, this type of perspective would allow me to render three sides of a building, which was more suited to the idea of combining architecture and industrial elements in the steampunk fashion – the concept I finally settled on.

The making of each piece started with a grid lightly drawn in pencil, a method of ensuring consistent angles and proportions throughout the series. The next step was a loose pencil sketch of the subject. This rough structure was further elaborated in the black ink outline. A light grey shade was then applied with alcohol-based marker to indicate the areas of light and shadow – the source of light, from the top left, is consistent throughout the series. Finally, the drawing was coloured using three marker shades only, and sometimes light and dark accents were added with white gel pen or black ink fineliner.





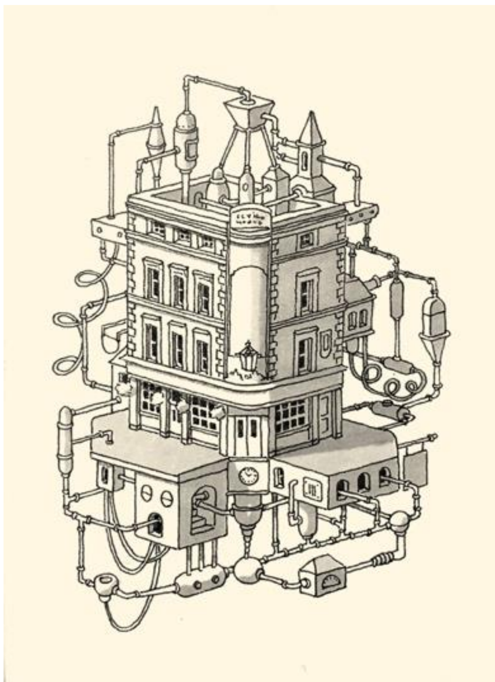


Fig. 51. *The Flying Horse* – stages of the drawing process.

Fig. 52. *Heterotopia: Pubs of London* – the complete series

***Heterotopia: Pubs of London* – postcard set**

I wanted to turn this series into a set of mini-postcards which, in the context of an exhibition, could be manipulated by the visitors. With this in mind, I made a tiny mock-up of a presentation box (below). Then I designed and put together manually

a full-size box for the A7 postcards. The postcards were printed on high quality card stock from scans of the originals.

Fig 53. Paper model of postcard box

Fig. 54. *Heterotopia: Pubs of London* – presentation box

The box is made to look like a corner pub building from three sides, while the back shows what that same façade would look like from the back/interior, and features steampunk elements similar to those in the drawings (Fig. 54, top). The box contains a map of London indicating the locations of each of the pubs included in the series (Fig. 54, bottom).

Fig. 55. *Heterotopia: Pubs of London* – postcard set details.

4.4.3. The making of *A Map of West Sussex*

The possibility of drawing an architecture map covering the whole region was one of the first thoughts I had when this project started to take shape in my mind. However, since this boded to be a sizable and quite intimidating task, I realised that a more manageable way to approach the complexity of a map would be to break it down into small parts and to treat each one individually.

Therefore, the initial approach to this project was very similar to the one I used in 'Heterotopia', in the sense that I started from the map of the region which I divided (more or less arbitrarily) into small sections. Initially the project was going to include East Sussex but later I decided to complete that part in the future.
In each section I identified a town or village where I'd look for a house to draw. Some of the locations were changed later on, if a better subject was found in another nearby place.

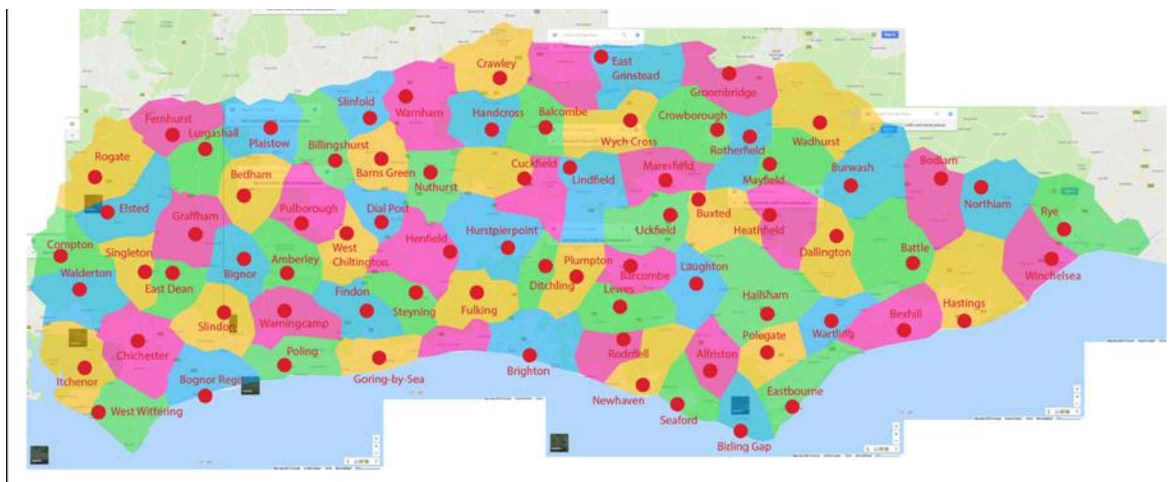


Fig.56. Digital map of Sussex divided in small sections, with red dots indicating the location of subjects.

The individual drawings were made using a minimal range of materials, the most important of which being black ink fineliners and A6 sheets of 280gsm archival paper.

The image below shows the typical stages of one of these drawings, the completion of which would normally take between 3 and 8 hours. The drawing starts with a rough pencil sketch that defines the key elements of the composition, then details are gradually added with ink.

Fig. 57. *Bignor* – stages of the drawing

The 40 drawings that make up the series were made between May 2019 and October 2020.

They were scanned, post-processed and assembled in a map with the use of Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. Several more cartographic elements had to be drawn to complete the map, including the cartouche, the border and the compass. The map measures 1350 x 1050 mm and is printed on 308gsm Hahnemuhle photo rag paper with archival inks.

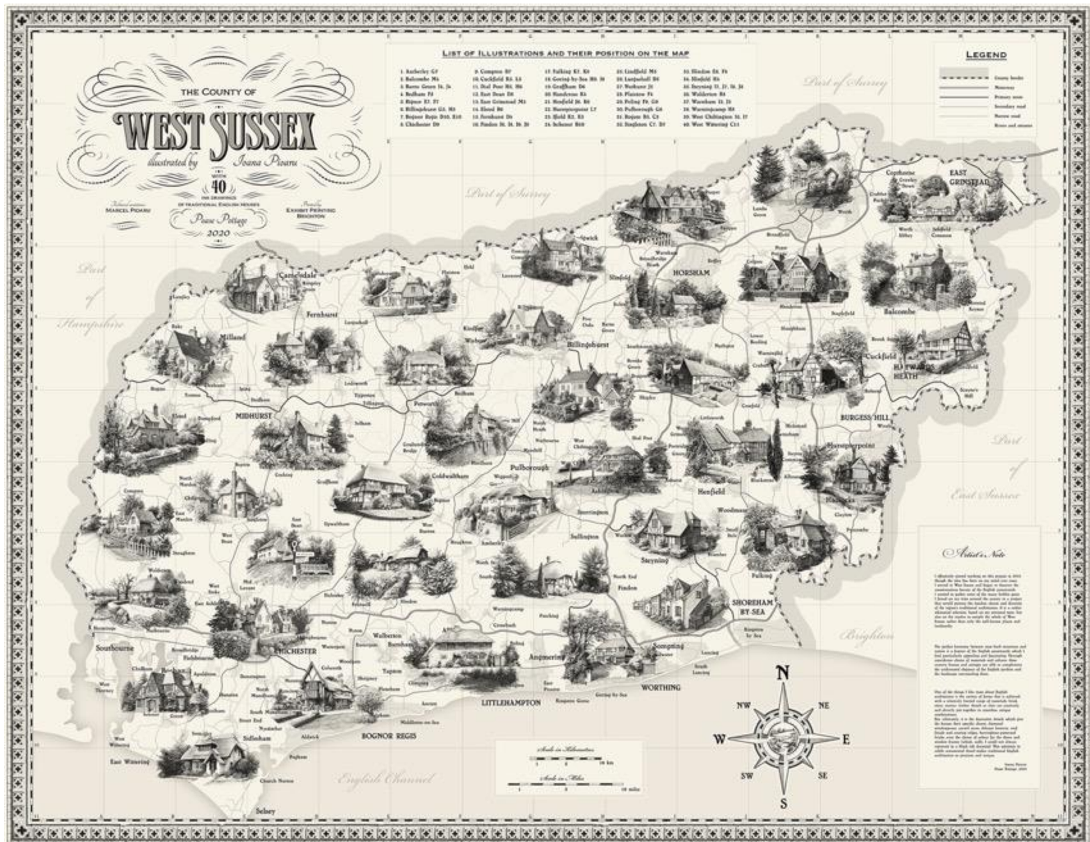


Fig. 58. *A Map of West Sussex* – giclee print, open edition, 2020.

4.4.4. Presentation

The drawings of *Heterotopia: Pubs of London* are displayed two by two, in traditional-style frames, over a mountboard that matches the chromatic palette of the series, with the name and location of the pub indicated at the bottom.

Fig. 59. Three of the artworks in the series.

Fig. 60 shows a possible arrangement of the framed drawings, which can vary depending on the available space.

Fig. 60. *Heterotopia: Pubs of London* – studio setup.

Fig. 61. *A Map of West Sussex* – studio setup.

The framed map is mounted on a wall. If the space allows it, the original drawings can be displayed on top of a large table, under a sheet of mountboard with 40 apertures and a sheet of glass for protection. Otherwise, a small book containing good quality reproductions of all the images can be available to browse.

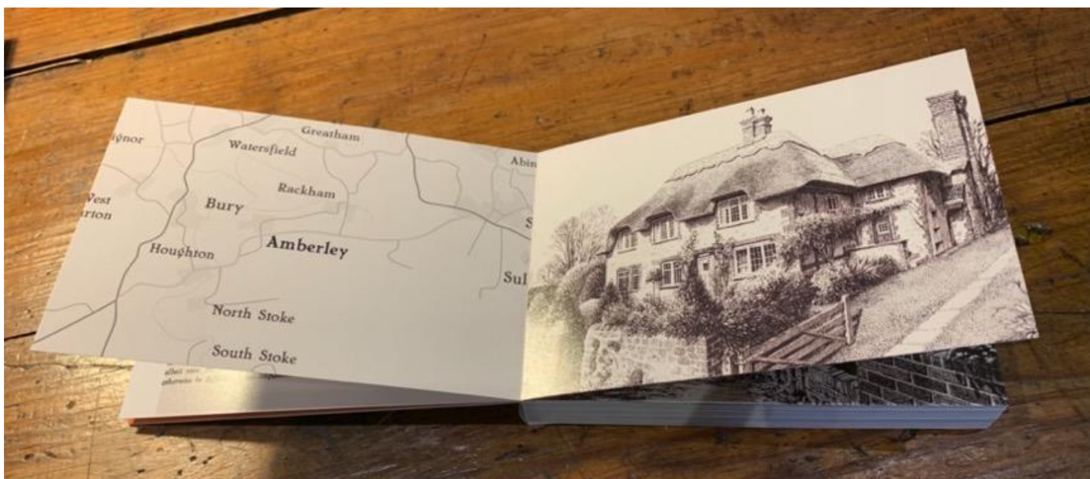


Fig. 62. *Traditional Architecture of West Sussex* – unique book, 2020.

4.5. Views of a maximalist exhibition

The photographs in this section show the projects presented above, set up together and curated in my studio. Due to the transparency of the SRD holograms, careful consideration had to be given to arranging them in the available space, so that whatever was visible on the other side didn't clash with the holographic images. More holograms become visible as the viewer moves through the space, while others disappear. The interplay between the visible and the invisible, dictated by the limited angle of view of the holograms, was a constant concern when curating this exhibition.

Fig. 63. Exhibition view.

Fig. 64. Exhibition view.

Fig. 65. Exhibition view

Fig. 66. Exhibition view

Fig. 67. Exhibition view

Fig. 68. Exhibition view

Fig. 69. Exhibition view

Fig. 70. Exhibition view

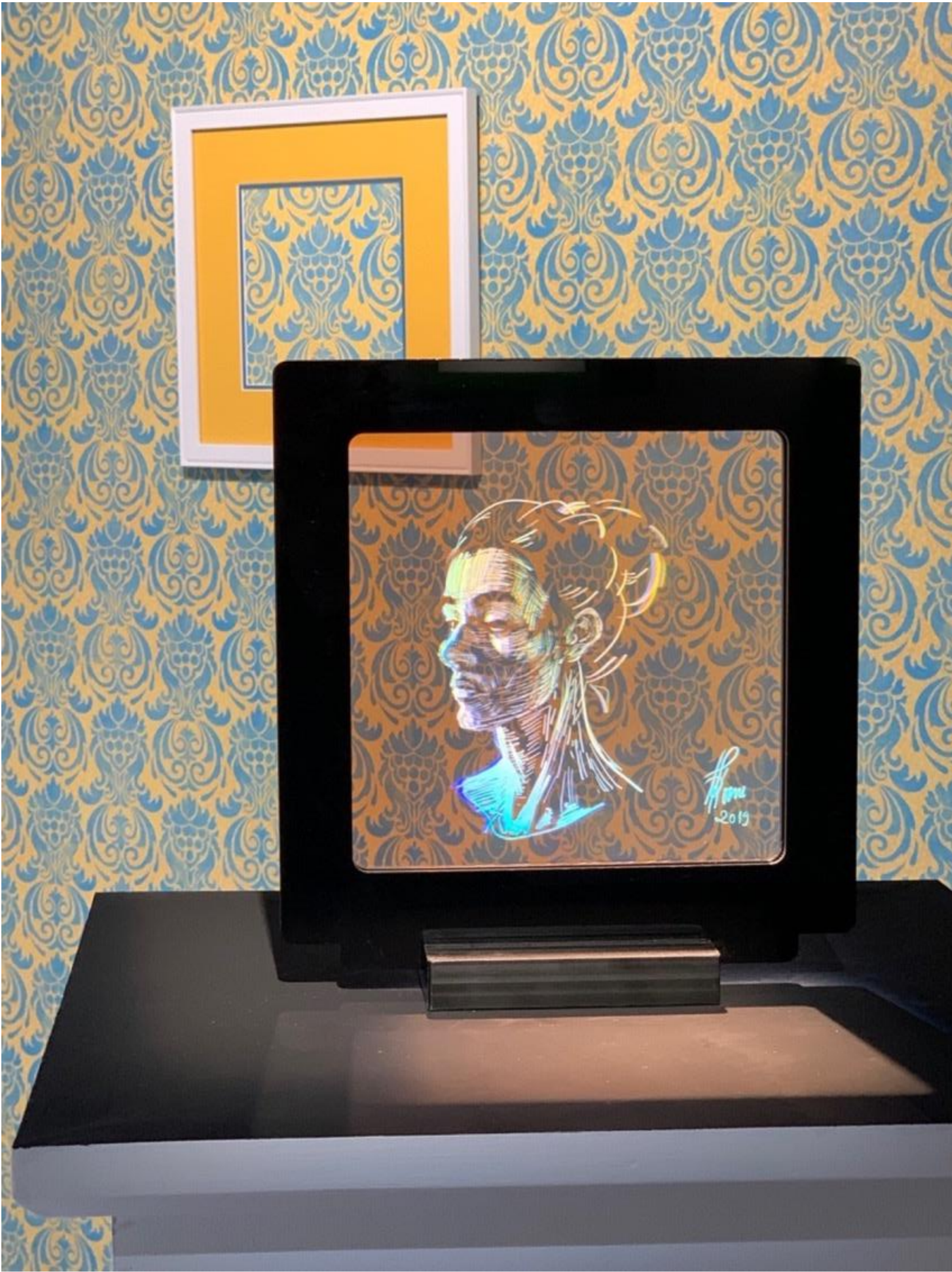


Fig. 71. Exhibition view

Fig. 72. Exhibition view

Fig. 73. Exhibition view

CHAPTER 5: Towards a definition of maximalism

The previous chapter focused on factual details regarding the process of artmaking and the display of the resulting artworks in a gallery/exhibition context, without directly addressing the relations between the artworks and the concept of maximalism. In this chapter I will reflect upon these relations and present the findings of this research.

The first part, consisting of theoretical reflections generated by the literature review and the art practice, proposes several concepts to be considered in constructing a rounded image of maximalism: maximalism as a de-historicised operational concept, maximalism as a type of practice which decentralizes the artistic self, and a theoretical framework for discussing maximalist art in terms of spatial, durational and narrative aspects. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, one of the gaps identified in the literature review was methodological - the absence of a set of procedures to enable the understanding and use of the concept of maximalism. It was this set of procedures which was constantly shaped during the research period and which finally led to the construction of the theoretical framework outlined in this chapter.

The second part shows the relation between these theoretical insights and the art projects. Each project is discussed from the perspective of its relevance to maximalism as defined in the theoretical section.

The choice of presenting the findings in this order, i.e., theory preceding the practice, was driven by the necessity to organise the material in an easily readable

and logical structure. However, it should be stressed that the practice of art played a crucial role in generating these theoretical insights and in guiding me towards the relevant literature. For instance, the idea of a decentralized artistic self that led me towards Brodie Beales' concept of 'becoming Dionysian' (Beales, 2005), was driven by my maximalist approach to artmaking understood as the impulse to 'sample' a multiplicity of media, tools and procedures without ever fixing for too long on a single one.

5.1. Theoretical reflections

Deleuze's discussion of the Baroque in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* constitutes a precedent for expanding the significance of a term, from a designator of a specific period and style to a de-historicised concept with a much wider application (Deleuze, 1993).

In establishing the grounds for defining maximalism as an operative concept, I have drawn upon Nietzsche's theory of the Apollonian and the Dionysian (Nietzsche, 1993) and exemplified the possibility of using maximalism as a category, applied to various examples from art history.

A subsequent development by Brodie Beales of the same Nietzschean theory (Beales, 2005) was built upon to develop the idea of the decentralization of the artistic self, entailed by the practice of maximalism.

Finally, the method of art analysis based on spatial, durational and narrative parameters which I propose here was informed by previous definitions of maximalism described in the literature review, in combination with the theories mentioned above.

5.1.1. Maximalism as an operative concept

Following the argument of Tatiana Flores (2007), this study does not propose maximalism as an artistic movement, encompassing a body of works sharing similar

qualities, but as a critical category within the vocabulary of art, a transhistorical term which can function as an operative concept in a discussion about art.

In his book *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1993), Deleuze suggests that the Baroque, understood as a pure concept, can be 'stretched beyond its precise historical limits' (Deleuze, 1993, p. 33), expanding its reach not only after the 17th and 18th centuries, but most interestingly, before what is ordinarily designated as the baroque period, giving the example of early renaissance painter Uccello (Deleuze, 1993). The baroque fold therefore can be continued or extended to infinity.

Similarly, it can be argued that a definition of maximalism as an operative concept can be tested out against various examples from art history and from contemporary art. This working definition which I propose below is inspired by the Nietzschean theory of the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

5.1.2. A working definition of maximalism

The Nietzschean dichotomy of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, which was useful in grasping the meaning and potential of maximalism, was introduced in *The Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche, 1993) and furthered in later works (e.g., *Ecce Homo*). According to Nietzsche's theory, the human condition is governed by, and perpetually oscillating between the two opposing yet symbiotic forces represented by Apollo and Dionysus. The apollonian principle is associated with reason, order and individuality and representation (sculpture), while the Dionysian stands in for excess, chaos, irrationality, performance and participation. Nietzsche argues that the Socratic dialectic and the philosophical currents streaming from it, by undermining the importance of the senses and negating life, are directly opposed to the concept of the Dionysian. Nietzsche distances himself from Kant's idea of Sublime (Kant, 1987), advancing the idea that the Dionysian experience is inclusive rather than alienating to the viewer, demanding immersion within the artistic act and a closeness of experience quite opposed to the critical distance required by the Kantian sublime (Nietzsche, 1993). However, the sublime marks the point where maximalism and the Nietzschean concept start to diverge, as maximalist art is

closely related to the sublime. This is evidenced by Colangelo's literary definition of maximalism and also by Harman's theory of object-oriented ontology, upon which this study relies: in literature, maximalism is linked with the sublime by an engagement with the limits of the medium (the printed volume) (Colangelo, 2014), while in object-oriented ontology the sublime nature of an artwork is found in the chasm opened up by the withdrawal of the real object behind its sensory qualities (Harman, 2020).

Following Barbara Stiegler's argument in *What is Tragic?* (2016) it is important to note that although the Dionysiac principle plays the central role in Nietzsche's philosophy, contrary to Deleuze (who, in Stiegler's words 'is at great pains to attribute [Apollo] even the smallest legitimacy'), the Apollonian too holds a fundamental role – the necessity of representation (Stiegler, 2016). The elegance of Nietzsche's thinking lies precisely in his refusal to 'banish' Apollo, despite identifying him as the underlying principle of post-Socratic philosophy. Besides the fact that it emphasizes the harmony which can be found within one's chaotic experience, the force and ultimately the uniqueness of the Apollonian and the Dionysian concept lies in the symbiotic nature of their relation, in their indivisibility. With regard to this study, numerous similarities can be drawn between maximalism and what might be called a Dionysian approach to art and artmaking.

Furthermore, Nietzsche's concept suggests the possibility to read the succession of the various stylistic currents in the history of art through the lens of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy: one can argue that maximalism is instantiated in various works of art throughout the history of culture when the balance weighed heavier on the Dionysian side.

Art history through a maximalist lens

The following section will show how certain examples taken from the art of the past can be analysed in a maximalist key, bearing in mind the aforementioned parallelism with the Apollonian/Dionysian concept. The aim of this review is to show how maximalism can be applied as a transhistorical term in a discussion about art in general. This however is not meant as a thorough and exhaustive

'maximalist retrospective' as this goes well beyond the scope of this study. Instead, it will clarify, through a variety of examples, the functionality of the term within the vocabulary of art.

Colossal size as seen in some of the world's largest sculptures or buildings from ancient times to the present days is a tendency towards maximalism that transforms the sublime, which Kant assigns to nature rather than manmade artefacts (Kant, 1987), into an attribute of human power. The Giza Necropolis complex is one such example, as are some other 'wonders' of the ancient world, nowadays no longer existing – the Colossus of Rhodos, the Statue of Zeus, the Colosseum – whose scope was the celebration of art, architecture and engineering accomplishments of the times.
During the Middle Ages and especially in western Europe, the church, whose wealth grew significantly, was prepared to spend lavishly on art not just for the glory of the Christian religion but also as a means to display its power. Many art objects, buildings and monumental sculpture produced in this period exhibits a pronounced maximalist character. Particularly the Gothic, originally synonymous with 'barbaric' and considered by Giorgio Vasari to be characterised by 'monstrous disorder' (Vasari cited by Homan, 2007), was a style which put emphasis on decoration and was more in tune with a Dionysian penchant for flamboyance. In contrast with early medieval architecture, which was weighed down by heavy stone walls, gothic cathedrals shot gracefully upwards, using the technology of the pointed arch, rib vaults and flying buttress to transfer the weight of the tall walls down to the ground. This resulted in higher ceilings and more space for windows that allowed the interiors to be filled with light, and also colour, through the use of stained glass. In addition to enlarging the space of the church or cathedral, all these new architectural elements and surfaces also brought about a proliferation of ornamental details and figurative imagery (often featuring grotesque and brutal scenery for which the gothic was frowned upon for a long time), present in the intricate monumental sculpture which adorned the entrances, walls, columns etc. (Fletcher and Fletcher, 1905).

Furthermore, illuminated manuscripts, apart from constituting an exquisite example of medieval art, are a perfect illustration of 'intensity maximalism': their detailed miniature paintings, finely and carefully executed with rare and expensive pigments, enriched with gold leaf, often bound inside luxurious jewelled covers and, generally, the wealth of visual information contained within (which is, in some cases, the only surviving documentation of some of the architecture of the time), are features which can be seen to connect medieval manuscripts with the concept of maximalism.

Notwithstanding the religious fervour inherited from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance represents a return to the values of the ancient world, which translated into a reformation of the Christian Church on the one hand and a growing importance of secular life on the other. With regard to the arts, one could say that the Dionysian zeal for excessive ornamentation gradually made room for a more Apollonian approach characterised by balance and harmony in painting and by symmetry and an orderly arrangement of structural elements in architecture, in the tradition of classical antiquity. It would appear that the art scene set up by the Renaissance is not particularly hospitable to, or encouraging of, maximalist tendencies. And yet, ironically, the most renowned work of Renaissance architecture – St. Peter's Basilica in Rome – could safely be labelled 'maximalist': meant from the outset to be the grandest building in Christendom and having taken one century to be built, the basilica still holds many records, amongst which the largest church in the world, second tallest building in Rome and the world's tallest dome.

Spatial maximalism can be further traced in Mannerism, the art of a world undergoing radical changes brought about by the Copernican revolution, reflecting a loss of faith in ordered harmony. Given that Renaissance masters had achieved a level of perfection which left no room for further developments, mannerist artists sought to replace the existing rules of art with a new style which better reflected their world view. Harmonious compositions and linear one-point perspective were replaced by more dynamic, complex compositions, while realistic renditions of reality were rejected in favour of highly stylised depictions of the subject matter,

with an emphasis on the personal vision, understanding and technical objectives of the artist. Maximalist tendencies are present in the mannerist organisation of space, characterised by expansion through fragmentation and the heterogeneity of composition, accompanied by a proliferation of details and surfaces. The desired effect (in the viewer) of this expansion and fragmentation is that of dizziness, amazement and rapture (Martin, 1977).

Maximalism and the Baroque have numerous points of convergence, their proximity is perhaps the most immediately and intuitively graspable, and yet their relationship is difficult to pin down due to the confusion and constant debate surrounding the concept of 'baroque' in traditional and recent criticism. For instance, Wölfflin's famous formalist analysis of the baroque, in *Renaissance and Baroque* (Wölfflin, 1984), (with its reluctant reverberations of Bruckhardt's antipathy for the Baroque (Bauer, 2008)) opposes the Baroque to the aesthetics of the Renaissance, whereas criticism after the 1950s prefers to place the opposition between Baroque and Mannerism. John Rupert Martin states in the Introduction of his book 'Baroque': "I do not conceive of the term Baroque as designating an art which is extravagant, heavily ornate or bombastic' (Martin, 1977, p. 11). The definition he rejects is precisely what ordinarily (and fallaciously) springs to mind when one thinks of the baroque. In any case, whether we mean by this term Wölfflin's ornate, exclamatory, emotional, extravagant 'high baroque', or Martin's 'second phase Baroque' represented by the luxuriousness and sensuality of Rubens, Bernini and Boromini, or indeed any other (partial or complete) definition, there is an undeniable maximalist component expressed in the richness and grandeur of the Baroque. Aside from the formalist aspects of the maximalist-baroque relation, another particularity of the baroque age is worth mentioning here as a form of maximalist expansion. Namely, the breakdown of the ancient distinction between earth and cosmos, and the ensuing 'consciousness of infinity' influenced the baroque art in an unprecedented way: artists sought to convey this sense of the infinite by opening up the space of their artworks to include the viewer, in order to create an unbroken unity between art and reality that would mirror the all-encompassing vastness of the universe. (e.g. Velasquez)

To say that Rococo art displays maximalist tendencies would be an understatement – there is little about the delirious flamboyance of rococo which is not maximalist. Drawing its inspiration from nature, Rococo art shows a preference for curved, sinuous forms, floral motifs, asymmetrical design and expressive use of gilding. Following a logic of exuberant theatricality, these 'ingredients' are mixed together in an ebullient hotchpotch. Although regarded by most critics as decadent and superficial, the Rococo aesthetic has seen a revival throughout Europe in the 19th century particularly in the field of applied arts, it echoed later on in Art Nouveau and has made a definite comeback in contemporary fashion, graphics and interior design.

(Neo)Classicism and the Age of Enlightenment mark a period governed by the Apollonian spirit. This new revival of ancient Greek and Roman values, noted for the attention and prominence given to harmony, balance and sense of proportion, shows little to no interest for any maximalist effusions, safe perhaps for the use of grand scale in architecture.

The importance which Romanticism places on emotion and the personal voice of the artist, as well as the interest in nature and its influence on the artist, situates it in the territory of the Dionysian. However, the connection with maximalism is perhaps not as obvious as that with the Dionysian and is expressed, particularly in painting, in depictions of the sublime, overwhelming vastness of nature.

Many of the artistic currents and styles that emerged during the 20th century show more or less pronounced tendencies towards maximalism. The expressive use of strikingly vivid, intense colour, and fierce brushwork which characterises fauvism sought to maximise the emotional potency of colour. Cubists' refusal to represent objects from a single perspective led to a fragmentation and reassembling of the object, depicted now from a multitude of vantage points. Surrealist artists expanded the means and range of artistic expression by incorporating in their 'toolkit' terminology and methods of Freudian psychoanalysis – the unconscious, free association and the realm of dreams were used to create an art that aimed to revolutionise visual experience and liberate it from false rationality. A similar rejection of logic and reason (and, in addition, of aestheticism) championed by

Dadaists, resulted in an unprecedented expansion of the field of art, due paradoxically to their principle of anti-art which challenged accepted definitions of art, a radical gesture which had a long-lasting impact and influence on art practitioners of the 20th and 21st century. Abstract expressionism employed colossally scaled surfaces, while action painting (as understood by Harold Rosenberg (1952)) showed the first manifestation of durational maximalism by shifting the attention from the physical artwork to the 'artist's struggle', to the process of artmaking. Op Art and holographic art are inherently maximalist as they contain (or simulate) an extra dimension – that of motion in the former, and that of volume in the latter – which is not physically present in the artwork but is instantiated in the meeting of the artwork with the viewer. Pop Art continues the Dadaist program of maximising the space of art to include objects from or inspired by everyday life and popular culture, with complete disregard for any hierarchy. A further democratisation (and consequent expansion) of art occurs with the advent of postmodernism in its multitude of manifestations, who, according to a non-discriminating logic of 'anything goes', not only draws inspiration from any contemporaneous source, however frivolous it may be, but also endeavours to revive and appropriate all artistic styles of the past, albeit ironically or as an intellectual exercise. Finally, just as a general overview of maximalist tendencies in contemporary art (which will be further expanded in the next section of this chapter), the ample diversification of media, subject matter and the contexts in which art operates join forces to constantly challenge and re-define our idea and understanding of art and its role in contemporary society.

5.1.3. Maximalism and the decentralisation of the artistic self

Equally useful to this discussion is Brodie Beales' idea to associate the concept of 'becoming', as elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2013), to the Nietzschean dichotomy Apollonian/Dionysian in a theory titled 'becoming-Dionysian' (Beales, 2005). Using Nietzsche's exploration of the balance between the Apollonian and the Dionysian as a framework for examining artistic creation on

which to overlap the deleuze-guattarian ‘becoming’, Beales uses his new concept of ‘becoming-Dionysian’ to understand a type of artistic practice that focuses on the process of artmaking rather than simply on the result of this process, where the practice of the artist is as relevant to the understanding of the work as the finished artwork itself. In Beales’ words:

> ‘in creating a work of art that surpasses the restrictions of purely mimetic or expressionistic modes, the artist may be understood as engaged in a process of becoming. […] the becoming in which the artist is involved is a dynamic, multiplicitous relation between internal states (here designated with the term Dionysian) and external learning (designated with the term Apollonian), to which the term Becoming-Dionysian may be applied’ (Beales, 2005, p. 1-2).

Returning to the problem of Maximalism and its closeness to the Dionysian principle, juxtaposing the concept of becoming enriches maximalism with a new dimension. The decentralisation, the fragmentation of the artistic self by means of a maximalist artistic practice appears in this new light as a method to explore possibilities and access new tools for artistic expression and create a new language. The process of becoming is not one of imitation or analogy but generative of a new way of being through acquiring new functions or replacing old functions with new ones.

Maurizio Lazzarato resonates with this idea in his essay *Art and Artwork* (2006), where he points out that in contemporary society, there is a continuity between art and work; capitalism transforms the artist into a worker and the citizens into public, while appropriating and incorporating artistic and cultural practices within its economic machinery. Drawing upon Guattari’s and de Certeau’s ideas, Lazzarato argues that it is possible to resist the ‘new semiotic machines of capitalist accumulation’ (Lazzarato, 2006) if art were to focus more on the process than on the object; thus, instead of providing commodities which can be readily assimilated

by capitalism, art should produce ‘conceptual, aesthetic and social instruments of which the various publics could make use at their convenience’.

5.2. A new theoretical framework for describing artistic maximalism

In this section I will revisit previous definitions of maximalism sourced in architecture and literary theory. By relating the insights gained from them with core ideas of the theories mentioned above, I will propose a speculative model for analysing art which is better suited to the objectives of this research.

Patrick Templeton identifies a similarity between minimalism and maximalism in their relation to the beholder, namely that either through compete silence and opaque austerity, or through bewildering noise and overwhelming eclecticism, they both alienate the subject (Templeton, 2013). A rupture between object and subject as a function of the sublime is also observed by Harman, with the significant difference that the sublime void created by the withdrawal of the object is not just alienating but also fascinating to the beholder, who sways between abhorrence and attraction (Harman, 2020, p. 41). This duality is a necessary condition for an object to function as a work of art, i.e., to uphold our gaze, and that is achieved through its sensory qualities alluding to the existence of the withdrawn, ungraspable, real object. It is to these sensory qualities that maximalism is attached.

I noted previously that Nietzsche regarded the alienation triggered by the sublime as opposing the life-affirming Dionysian force. However, an understanding of the sublime as both repulsive and attractive can be seen as an at least partial reconciliation of the sublime with Nietzsche’s Dionysian principle and with artistic maximalism.

What stops the sublime from becoming completely alienating in a work of art is its finitude. If we remember the theory of literary maximalism proposed by Ercolino, the maximalist novel balances its inherent chaos function with an equally

important cosmos function which, without threatening to annihilate the maximalist nature of the novel, ensures that the content of the work does not descent into complete disarray (Ercolino, 2012, p. 250). Following this idea, I argue that for a maximalist object to function as an artwork it always needs to retain an apollonian element that pulls it back from reaching a state of overwhelming, incomprehensible complexity. As Colangelo observes, the maximalist character of a work is defined not so much by an absolutist impulse, as by an engagement with the limits of the medium (in that case, the physical book) (Colangelo, 2014, pp. 65-66). By acknowledging the boundaries of the medium – and this acknowledgment of finitude plays the role of the apollonian – the maximalist principle can then operate within those boundaries. If we are to apply the same line of argument to minimalism, the Dionysian element that must always reside in a minimalist object is the necessity of an object in the first place – to which minimalist qualities are attached. Otherwise, to paraphrase Colangelo, the 'perfect' minimalist object is not an object at all, it is nothing (Colangelo, 2014, p. 66).

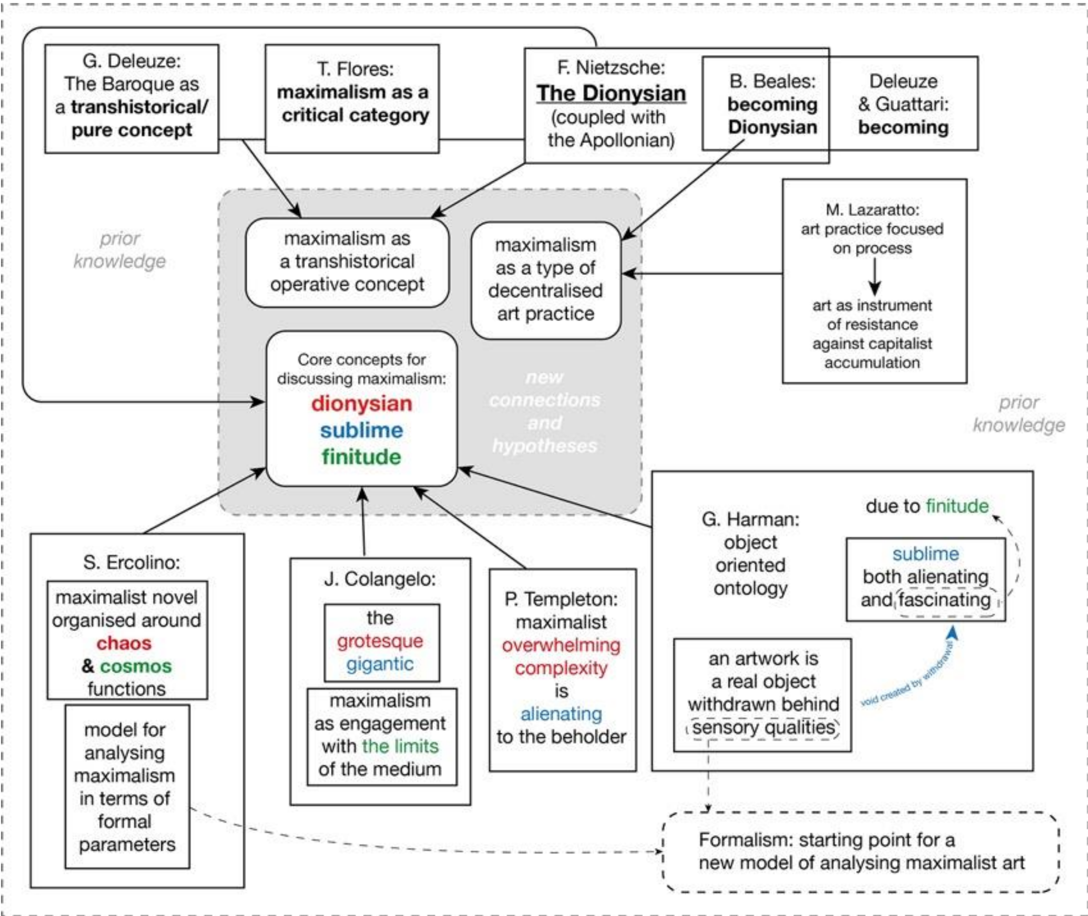


Diagram 3: establishing the ground for a maximalist theoretical framework

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The observations above establish the sublime, the Dionysian principle and the necessity of finitude as core concepts for a discussion of maximalism. Having also shown, on the basis of object-oriented ontology, that the maximalist tendencies manifested in art objects refer to their sensory qualities, I propose a speculative model for describing such objects in terms of spatial, temporal and narrative parameters and for opening up a discussion about maximalism as a type of disjointed artistic practice.

The following sections propose readings of maximalist art based on these parameters, using examples from contemporary art. Many of the artworks presented below encapsulate political and social meanings, sometimes attributed by the artists themselves. Although I acknowledge art's cultural and political functions and would not reject an interpretive reading of art (on, say, formalist grounds), both the selection of artworks and the terms in which they are discussed are guided primarily by this study's concern with formal aspects.

5.2.1. Spatial maximalism

Some key concepts to observe when considering the spatial quality of maximalist artworks are scale, intensity and a questioning of what might be called 'the space of art'.

Spatial maximalism is a type of art which makes a point of either taking up as much space as possible, or taking up more space than is usually understood as 'the space of art', thus infiltrating into the liminal territories of non- or para-artistic space, or even expanding the space of art by inhabiting the world of the virtual (as in digital, virtual and augmented reality art). A less intuitive type of maximalism (which refers back to Colangelo's stress on the importance of detail (Colangelo, 2014, p. 69)) is what I would call 'intensity maximalism'. This would express an 'inwards' expansion of the artistic gesture leading to a high concentration or intensity, as in the case of miniature art which uses small surfaces with extreme efficiency. Similarly, Victorian

horror vacui artist Richard Dadd and contemporary artist Paul Noble endeavour to populate the entire surface of their artworks with a maximum amount of detail. Biljana Puric (under the name Eli Anapur) observes, in a brief study on the importance of scale for the viewing experience (Anapur, 2016), that as one of the organisational principles of structural elements in art, scale is not synonymous to size, but functions as a relational principle defined through the ratio of the art object to another object, in many instances the human body. Scale is therefore a formal element carefully considered by the artist, employed as a means of attributing meaning or emphasizing importance.

The vast Turbine Hall of London's Tate Modern has been the site of many projects with an obvious maximalist focus on scale. The very first artist to exhibit here was Louise Bourgeoise, and part of her installation *I Do, I Redo, I Undo* (The Tate, 2000) is the iconic artwork *Maman* – a nine-metre-high sculpture of a spider made of steel, with a bronze thorax and a sac containing marble eggs. Through exaggerated magnification of a (usually) small insect, the work forces a rethinking of the commonplace, while investing the spider with a symbolism that wouldn't normally be associated with it – that of parenthood. But even without access to the autobiographical reference attached by the artist, the viewer is confronted with an unsettling scenario brought about by the inversion of normal scale of the human and insect.

Another artwork installed in the Turbine Hall is *Marsyas* (The Tate, 2002) by Anish Kapoor, an artist with a predilection for spatial maximalism consistently manifested throughout his entire career. Made up of three steel rings joined together by a red plastic membrane, *Marsyas* achieved the remarkable performance of occupying the entire space of the hall. The structure of this gigantic sculpture is thus conceived that no single perspective allows a full view of it – the visitor has to move through the space to get an idea of the overall shape and the various features revealed by different viewpoints.

Spatial maximalism is a feature of Yayoy Kusama's *Infinity Rooms* (1993-present) where the artist makes use of mirrors to create the sensation of infinite space. Other immersive installations such as *Obliteration Room* and *I Am Here but Nothing*

transform the gallery space by using optical devices such as bold colours against a white background or UV illuminated dots in a dark space respectively, to create dizzying environments where visual perception is distorted, depth is flattened, and visitors lose their sense of space. Kusama's installations are a good example of an engagement with the limited space of the gallery to create the illusion of ungraspable vastness.

Yet another type of spatial expansion as a function of maximalism is exemplified by holography. A most unique instance of spatial maximalism, holography expands space in an illusory fashion, because holographic objects do not actually take up the volume of space which they appear to occupy. Paula Dawson's *There's No Place Like Home* (1999) uses a large hologram as a window through which one can see the interior of an ordinary flat (Davis and Ramsey, 2010). Yet this is not a window, what lies behind it is not the open space of a room but a wall. The real space and configuration of objects that the hologram captures in glorious detail is far removed both in space and in time, whilst what we are confronted with is an uncannily accurate copy of that reality.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work in its entirety is a perfect example of maximalism as a type of art infiltrating the space of non-art. Their wrapped objects encounter the viewer unmediated by an institutional interface such as a museum or gallery. A project such as the wrapping of the Pont Neuf in Paris (1985), by targeting an architectural site used by thousands of people every day, casts a different light on an object which is taken for granted due to its usefulness and 'readiness-to-hand' (Heidegger, 1962, p.98). To continue the Heideggerian reading – the wrapping temporarily undermines the object's belonging to the web of equipment, its tool quality becomes secondary to its newly acquired artwork condition.

Gerard Genette's *Paratexts* (1997), a work of literary theory analysing paratextual devices used within and outside a book, explains the importance of secondary literary devices. The preface, the cover design, illustrations, editorial decisions such as the formatting of a book etc., mediate the act of communication and influence the reception of a literary production, sometimes even before the engagement with the actual body of the work has even started. If one wanted to consider

literature and art in parallel, one could say that frames, plinths, walls or indeed the entire gallery space, artists statements, press releases and all other curatorial practices and conventions are the visual arts' equivalent of paratextual devices. Genette brings to the reader's attention not only conventional uses of paratextual devices, but also peculiar ones, emphasizing the richness of these regions of ambiguity.

Incidentally, because of their large scale, Christo and Jeanne Claude's wrapped objects also exemplify the first type of spatial maximalism. However, the core feature of maximalism infiltrating non- or para-artistic space is not scale, but a short-circuiting of categories that draw the boundaries of what is and what isn't art. For instance, Rirkrit Tiravanija's project *(who's afraid of red, yellow and green)* (Hirshhorn Museum, 2019) repurposed the space of the museum – a para-artistic device – transforming it in a dining space where visitors could eat curry together. Such a reading of maximalism can be said to have too wide – and therefore too vague – a scope, neighbouring the highly permissive definition of art proposed by relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002), and thus contradict the premise of object-oriented ontology, which upholds the autonomy of the work of art, its separateness from the context in which it operates (Harman, p. 32). I want to point out that what I propose is not an interpretive reading of Tiravanija's work in a social/political key, but simply an observation that the action of bringing together an essentially non-artistic object (people eating curry) with a para-artistic device (the gallery space), as an artistic act operated by an artist and regardless of his motives, has a maximalist character in that it expands the boundaries and reach of art.

A recent phenomenon manifested in the art world over the last couple of years illustrates the same type of spatial maximalism, at its purest: the immersive art installations based on the work of Vincent Van Gogh. A number of touring exhibitions such as *Van Gogh, the Immersive Experience* or *Van Gogh Alive* transform the hosting venues into dazzling shows of animated projections. Minutely choreographed videos present reproductions of the artist's paintings blown up to colossal size and envelop the entire wall and floor space as well as the

bodies of the visitors in a spectacle of light and colour. Suggestion and metaphor are replaced by an almost naïve literalness. A new, carnivalesque dimension is overlayed to the original images: the suggestion of motion, realised by the artist through composition, direction of brushstrokes and chromatic juxtapositions, is replaced by the actual motion of the digital animations and the ever-shifting projections and reflections. Although these shows are intended to be a closer, more intense encounter with the work of Van Gogh (otherwise difficult to access by such a large audience), one cannot help distinguishing an entirely new dialogue (not to say monologue) established between awe-struck visitors and the creators and curators of these multi-sensory maximalist shows, with Van Gogh's imagery used as emotional interface. The added layers of animation, sound and video projection offer an almost prescriptive narrative of the act of seeing. Hugely magnified brushstrokes and enlarged details do indeed offer a new perspective on the work. Yet, on the whole, the void between the artwork and the viewer, which was hitherto the space of metaphor, of hesitant search for meaning and sensations, is filled up not so much with a more intimate understanding of the work, as with a confident blaring of the curator's interpretation. These observations are not meant to disparage immersive installations, but to identify them as a new type of maximalist, performative act staged by the para-artistic entity of the curator or organising institution.

5.2.2. Durational maximalism

This type of maximalism is usually expressed in time-based art (such as video art, performance or endurance art) but can also refer to the amount of time invested in the process of artmaking. It refers to the duration of the experience of art – the expanse of time the artist is engaged in the artistic act, or to the relation of the artwork with the spectator, whether a real or virtual spectator. To clarify, the concept of a virtual (or abstract) spectator is a paraphrase of the concept of the 'abstract reader' from Jaap Lintvelt's literary theory (Lintvelt, 1994), adapted to a fine art context. The abstract spectator functions as an image of a receiver implied by the existence of the work of art but also as a projection of an ideal spectator,

capable of grasping the full meaning of the work as it was intended by the artist. The distinction between real and virtual spectator is particularly important in the case of durational maximalism if we think of works of art such as, for instance, the film *Modern Times Forever* (2011) by Superflex, with a total runtime of 240 hours (IHME Helsinki, 2011). The film captures a period of 5000 years in the (assumed) lifespan of a modernist building in Helsinki, showing the progressive decay brought about by the passage of time. The film is projected on a large screen in Helsinki's Market Square, while the real building it portrays can be seen in the background. Even though the period of five millennia is condensed into ten days, this is still very long for a video piece. Admittedly such productions are not meant to be taken in at one sitting. Indeed, Jakob Fenger from Superflex claims that the viewer is not expected to watch the whole film from beginning to end, but rather, as s/he passes by the projection site now and again, to notice the changes that have occurred since s/he last saw it (IHME Helsinki, 2011).

If in the real world the demand of such a maximalist video to be watched is alienating, in a 'perfect world' one can imagine a spectator capable of such an act. The very existence of durational maximalist works of art creates a strong tension between the limited competence of a real spectator and this ideal projection, impossible to materialise, or perhaps not even meant to be materialised but simply to exert 'mental pressure' from this abstract plane of existence.

Tehching Hsieh, a pioneer and master of endurance art (Sutton, 2009), took this tension to a whole new level in his year-long performances carried out between 1978 and 1986. Submitting one's own body and mind to an act of pure waiting, for such an extended period of time, challenges the public on a much deeper level, one that does not allow the same kind of distance and objective gazing as a long piece of video art – the state of waiting, of engaging with the passing of time, that is so common to both the performing artist and the viewer blurs the distinction between art and life. The sway between fascination and abhorrence brought about by the sublime experience is made most evident by durational maximalism. Witnessing durational performances such as Hsieh's, but also Chris Burden's *Doomed* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1975) or Marina Abramovich's

The Artist is Present (Museum of Modern Art, New York 2010) one feels equally compelled to look harder, as the performance offers a mirror image of one's own human condition, and at the same time to reinstate the art/viewer barrier and eventually to look away.

5.2.3. Narrative maximalism

Implicitly related to both durational and spatial maximalism, it is a type of art characterised by a high density of acts of communication aimed at the viewer, a multitude of interconnected narrative cells, each bearing information, telling a story (or part of a story), waiting to be seen, experienced, deciphered. If the previous types of maximalism are defined by and primarily concerned with formal aspects, what is at stake in narrative maximalism is diegetic content, while matters of form remain a consequence or a side effect.

The colossal installations of multidisciplinary research group Forensic Architecture constitute an example of narrative maximalism. The group use digital reconstructions and documentary evidence from sources such as CCTV, satellite views or mobile phone video footage to carry out alternative investigations into state-initiated acts of violence and injustice. The information gathered from these sources is presented in complex installations such as *Counter Investigations* hosted by the Institute of Contemporary Art London (ICA 2018), comprising infographics, video simulations and other visualisations meant to corroborate the data in a coherent narrative. What makes these installations maximalist is not the great space they take up, but the sheer amount of information contained within.

Marcel Dzama uses drawing to create elaborate compositions, sometimes presented as dioramas, swarming with characters, groups of characters and objects rich with symbolism, to enact stories inspired by various mythologies. The difference in scale between the individual figures of the drawings and the comparatively large surface of the artwork is one of the characteristic features of his visual language. In the exhibition *Behind Every Curtain* (David Zwirner Gallery, 2011), a bird's eye perspective allows a first overview of the drawings that reveals a

certain resemblance to the medieval aesthetic and the art of Pieter Bruegel; the viewer is then pulled closer to discover a multitude of little details, gestures and dramas that individualise the characters, otherwise perceived as a more or less uniformly attired mass engaged in a ritualistic choreography.

Maurizio Cattelan's retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim New York suggestively titled *All* (2011) is a form of narrative maximalism. With characteristic scorn for conventionality, the artist chose to exhibit his life's work as a chaotic mass of objects hanging in the air, in the gallery's rotunda (Spector and Brinson, 2011). The show expresses the artist's opposition to the idea of a (chronologically ordered) retrospective that on the one hand dislocates the object of art from its original, meaningful context, and on the other hand strips the work of its fundamental irreverence. This seemingly chaotic configuration proposes a nonlinear reading of Cattelan's work. The stultifying formula of the retrospective exhibition is shaken to its core, as all of the suspended objects and all the stories they evoke confront the viewer simultaneously and refuse him the privilege of a gentle and orderly encounter with the work.

Synchronous vocality of multiple narratives, and the nonlinearity of discourse thence ensuing, are characteristics of narrative maximalism. The viewer, faced with a multitude of stories wanting to be heard, has to choose his/her own trajectory in trying to assimilate the overall discourse.

A case of narrative maximalism closely related to durational maximalism is the work of outsider artist Henry Darger. The sheer vastness of Darger's work, discovered shortly before his death, is enough to demonstrate its maximalist character: several hundred drawings and watercolour paintings accompany his manuscript titled *In the Realms of the Unreal*, counting over 15000 pages, written over six decades. Although labelled as 'outsider art', the term is not meant to belittle Darger's work, whose artistic merit has been posthumously acknowledged and continues to gain international recognition. A part of his work is on permanent display at Inuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art in Chicago, while other works are included in the permanent collections of prestigious institutions such as MOMA New York, The Art Institute of Chicago, the Smithsonian American Art

Museum etc. Darger's drawings, some of which are two feet high by up to ten feet long, depict minutely orchestrated scenes, populated with myriads of characters, and demonstrate an innate skill for composition and use of colour despite his lack of artistic training. Darger's life-long commitment to a body of work that was never intended for the public eyes, an exercise in durational maximalism akin to Tehching Hsieh's *Thirteen Year Plan* (1986-1999), tests the limits of our understanding of art, it blurs the distinction between art and life, and ultimately triggers a radical reconfiguration of the meaning of art.

A mention of Gregory Crewdson's work, whose maximalist character is perhaps less obvious than previous examples, feels necessary in this discussion on narrative maximalism.

Gagosian Gallery's press release for Crewdson's 2002 *Twilight* series describes his work as:

> 'elaborately staged, large-scale color photographs that explore the psychological underside of the American vernacular. The photographs combine a realist aesthetic sensibility with a highly orchestrated interplay of cinematic lighting, staging, and special effects.'
>
> (Gagosian, 2002)

Crewdson, who considers himself 'first and foremost (…) a storyteller' (Gagosian Quarterly, 2016, 3:01), acknowledges the fact that the medium of photography, compared with video or film, is restrictive in that it only captures one moment in time, leaving the 'before' and 'after' in ambiguity. The maximalist character of his work stems from his endeavour to take on the challenges imposed by the medium's limits, and to operate at the verge of photography's 'territory'. Crewdson's use of meaningful details within his highly elaborate compositions, where nothing is left to chance, charges the work with narrativity. Every inch of his large-scale photographs, every object, light, pattern and reflection are voices that add to the overarching story told in the split second immortalising the scene. On a superficial level, the Dionysian, 'dissonant chorality' (Ercolino) of the individual elements create the appearance of realism, of the photograph capturing a random

moment of American suburban life. However, this appearance has nothing to do with chance. On the contrary, the artist micromanages every single aspect of the work and considers the smallest detail with as much attention as the overall environment. The scenes are infused with theatricality, painstakingly planned, constructed and postprocessed, according to the artist’s vision and directorial choices, to reach what we perceive as a state of perfect aesthetic harmony. Finitude lies in the authorial intervention, in the artifice that stealthily turns the realistic into stylistic, and ultimately separates reality and art. The artist consciously leaves marks of his vision and authority: the artificial sources of light, the placing of objects, the character’s positions and attitudes, even the choice of the fleeting, symbolically charged twilight as a backdrop for the scenes, are meant to signal his intention to designate these microcosms as unequivocal pieces of art. The encounter with the sublime is as subtle as every other aspect of Crewdson’s work: the feeling of angst, of alienation, melancholy and danger creep up, as more details become apparent, and the narrative unravels.
This ambitious approach to photography demonstrates a maximalist engagement with the limits of the medium through a perfect balance between what I proposed as the core concepts of maximalism: the Dionysian, the sublime, and finitude.

5.2.4. Maximalism as an artistic practice

This type of maximalism refers not to the artworks being produced (which may or may not be maximalist themselves) but to how the artist approaches the act of artmaking. Depending on the breadth of their knowledge or their competence, such a practitioner might be considered a polymath, a jack-of-all-trades, or anything in between, the defining quality being their conscious decision to approach a variety of different tools and subjects for the production of their art. The opposite would be, for example, an artist who specialises in painting and uses this medium exclusively. Maximalism as an artistic practice may appear to be quite common nowadays, as artists tend to acquire a wide range of skills either forced by circumstances (for example, because they cannot afford to employ assistants or technicians) or voluntarily, as a deliberate way of decentralising the artistic self and

questioning the definitions of ‘art’ and ‘artist’. An artist practicing this type of maximalism, by eschewing the narrowing down of his/her attributes and potential, is engaged in a continuous process of becoming. This differs from a multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary practice in that the focus is neither on the subject of the work nor strictly on the medium, but on the very concept of change, being closer to what Basarab Nicolescu defines as indisciplinarity – ‘the transgression of disciplinary boundaries’ and ‘an anarchical form of knowledge’ (Nicolescu, 2014).

One practitioner of this type of maximalism is contemporary British artist Martin Creed. Experimental in his approach to both art and music, Martin Creed uses a wealth of materials, tools, processes and media to create a body of work that is as impressively diverse in its formal attributes, as it is simple in its premise: the wish to make things and to express himself. In an interview with Mikel Toms, he points out that the difference he sees between music and art is that when experiencing a piece of music, one witnesses its making, its construction, to a certain extent, whereas in painting or sculpture the object of art is a leftover of what is actually exciting to him, i.e., the process (Toms, 2013). To overcome what he calls the failure of art, some of his works encapsulate the thinking he goes through to arrive at a work of art, based on simple instructions for producing the work. The work itself starts with a simple, clear idea and is developed in an organised fashion, gaining strength and becoming more persuasive with repetition and accumulation (Smith, 2007).

Creed is notoriously vague about his understanding of art. Asked by Adrian Searle whether a gallery room half full of white balloons is art (*Work 268*), he answers “I don’t know about that, I don’t know the answer.” Other equally tentative statements by Creed include: “Anything is art that is used as art by people”, or "It is a matter of seeing how it goes" (Kellaway, 2014), or “I don’t want to be pinned down. Every time I do one thing, I think, God I want to do something else” (Guardian Music, 2011). A further refusal to pin things down was the decision to replace conventional artwork titles with numbers. This started in 1986 but took a

different turn around 2013, when he started to add titles (as well as continuing the counting system) to some of the works.
Creed's distrust or disinterest in a clear definition of art, or in fixing the meaning of what a contemporary art practice is, drives his maximalist approach to artmaking.

Elaine Sturtevant is another artist whose practice can be interpreted through a maximalist lens. Famous for recreating the work of her contemporaries from the mid '60s onwards, she was broadly overlooked by critics – and scorned by some of the artists whose work she recreated, for instance Claes Oldenburg – until the '80s when the concepts of authenticity and appropriation became central topics within contemporary art discourse. However, despite the seemingness of appropriation, Sturtevant's work was not repetition for repetition's sake. It had a different, more ambitious concern: to challenge and reconfigure our understanding of art. In this respect, the impact and importance of her work to art history is similar to that of Duchamp's and Warhol's. Sturtevant's artworks are not copies, just as our understanding of an artwork is not a copy of that artwork but a projection, a mental configuration of meanings and sensations triggered by the work. It is this mental image of an artwork that becomes Sturtevant's material – her reconstructions, made by hand, from memory, are only similar enough to the originals to trigger (what we think are our) thoughts about the original. Dislocated from the original context, her works are clones rather than copies. Their ontological independence is at once burdened and defined by the similarity with the original and by our mental associations and preconceptions.
A maximalist atomisation of the very notion of artist and authorship is at the core of Sturtevant's practice, which relies on a complete renunciation of 'personal style'. Paradoxically this lack of style itself becomes her style, the condition of continually becoming someone else, of assuming a different personality, of engaging on a sincere and personal level with new ways of making art, unlocking new scenarios and raising new questions about the meaning of art, artist, and the structure of the artworld.

5.3. Practicing maximalism

Maximalism as a type of art practice, which I described at the end of the previous section, is at the core of this research project and is what made the theoretical findings possible. In other words, my maximalist approach to artmaking – the unwillingness to have a fixed, well defined, consistent practice, the curiosity for trying out different ways of making art – is the generative force that led to the production of the artworks presented here and which will likely continue to drive my future projects.

5.3.1. *Spectral Figures* and the creation of a new maximalist medium

My initial desire to explore, through the medium of holography, the maximalist tendencies already present in my practice, led to what I consider to be one of the most important findings of this project: the creation of a new art medium – virtual reality holography. This was generated by my approach to the initial objective of my study, which was to create a body of work that explored horror vacui drawing through holography. VR artmaking presented itself as the perfect method for this task: on the one hand it is, essentially, a drawing tool (albeit in three dimensions), on the other hand it is capable to output three-dimensional objects and content compatible with a digital holographic printer.

As a new art form that synthesizes the qualities of traditional hand-drawing with the unique features of holography and VR art, VRH offers the possibility to develop artistic ideas and concepts that could not be materialised with any other medium. From a practical point of view, it has the unique ability to showcase VR artworks outside of VR space, without the need of a headset. Artworks created in VR are fundamentally difficult to view or exhibit outside of virtual space without losing some of their essential features. Online galleries which allow the viewer to explore

VR projects using a standard monitor, flatten the three-dimensionality of VR artworks, as any 2D representation of a volume.
The advantage of bringing together VR and holography, is that it allows for an artwork produced in VR to be displayed and viewed easily in either a public gallery or a private space. A larger number of people can experience the work simultaneously, without having to wear a cumbersome headset in order to perceive the three-dimensional appearance.

In my view, the most important achievement of holographic imagery and what truly differentiates it from other media is its capacity to visually expand space without resorting to the traditionally accepted convention of treating a 2D surface as an interface for 3D content, which makes it intrinsically maximalist. I see holography as a good example of a maximalist use of the 'space of art', in the sense that it employs a flat surface to display a volume, rather than the actual three-dimensional space usually taken up by a physical object or scene.
By using this unique quality of holography in conjunction with VR art, I saw a possibility to connect the realms of the virtual and the real and to develop a new form of art that could be unique in itself.
Both holography and VR are prime examples of spatial maximalism: through an efficient use of the space of art, a minimum amount of either digital or analogue space is used to render a potentially infinite amount of visual content.
The inherently maximalist nature of holography is manifested in its simulation of an extra dimension – that of volume – which is not physically, or visibly, present in the artwork but is instantiated by the meeting of the work with the viewer (and the replay light). Jacques Desbiens calls this 'the dispositif of holography' (Desbiens, 2019), a concept that echoes Harman's definition of art as the meeting place between artwork and beholder (2014) – the encounter of the object and the subject which activates an otherwise invisible, latent dimension.
The importance I gave to the dispositif of holography, particularly in *Spectral Figures: Endangered Species*, is reflected in a number of choices made throughout the development of the project: selecting the VR artmaking tools most suited to be

visualised through holography, identifying SRDH as the best type of hologram in terms of visual and archival quality, displaying the holograms in custom made double-sided frames, illuminating them with projectors to reduce the amount of light cast outside the hologram. The aim of this optimisation of visual quality was to create an ideal encounter between artwork and viewer, where medium specificity becomes secondary. Thus, paradoxically, by minimising the character of holography or, in other words, by allowing the viewers to forget that they are looking at a hologram, the intrinsically maximalist nature of holography was allowed to operate at full capacity and thus to establish a dialogue with the viewer undistracted by the 'flaws' of the medium. This conscious engagement with the limits of holography shows how Colangelo's definition of maximalism can be applied in the field of art: taking the limitation of the medium as a datum, and exploring vastness (e.g., the sublime vastness of VR space), within those boundaries.

5.3.2. *Meditation on a Machinic Cube*

Meditation on a Machinic Cube explores spatial maximalism in two different ways. First of all, it expands the space of art by incorporating para-artistic devices into the artwork. Secondly it decentralises and activates the viewer by multiplying the perspectives necessary for getting a complete image of the work.

Through the use of double-sided frames, that is, an unconventional para-artistic device, I was able to emphasise the peculiarity of objects to show themselves only partially, or in other words, the fracture between the seen and the unseen. Moreover, the frames were also turned into sculptures in their own right, telling their own story. Adorned with a sufficient amount of detail, this traditionally discrete object that enhances the perception of the artwork usually without making a statement itself, took a step forward, acquired a voice and became the artwork. The 'contamination' of this otherwise neutral space, the expansion of art into the non-art, or para-art is a consequence of maximalism as horror vacui - the fear of emptiness.

A significant effect of using double sided frames is multiplying the perspectives necessary for a complete experience of the work exhibited, which, according to art theorist Claire Bishop, is one of the fundamental characteristics of installation art. As Bishop points out, by walking into and around the work, the viewer is on the one hand 'activated, and on the other hand becomes a 'decentred subject' that is denied an ideal spot from which to examine the work (Bishop, 2005, p. 11). This suggests that there is no single correct way, nor a privileged place for looking at the world, and that one needs to move and search continuously in order to acquire a complete, coherent image of the work. In the case of my installation, moving around the central piece not only reveals the opposing sides of the cube, but also an otherwise invisible chromatic dialogue between the linocuts and the floating cube which they portray.

5.3.3. *The Horror Vacui Wall* and *Techno Pop!*

The rawness and vividness of the colours I use for my linocut prints exemplify a type of chromatic maximalism similar to that observed by the authors of *Maximalism and Visual Delight* in their analysis of Jeanne Leighton-Lundberg's work (Davis et al, 2017). Furthermore, it is a kind of symbolic compensation for the stark, industrial appearance and the inanimate character of the machines and architectural structures represented in the artworks.
In addition, patterns and wallpapers, through their expansive and repetitive character, are a manifestation of spatial maximalism.

Apart from these rather obvious associations, *The Horror Vacui Wall* is also an exploration of durational maximalism through the process of artmaking, as I will detail below.
The imperfections of a hand-made print are sometimes thought to constitute the sign of authenticity, a trace of the artist's humanness. Thus, the imperfect hand-made artefact is considered, somewhat paradoxically, superior to a mechanically / robotically generated object, flawless as the latter may be. On the other hand,

sameness is the ruling principle of conventional printmaking; differences are undesirable and only tolerated when small enough to escape the trained, careful and critical eye of the artist, the judge who ultimately decides what is and what isn't included in an edition.

The interchangeability of the copies in a print edition is an ideal which any printmaker strives to reach, but it is also a limit of printmaking, in that it is virtually impossible to achieve, particularly so when the printing is done by hand rather than by using a press. Imperfections and differences between hand-pulled copies of the same edition are inevitable. These differences are deemed insignificant and ignored if they are minor. If they err too far from the intended look and are therefore noticeable or 'upsetting' (for instance a clear difference in colour, or an obvious error such as a fingerprint or a stain/mark which is not part of the design) they result in the exclusion of that copy from the edition. I decided to home in on this undesirable yet precious 'by-product' of printmaking – the imperfection.

A common misconception associates digital work with effortlessness, when contrasted with the physicality of 'analogue' artmaking, as though when working on a computer one is always a 'push of a button' away from a completed piece. The reality is that digital software is as complex as any other artmaking tool and requires a great deal of effort and training to yield satisfactory results. Just to make a parallel, 3D printing too could be seen as an easy and cheap (both literally and metaphorically) alternative to traditional sculpture, yet the same knowledge of volumes and modelling is required in order to create the object which is to be 3D printed, plus knowledge of the specificity and limitations of the printer.

A pattern is a good site for analysing concepts such as authenticity, copy, repetition and difference, precious flaw vs dull perfection. The seamlessness of a pattern relies on a complete lack of difference between the iterations of the motif, on a perfect interweaving of its repeated image. Considering that I used digital artmaking software to design the motif of the wallpaper, it is easy to see how I could have generated a flawless pattern to be printed as a wallpaper by a perfectly reliable commercial digital printer. However, I decided to insert an extra step in the process, and that was similar to a maximalist time loop: a digital medium

capable of visual flawlessness was employed to reproduce mistakes characteristic of handwork as a form of meditation on the tension between the two modes of art production.

5.3.4. *Heterotopia: Pubs of London* and *A Map of West Sussex*

These two projects constitute a form of spatial maximalism which I call intensity maximalism; akin to miniature art, it represents the efficient use of a relatively small surface to render a high density of details.
In addition, the *Heterotopia* artworks also have an underlying narrative component, constituted on the one hand by an allusion to certain epic characters contained in the pubs' names, and on the other hand by the combination of traditional architecture with steampunk elements, which is open to a breadth of interpretations. These are some examples of interpretations given by various people who have seen the drawings: the intricate machinery has a mysterious or unknown function hidden behind an appearance of normality; the pipes and machines are the equivalent of organs and blood vessels in the human body and although they look disturbing, they make life possible; the pub buildings are an innocent-looking front to an underground network of suspicious activities.

In 'A Map of West Sussex' the narrative component is not a central aspect of the work, in contrast to some of my previous map projects (*Lorem Ipsum*, Pioaru, 2008, *The World of Dr. Schnabel*, Pioaru, 2010) which used cartography as a site for narrative accumulation and as a device for non-linear storytelling. In this project however the narrative component is equivalent to a map's 'invitation' to being navigated in any direction, according to one's intention or instinct, while remaining a complete and harmonious whole.

Approaching the subjects of these two projects through traditional media provided unforeseen insights into maximalism as an art practice. First of all, it showed that old, established tools (traditional media) can be as effective as new ones (VR, holography) in enriching the understanding of maximalism, thus consolidating the definition of maximalism as a transhistoric operative concept. Secondly, this new change of direction was retrospectively understood as a symptom of maximalism – the illustration/drawing medium represents one of the many artistic personae which constitute my maximalist approach to artmaking.

5.3.5. Maximalism as an artistic practice

The thread that runs through all the projects above and which brings them together in spite of (but also in virtue of) their formal differences is the concept of maximalism as an artistic practice.

The maximalist nature of my practice as a whole is both a unifying and a decentralising factor. Similar to Ercolino's theory of literary maximalism (Ercolino, 2012), maximalism as an artistic practice has a 'cosmic function', reflected in the conscious decision to operate within the field of art – ultimately, a form of Apollonian coherence –, and a 'chaos function' enacted through a Dionysian restlessness driving the centrifugal expansion of the individual art projects presented above.

Maximalism as a process of becoming-Dionysian is a refusal to espouse certain customs associated with the practice of art. For example, the focus on a specific medium or subject can be read as a 'branding strategy' meant to secure a stable position within the artworld and the world at large or, in Lazzarato's words, within the 'semiotic machines of capitalist accumulation' (Lazzarato, 2006). By breaking away from this definition of the artist as an endpoint or fixed category, maximalism enriches the condition of the artist with a new dimension, that of becoming. Becoming-artist instead of being-artist, a process rather than a state, or stasis, is characterised by constant learning and the accessing of new skills and tools for artistic expression and epistemological exploration.

The decentralisation of my artistic self – a form of 'dissonant chorality', as Ercolino might name it (2012) – takes the form of a multiplicity of artistic personae: the VR

holography portraitist, the techno-pop printmaker, the *horror vacui* installation artist, the steampunk illustrator, the cartographer of traditional architecture etc. Curating an exhibition so as to include such a diversity of artistic directions is a challenge in itself. But equally challenging is for the viewer to make sense of what is being 'communicated', beyond a certain sense of transient charm emanating from the individual artworks. In passing from one artwork to the next, the viewer is confronted with an almost complete lack of continuity, in terms of content and what might be understood as the meaning of the work. The disruption of object-subject communication operated by the practice of maximalism is a reminder of the autonomy of the art object advanced by object-oriented ontology. It draws attention to the withdrawal of the real object behind its sensory qualities, which is the essence of art (Harman, 2020). It highlights the impossibility of a perfect grasping of the object of art and the necessity to embrace this limit of the faculty of objective knowledge with respect to art.

Each individual artwork, in its relative simplicity, suggests at the very least some avenue of interpretation – for example, the imminent disappearance of an endangered animal is reflected in the vanishing of its holographic image outside the viewing angle of a hologram. However, the maximalist exhibition as a whole, through the series of ruptures in communication that it operates by shifting from one medium to another and from one subject to another, opens up a completely different set of questions, steering away from a hermeneutical reading of the work. Pertaining not so much to the content of the artwork as to the process of artmaking and the conditions of its emergence, maximalism as an art practice establishes a new dialogue, between the artist and the viewer. The maximalist artist, refusing to be pinned down by a conventional understanding of art, confronts the viewers with a disrupted definition of the artistic self, and thus challenges them to question their own acceptance of a fixed position within the fabric of society.

5.4. Summary of the relationship between the artworks and maximalism

The *Spectral Figures* VR holograms establish VRH as an intrinsically maximalist medium. They are a strategy of expanding physical space by using a flat surface to render a 3D object but also a method of bridging the gap between the virtual and the real. Displaying some of these holograms in double-sided frames is also a way of maximising the number of people who can experience these artworks simultaneously.

Meditation on a Machinic Cube proposes a maximised experience of an artwork through multiplying the viewing perspectives necessary to get a complete image of the artwork. The space of art is expanded through the inclusion of para-artistic devices into the body of the artwork.

Techno Pop! explores chromatic maximalism, while *The Horror Vacui Wall* highlights the link between maximalism and the decorative arts. In addition, it explores durational maximalism by using a digital medium to replicate imperfections characteristic of manual work, and thus questions ideas of authenticity, value, and manual labour versus mechanical reproduction.

The works under the concept of Heterotopia propose a maximalist narrative, where architecture is coupled with pseudo-realistic industrial/machinic structures to create eerie sites open to interpretation. Used as a form of intensity maximalism, miniature drawing also becomes a site for maximalist accumulations of narrative cells, allowing for a non-linear, multi-directional storytelling.

Cartography is used as a vehicle for artistic expression in *A Map of West Sussex*, consisting of a highly detailed map of the region’s traditional architecture, exemplifying intensity maximalism.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusions

This study has shown how the practice of art can lead to a better understanding of the theoretical concept of maximalism through critical interrogation, and how the insights thus generated can be assimilated within art discourse and applied to a wider variety of artworks and practices.

The research question of how a definition of maximalism can be derived from the practice of art was addressed through the creation of a body of work which took the maximalist tendencies already present in my practice as a starting point. The artworks and the process of artmaking were interrogated against the objectives of this research. Knowledge generated through the critical interrogation of the practice shaped the theoretical arguments contained in the thesis and guided a synthesis of relevant theories, which helped construct a more rigorous definition of maximalism. For example, the desire to work with a multiplicity of media, tools and procedures which distinguishes my artistic practice directed me towards the Nietzschean dichotomy of the Dionysian and the Apollonian, and its more recent development – 'becoming-Dionysian' – by Brodie Beales. These were instrumental in establishing maximalism as a type of artistic practice characterized by a decentralization of the artistic self.
In order to show the relevance of maximalism to art discourse in the context of its undertheorisation, a working definition of maximalism was applied in the analysis of a series of examples from art history. This established the function of maximalism as a transhistorical operative concept, along the lines of Deleuze's theory of the baroque.

The objectives generated by the methodological gap, namely the need for an appropriate set of procedures enabling the understanding and use of the concept of artistic maximalism, was addressed through the construction of a theoretical framework for the analysis of maximalist art. Apart from the insights generated by the art practice, the building blocks of this new framework were previous definitions of maximalism identified in the fields of literature (Colangelo and Ercolino) and architecture (Templeton). In addition, the strand of formalism developed by object-oriented ontology provided a solid theoretical basis due to the emphasis it places on the autonomy of the art object and the recuperation of beauty – understood as the withdrawal of the object behind its sensory qualities – as the essence of art. Designating the sensory qualities of the object as the carriers of its formal attributes encouraged the construction of the theoretical framework of maximalism around spatial, durational and narrative parameters.

The epistemological objective constituted by the need for a definition of artistic maximalism was addressed by the use of this framework with reference to contemporary practices on the one hand, and to my own practice on the other. Several forms of artistic maximalism were revealed by artworks developed for this research.

Holography was established as an intrinsically maximalist medium distinguished by its capacity to expand physical space through rendering 3D content on a flat surface. Another instance of spatial maximalism was exemplified by VR holography, an original art form resulting from this research, which bridges the gap between the virtual and the real. The use of double-sided frames for the display of VR holograms maximises the number of people who can view the works simultaneously. Furthermore, close attention given to the hologram's display conditions showed how it is possible to maximise the impact of the work on the viewer and thus establish an engagement with the content of the work unencumbered by the limitations of the medium.

The findings related to VR holography are expected to drive companies such as Geola to develop software aimed at automating the process of transferring imagery from VR to holography. This would make it easier for a larger number of

art practitioners to explore maximalism through VR holography. Geola is one of the major holography companies working in the field today and has provided digital holographic printing services to artists for the past 20 years.
The inclusion of para-artistic devices into the body of the artwork, inspired by Gerard Genette's theory of the 'paratext', is another maximalist strategy of expanding the space of art.
Chromatic maximalism designating the use of extreme contrasts, fauvist colours and intricate patterns generative of optical illusions aims to increase the impact of the work as a visual jolting of the senses.
The intensity maximalism that characterises miniature work exemplifies an 'inwards expansion' through an extremely efficient use of the surface of the artwork, suggesting an ethical component manifested in the economical use of resources.
Durational and narrative maximalism brings into focus the artist as labourer, along with the time and effort invested in the process of artmaking. It also highlights the tension between the mental and physical pressure exerted by the work demanding to be experienced, and the limited competence of the observer.

A 'centrifugal' approach to artmaking, characterised by the desire to sample a wide variety of media and processes, was identified as a symptom of maximalism: a way of practicing art through decentralising the artistic self. By refusing to embrace a conventional definition of the artist as a fixed category, maximalism was shown to enrich the condition of the artist with the dimension of becoming. Maximalism as an artistic practice is therefore characterised by constant learning and the accessing of new skills and tools for artistic expression and epistemological exploration.

Investigating these forms of maximalism showed the potential usefulness, to art theory and criticism, of a theory of maximalism based on aesthetic formalism.

To summarise, the project proposes a twofold definition of maximalism: one pertaining to the artwork, the other to the condition of the artist and the process of artmaking.
The first definition – maximalism as a mode of artistic expression intrinsic to the artwork – lends itself to a type of art analysis partially grounded in object-oriented ontology and makes use of formal parameters to scrutinise a work of art and analyse its maximalist character.
Secondly, maximalism designates a characteristic of the process of artmaking, referring to a type of strategy which the artist chooses to employ as a means of decentralising the artistic self.
Both definitions were constructed around knowledge derived from the body of works presented here, in its entirety, which includes the process of their creation.

The clarification of the concept of maximalism addressed by this investigation can be seen as a contribution to the vocabulary and discourse of art. The breadth of questions it invites with regard to various contemporary practices is envisaged to stimulate further developments by other art theorists and practitioners.
Due to the practice-based nature of this research, the examination of maximalist tendencies in contemporary art was limited to only a few examples. However, a more in depth, critical investigation of existing maximalist artworks and practices, based on the theoretical framework outlined by this study, could reveal further aspects of maximalism, enriching the current definition and revealing the full significance of maximalism in the field of contemporary art.
The wider social aspects of maximalism as an art practice is another line of inquiry opened up by this study. Although it could not be fully explored due to the inevitably narrow scope of the research objectives, it indicates a possible direction for future research. The fracturing of the artistic self, operated by the practice of maximalism, the refusal to be pinned down in a fixed category, is a form of disobedience through which the artist eschews entrapment within the capitalist machine. Maximalism as an art practice can constitute a strategy and model of behaviour that would serve society at large, by establishing creative nomadism

(and the constant quest for knowledge it engenders) as an instrument of resistance against stasis and complacency.

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