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Enantiodromia

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master

of

Fine Arts

at Massey University, Wellington

New Zealand.

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ABSTRACT

This exegesis explores the trajectory of my artistic practice between 2020-2021. It begins with a prologue discussing a childhood memory that resurfaced on multiple occasions throughout my MFA. Two further areas of interest from my personal history – the concept of *enantiodromia* and the Zen Buddhist tenet of “nothingness” – are also offered as the main threads that run through my entire thesis project. I then discuss a group of drawings I brought with me into the MFA which became the visual foundation on which my current work was constructed. My art historical background from late Gothic through to Surrealism and other relevant artist models I discovered during the MFA such as Josef Albers and Donald Judd, work to contextualise my arts practice and anchor it in both historical artistic precedent and modern art theory. My methodology is centred around the notion of iteration, and I suggest my attempts at manipulation of the display environment I hang my paintings in is yet another step in the iterative journey of searching. This searching is then tied in with the repetition of the motif in my imagery. I also include a discussion of my intentions for the final display of my work at the end of the MFA and how it may be the final stage of the MFA but it is also a stepping off from this chapter and onto the next, suggesting further areas of development and exploration.

KEYWORDS

Painting, installation, immersive experience, dream-nightmare, Carl Jung, dream interpretation, archetype, *enantiodromia*, Zen Buddhism, “nothingness”, ‘*scapes*, motif, documentation, iteration, tension of opposites, paradox, closed loop, light, shadow, time of day

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Finally, thank you Simon Morris and Teresa Collins for permitting me to utilise Te Whare Hēra for my final submission exhibition – I cannot think of a better space to show the culmination of my work over the last two years.

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last two years, while engaged in my thesis project, the memory of a recurring dream-nightmare I had as a child constantly resurfaced in my mind. This memory was difficult to ignore and eventually became attached to the visuals within the paintings I was developing. Therefore, in the prologue I will offer the dream-nightmare as a kind of origin story, describing the visual and haptic sensations within, which has persisted throughout my life.

Following this recollection, in Section One I discuss two topics that will become the main threads of the project, running side-by-side, through the document. First, the term *enantiodromia* will be introduced as a descriptive for the dream-nightmare and the starting point for selected theories of Carl Jung to enter the project. Then I will explain the concept of 無 (“*mu*”), a central tenet of Chán (Zen) Buddhism meaning “nothingness” or “non-existence.” This will (paradoxically) become the foundation upon which my aesthetics are constructed.

In Section Two I will focus on an analysis of the evolution of my work during the Master of Fine Arts programme, starting with a series of drawings I brought with me which then developed into a series of oil paintings on panel. These drawings are a group of six I created back in 2016. During that time the designs were an anomaly in my larger arts practice, which was centred on portraiture, influenced by my art history studies into early Renaissance portraiture of the northern European tradition (Flemish, German, and English portraits from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries). I have slowly developed a fixation with the structure motif and moved away from portraiture entirely. While discussing these drawings, I will bring into the exegesis relevant aspects of art historical research, including the influence of late Gothic religious iconography, Surrealism, and Impressionism which have influenced my thesis project.

This will segue into a discussion on iteration, establishing it as a form of “searching” and as a significant methodology in my work. This searching will be offered not so much as finding a conclusion, or a resolved “final” piece, but as a series of steps each culminating in unique results. As new influences make their mark on my project and memories resurface, my practice will oscillate between past experiences and new ideas. The work of German abstract artist, designer, and teacher, Josef Albers, will be introduced in this discussion of iteration alongside that of 1960s Minimalism, specifically the work American artist Donald Judd. This will then loop back to my interest in the tenets of Zen Buddhism.

In Section Three I will elaborate on my tactics for developing environments in which I display my paintings and, in the process, expand my arts practice beyond the painted object to include the space itself. I instigated four immersive environments over the last year, which I presented to audiences during the MFA critique sessions. These iterations in “spatial interactions” raised questions concerning the tensions and possibilities involved in spatial manipulation of the viewing experience. These included discussions around their usefulness, the “theatricality” of the experiences, and how these environments operated in relation to the conceptual and formal concerns of my paintings.

I suggest that my interests and intentions extend beyond the painting surface, but, ultimately, will always be tethered to it. I hope to establish an “environmental aesthetic” to generatively house my paintings, environments that are influenced by the painting, and reflect back onto the painting itself, creating a cyclic feedback loop.

In Section Four I will explain my intentions for the final submission of my thesis project. This will be installed at Te Whare Hēra gallery, Clyde Quay, Wellington. It is a space that permits daylight to play a major part in the display environment. This will create some challenges for my practice but will also offer new possibilities for my spatial manipulations. In actively working with this space, I aim to have my paintings interact with the gallery environment, as well as the audience, in ways that step off from my immersion experiments this year, and also bring a new iterative experience (another step along the journey) to my practice.

Finally, I will conclude with an exploration of the potential for my art practice to continue expanding beyond the painted surface in considering the use of digital animation and other modes of image-creation for future endeavours.

PROLOGUE

The dream

When I was child, I had a recurring nightmare. The last time I remember having this dream I was 10 or 11 years old. Since then, I have not dreamed it again. This dream did not have strong visuals. It was more about sensation and feeling, a haptic experience in many ways. The only way I have managed to describe the dream over the years has been as a “nightmare of opposites.”

It would start the same way and follow the same trajectory. I would find myself in a room or an enclosed space that felt incredibly claustrophobic, but at the same time it would appear to have no walls, or at least walls so far away it was difficult to discern them. The space would be in total darkness, yet I found it difficult to see due to the sensation of being blinded by light. I knew I was always alone in this setting but felt the presence of a multitude of people, like the space was fit to burst with the sheer numbers that had crowded into it, although I could not see them. This presence was underlined by the aural sensation in the dream. I could always hear someone talking, sometimes it would be aimed at me, sometimes it seemed like it was a conversation I had accidentally overheard. This person would be whispering in my ear, while at the same time yelling at the top of their voice in my face. This disembodied voice while yelling emanated anger and retribution, yet the simultaneous whisper was gentle, a caring voice, like that of a doting grandparent. The only certain feeling I got from the dream of opposites, the only non-contradictory fact, was that this voice was male.

It was at the moment when the voice began its whispering tirade, that a sensation of movement would enter the dream. I would feel like I was moving through space, that I was rushing forward at great speed, attempting to put vast distance between me and the spot where I began, the spot where I thought the voice was. However, if I tried to discern my surroundings to understand the distance travelled or the speed at which I was moving, the sensation of momentum would abruptly change into that of complete stasis. I was moving indeterminately fast while standing stock-still.

This sensation of momentum did not follow a linear trajectory either. The sensation told me that I was not only bolting forward, but also that I was being propelled backwards. It was like a falling backwards from a very high place, except horizontally. An intense sense of vertigo permeated the dream. Although I mentioned visuals were not a major part of the dream, it was important for the sensation of movement. Although there was nothing in front of me, it felt as if I was simultaneously rushing toward something (perhaps someone), the threat of collision and disaster imminent, while flying backwards with the object/thing/person becoming smaller the further I moved away from it, but never disappearing on the horizon, always in front of me within view. I still do not know what the “thing” was in front of me, but it had the feeling of an object rather than a person.

All the while within the nightmare the events felt like they were taking forever. Time stretched on for an indeterminable length of time. It felt like the situation was a closed loop, a paradoxical condition. The future was deferred, the promise of change just out of reach, dangled in front of me by the interminable present, the omni-present. The only release from this Sisyphitic condition was the fact that these recurring dreams were

always lucid. I would eventually become aware that I was experiencing this/these event(s) once again, and I would force myself to wake up. After waking, I would lie there in the dark shaking off the sensations that would linger. I remember sometimes if I closed my eyes too soon after waking the sensations would still be there waiting behind my eyelids. And it was always the sensation of vertigo that took the longest to dissipate.

I find it difficult to settle on a descriptive of either “dream” or “nightmare,” as the feeling of the dream experience was both dread and complete calm. It was both – and neither – at the same time.

SECTION 1: The Two Threads

Enantiodromia

Over the last two years, as this childhood memory resurfaced on multiple occasions, I came to understand the dream did not necessarily represent anything tangible or concrete (literalism), as it was entirely a closed loop of paradoxical situations. I ceased attempting to explain it and I now view it as a metaphor containing the visual and haptic representation of the term *enantiodromia*.

While studying Carl Jung's theories on the nature of the human psyche during my undergraduate religious studies, I read about the "tensions of opposites" through his explanations of dream symbolism.¹ He suggested dreams contained "archetypes" which are universal images that have always existed, shared by all people irrelevant of their background or culture. These stem from what Jung called the "collective unconscious," a deep layer of the unconscious mind that contains ancestral experience.² An important archetype for dream interpretation is that of the *anima* (the image of the feminine for a male) and the *animus* (the image of the masculine for a female). These images, however, do not necessarily indicate that one born as a particular gender (biological) will encounter the opposite gender (biological) in the form of the archetype. What they represent, according to Jung, is the opposite *persona* to the one which the waking ego has established in the external world, the one they present to everyone around them in their waking life.³ The role of these *anima/animus*, therefore, is to *counterbalance* the energy of the ego, offering a chance for a return to an equilibrium. For Jung, this interaction of the opposites in dreams is representative of not only the nature of the human condition, but the natural state of existence itself. While discussing Greek philosopher Heraclitus "The Obscure," Jung wrote:

*Old Heraclitus [...] discovered the most marvellous of all psychological laws: the regulative function of opposites. He called it enantiodromia, a running contrariwise, by which he meant that sooner or later everything runs into its opposite.*⁴

While reading, I discovered a sentence Heraclitus was recorded having said, 'All is flux, nothing stays still. Nothing endures but change.'⁵ This was significant to me because I had been writing and painting the same sentiment but in different words for years, well before I came across his philosophy, and which I painted again during the first Aotearoa New Zealand lockdown in March 2020, during Part 1 of the MFA (fig. 1). My own

¹ Vernon W. Gras, 'Myth and the Reconciliation of Opposites: Jung and Levi-Strauss,' in *Journal of the History of Ideas* (42, No. 3, 1981), 480

² Drew Thomases, 'Appropriating Archetypes: Carl Jung, Hindu Statuary, and Spiritual Seeking in California' in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* (24, issue 3), 100

³ Angela Hague, *Fiction, Intuition, and Creativity: Studies in Brontë, James, Woolf, and Lessing* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 70

⁴ C.G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1966), 72

⁵ http://www.jungiancenter.org/jung-on-the-enantiodromia-part-1-definitions-and-examples/#_ftn3 (accessed: 30 October 2020)

quote mimics the ancient philosopher's designation as a speaker of paradoxes. "There is only one constant in the universe: change."

To purposely assault your assumptions

The second time I lived in Japan was when I was on exchange to Meiji Gakuin University in Tokyo. During this time, I studied Japanese language, art, and anthropology. I became interested in the *kanji* character 無 (Japanese: *mu*, Chinese: *wu*) meaning “nil”, “none”, “un-“, and “nothingness”.⁶ This led me to begin studying Chán (Zen) Buddhism’s use of the character and its meaning of “non-existence.” My interest in the term was partially spurred by reviving my meditation practice, which I had developed when I first lived in Japan in my early 20s.

The phrase comes from the first “case” of the 48 *kōan*, Zen Buddhism’s traditional texts. In Chinese the texts are known as the *Wu-Men Kuan* (Japanese: *Mumonkan*), or *The Gateless Gate*. It consists of a collection of lectures given by the Chán Buddhist monk Wumen Hui K’ai, also known as the Lay Monk (1182-1259) of the Song dynasty in China (960-1279). In the preface to the texts Wumen offers the reader a verse to ruminate upon before beginning their journey into the teachings of Zen Buddhism:

The Great Way is gateless,

Approach in a thousand ways.

Once through this checkpoint

You walk unhindered in this universe.⁷

The first of these cases, known as the *wu (mu) kōan*, or the “Zhao-Zhou’s Dog” case, retells a story of how an anonymous monk approaches the Chán Master Zhao-Zhou (also known as Chao-Chou in Chinese, Joju in Korean, and Jōshu in Japanese) and asks, ‘Does even a dog have Buddha-nature?’ To which Zhao-Zhou answers emphatically, ‘*Wu* (No)!’

In the commentary following the “Zhao-Zhou’s Dog” case, Wumen elaborates further on the meaning behind the response *wu*:

To study Zen you must pass through the barrier of the ancient masters; to attain the subtle realization, you must completely cut off your mental constructs. If you do not, then objects will lead around your consciousness as they appear.

So, please, what is the barrier of the ancient masters?

⁶ *Kanji* is one of the three written scripts used in the Japanese language and is originally Chinese (the other two being *hiragana* and *katakana*, both are phonetic scripts, *kanji* is not). Chinese script developed from pictographs originally inscribed on turtle shells and was a form of divination. Over the millennia some have retained shapes and representational motifs of simplified forms from nature, whereas others were altered. 無 was originally the character meaning “dance,” but during the simplification process lost the dynamic visual reference of two figures with arms stretched upward, possibly holding tassels or wearing long sleeves and flowing robes. Eventually it would also lose its original meaning as well and become the symbol for the negative (as opposed to the positive). Dance, the action bringing positiveness through joy and pleasure, was eventually converted to the negative, devoid of everything in all its entirety.

⁷ Paul Lynch, ed., *Wu Men Guan: The Barrier That Has No Gate* (Huntington Beach, CA: Before Thought Publications, 2010), 4

The single word *wu* (wu) is the lock on the gate of the source; therefore it is called the “The barrier of Zen that has no gate.” Those who can pass through this barrier will not only see Zhao-Zhou face to face, but they will also enter into the realm of all the Zen Masters who ever were, entangling your eyebrows with theirs, seeing with the same eyes, and hearing with the same ears.

Isn't that a delightful prospect?

Wouldn't you like to pass this barrier?

Arouse your entire body with its three hundred and sixty bones and joints and its eighty-four thousand pores of the skin; summon up a spirit of great doubt and concentrate on this word “*wu*.” Carry it continuously day and night. Do not form a nihilistic conception of vacancy, or a relative conception of “has” or “has not.” It will be just as if you swallow a red-hot iron ball, which you cannot spit out even if you try.

All the illusory ideas and delusive thoughts accumulated up to the present will be exterminated, and when the time comes, internal and external will be spontaneously united. You will know this, but for yourself only, like a dumb man who has a dream.

Then all of a sudden, an explosive conversion will occur, and you will astonish the heavens and shake the earth.

It will be as if you snatch away a great warrior's sword and hold it in your hand. Meeting the Buddhas, you will kill the Buddhas; meeting Chan (Zen) Masters, you will kill Chan Masters. On the brink of life and death, you command perfect freedom; among the six fold worlds and four modes of existence, you enjoy a merry and playful Samadhi [a state of complete absorptive contemplation of the Absolute, free from ego-generated thought, anger, emotion, and desire].

Now, I want to ask you again, “How will you carry it out?”

Employ every ounce of your energy to work on this “*wu*.”

If you hold on without interruption, behold; a single spark and the holy candle is illuminated!⁸

However, Shudo Ishii (2004) has offered evidence that over a century before *Wumen* compiled the *Wu-Men Kuan* in 1228, there was another version that gave an affirmative answer to the question asked to Zhao-Zhou.⁹ In the *Hung-Chih Lu* (Record of Hung-Chih), compiled sometime around 1101, the story was as follows:

⁸ *Ibid*, 5-7

⁹ Ishii Shudo, “The *Wu-Men Kuan* (J. Mumonkan),” in *The Zen Cannon: Understanding the Classic Texts*, edited by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 210

A kōan was introduced. A monk asked Zhao-Zhou, “Does a dog have the Buddha-nature? The master replied, “Yes.” The monk then asked, “If it already has it, why is it thrust into this bag of skin?” Zhao-Zhou answers, “To purposely assault your assumptions.”¹⁰

In the same record Ishii points out that after this interaction another monk asked Zhao-Zhou the same question:

[...]The master responded in the negative, “Wu.” The monk asks, “All sentient beings, without exception, have the Buddha-nature. How is it that a dog does not?” To which Zhao-Zhou replies, “Because it remains in a state of karmic consciousness.”¹¹

Interestingly, the *Hung-Chih Lu* tradition dealt with both answers – the positive and the negative. To Ishii and Heine, it was not a question of whether one was better to adopt than the other, as Wumen did in his selection of the negative over the positive. And I must agree.

The story is more interesting if both answers are given space to exercise their influence on the mind. Solely taking the *wu* version as ‘correct’, changes the original function of the *kōan*. Half the story has been omitted, and by so doing, half the meaning and purpose of the conversation also has been omitted. The original parable makes you contemplate both states of existence of the dog. It is a contradictory existence, purposefully offending and assaulting your assumptions, like how the purpose of a trickster is to draw attention to the antithetical character of the human condition by deliberately acting in a contrary manner. I will return to the topics raised here later in Section Two when I discuss the nature of iteration in my arts practice and introduce Minimalism and the work of Donald Judd.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid, 231

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Goh Sze Ying, ‘What Nowadays is Zen? Killing the Buddha in the Minimal Art Object,’ in *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object.*, 44-45

SECTION 2: The Work

'Scapes

The six drawings I brought with me to the MFA had no contextual origin or precedent in my oeuvre up to that point, nor were they consciously borrowed from anything that I can recall. The design was experimental, and the impetus was to represent shadows containing reflected or refracted light, i.e., not just dark/black shadows (fig. 2). This may have partially arisen from my portraiture work, as I had become interested in lightening the shadows on the face with a complementary colour to the skin tones. I was doing away with the usual representation of shadow as dark, filling them with more illumination (fig. 3). The way in which I created the design itself could be considered a form of automatic drawing – like that of automatic writing – and what analytical psychologists call “free association.” This is a technique with connections back to Surrealist practices, which they termed “psychic automatism.”¹³

The image in the drawing is a representation of a modular structure located in an abstracted, minimalist “landscape.” A black “sky” hangs over a light/white “ground.” The structure does not interact with the background – as in it casts no shadow on it – and is illuminated by an elevated source of light. There are nine slats/partitions, creating 10 spaces/gaps inside the structure. The “front” and “back” are missing, so the “landscape” behind can be viewed through it.

When I finished the first drawing, I wanted to draw another one with the slats in different positions. I then quickly executed six variations. Each drawing had the same background and structure, all have 10 compartments. I kept the vanishing point anchored in the same position in each image. The only differences between them were the shift in the position of the slats and a slight alteration to the angle at which the light source hits the structure. I realised if I organised them in a particular order, it gave the effect of a kind of documentation of the steady change in the position of the light source, like the journey of the sun across the sky from early morning to midday. I orientated them stacked on top of each other and titled the iterative series *Time of Day*.

Regarding the term “landscape,” I felt I could not use the expression for these images as it was too narrow a definition and not adequate for describing what the composition was doing. After experimenting with terms like “desolate-scape,” “dream-scape,” “landscape of the psyche,” and even “inner-scape,” I decided it was just a *'scape*, i.e., landscape truncated with an apostrophe.

¹³ Robert Motherwell, *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*, edited by Dore Ashton and Joan Banach (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 216.



Figure 3, Billy McGown (colour version of #12 of the One Hundred Project), 2019, soft pastel and lumograph pencil on paper, 20 x 18cm

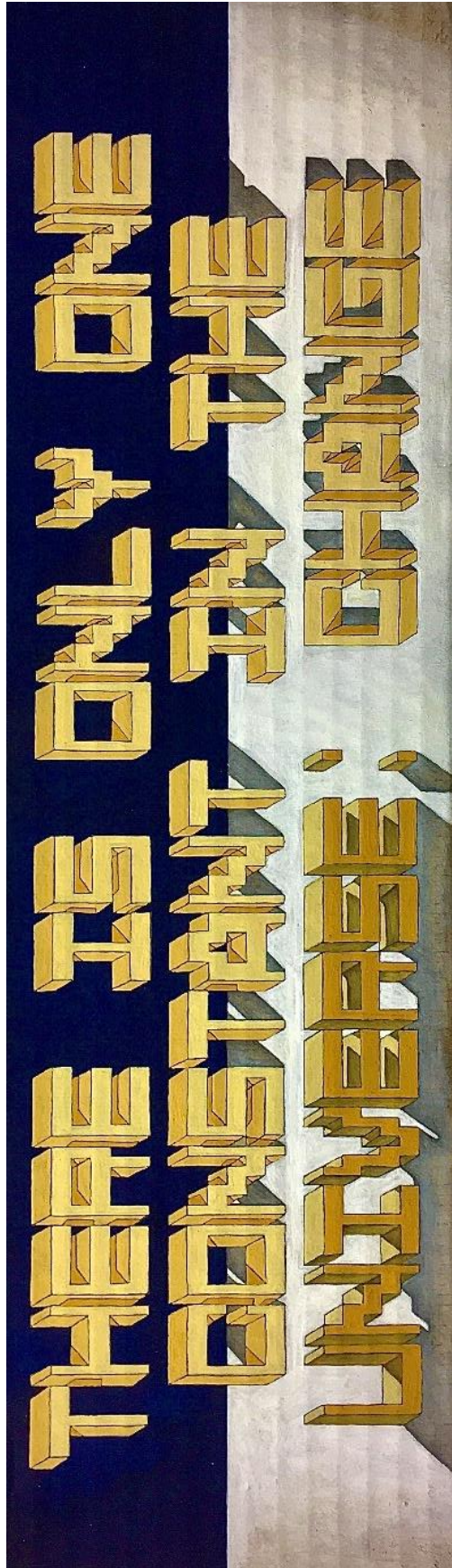


Figure 1, There is Only One Constant in the Universe: Change, 2020, gouache on cardboard, 8 x 25cm

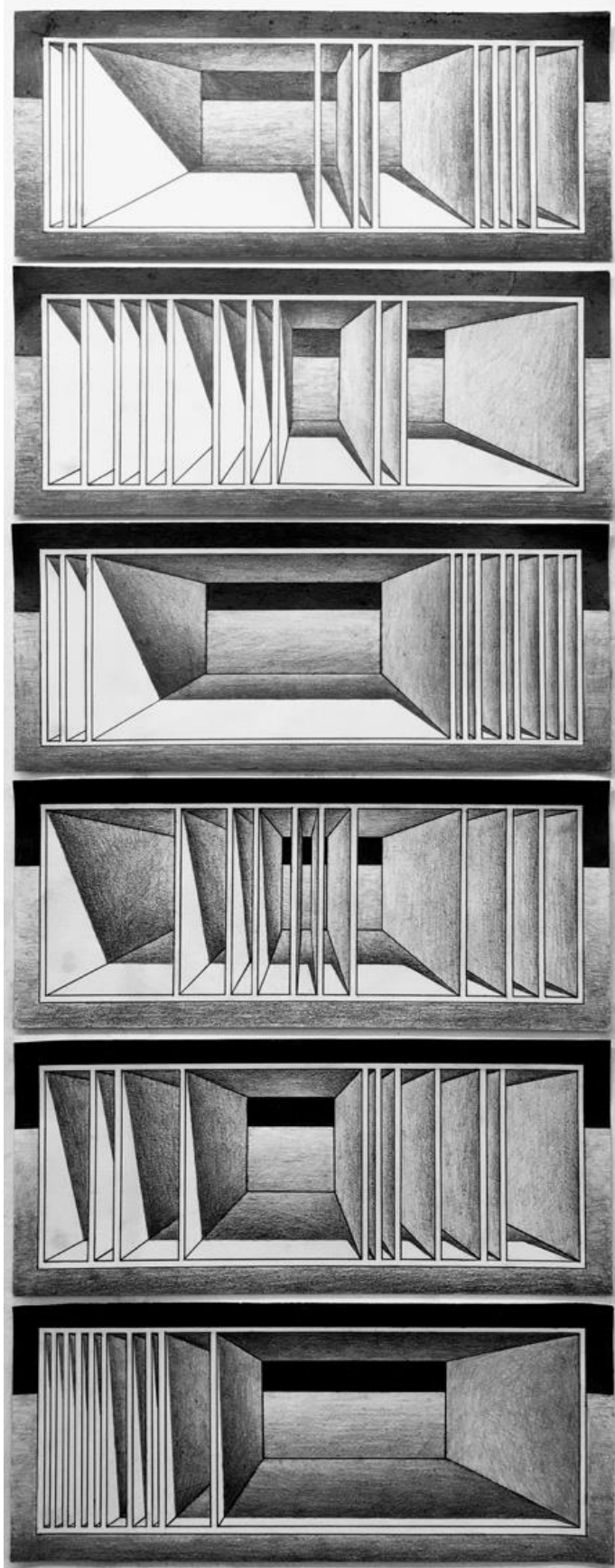


Figure 2, **Time of Day**, 2016, pencil on paper, series of six drawings, 10 x 23cm each

Art historical baggage¹⁴

When observing the group of drawings after completing them, I thought of several art historical precedents from different eras, recalled from my undergraduate studies in Western art. I saw references to late Gothic and early Renaissance religious iconography, the quiet mysticism of Surrealist painting, and the repetitive documentation of the Impressionists. I will briefly explore these three areas of concern before moving on to discuss the iterative nature of the structures.

The structure motif appeared to me to have an affinity with paintings representing the biblical story of the *Annunciation*. One specific example came to mind: Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* fresco at the Convent of San Marco, Florence (fig. 4). This wall painting depicts an interior-external space in which the divine interacts with the mortal. There are no walls setting up a barrier between the lay world and the spiritual realm. The scene could be that of a covered terrace of a church, or the representation of a Florentine palazzo. The roof is supported by mixed orders of columns and there is a doorway opened in the background through which a small window can be seen.

Furthermore, the entire scene is devoid of ostentatious embellishment and the surroundings are bare, minimalist, mirroring my own structural design and empty background. It is not surprising Fra Angelico's aesthetics were minimal, as he was one of the devoted monks living at the monastery he painted, hence his name "Fra," meaning friar or brother. These monks were devoted to the rejection of worldly wealth and possession in return for a quiet life of devotion and contemplation of the Scriptures.

I will return to this topic of *Annunciation* painting and expand upon the theme of religiosity in my discussion of colour in Section Three. In that discussion I will introduce work by the northern artist Jan Van Eyck who was a contemporary of Fra Angelico and painted the same biblical story, although his form of painting and aesthetics were vastly different from his Italian counterpart.

Next, the unpopulated and desolate nature of the pseudo-landscape reminded me of Giorgio de Chirico's paintings, the proto-Surrealist artist working at the time Guillaume Apollinaire was writing his notes on the concept of *surrealismé*. Specifically, Chirico's deserted streets, empty pavilions, shadow-casting palisades, and flat horizons came to mind. It seemed a logical overtone as the six drawings appeared to be devoid of joy. To me, they contained an unclear, esoteric quality and melancholic attraction, like how I consider much of the work of the Surrealists to be.

Furthermore, the technique I used to "discover" the visuals, as mentioned above, is like that of the Surrealist's psychic automatism. I began drawing without thinking about the resulting image, nor what the things/objects I was representing *are*. Consequently, during this time, I considered myself and my work to be Surrealist, likening my imagery to dream-scapes characterised in the work of the Surrealists, such as Chirico's described here.

¹⁴ Term borrowed from Sharon Orleans Lawrence, *How the Materiality of Paint is Intrinsic to the Work of Art: An Explanation of the Meaningful Placement of the Medium of Painting in Contemporary Art Theory* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013)

However, as I moved through the MFA and delved into my visuals in an intensely focused way, my self-identification as a Surrealist was challenged as I began to associate with other forms of art production outside the realm of painting. I will return to this area of concern in Section Three when I discuss the work of Minimalism in relation to my immersive experiments.

Finally, the passage of light across the structures implies the passing of time, as I have referenced in the title of the series. Ergo, I view these works as a kind of documentation, a logging of events over the course of a day, like that of Claude Monet's haystacks painted during different seasons, as well as his recordings of early morning and evening light on the façade of the Rouen Cathedral in Normandy. In these iterative series, the Impressionist explored the effect light had at different times of the year on his chosen motifs. Each season brought with it slight variations in the angle of light, as well as the quality of sunlight in winter through to summer.¹⁵

In his *Haystacks: Snow Effect* of 1891 (fig. 5), the effect created by the rebounding light from the snow in the shadow of the haystack was a source of inspiration for me when I was working on my portrait practice. The Impressionists found shadow to be as light and vibrant as the directly illuminated parts of an object. Therefore, Monet's shadows never contained dark colours, especially black. In this work, he depicts the white snow absorbing the blue tone of the atmosphere above, which then bounces back onto the underside of the haystack, mingling with the yellow and oranges of the dried grass. This illustrated the nature of the atmosphere as containing colour, which I also attempted to portray tonally, and later I would further develop in the colouration of shadow-play inside the structure motif, as explained below in my discussion of the painted versions of my 'scapes. When discussing colour in nature, Monet exclaimed, "I have finally discovered the true colour of the atmosphere [...] It is violet. Fresh air is violet."¹⁶ It was this idea of refracted light from atmosphere that I attempted to emulate in my portraiture during the period I created the *Time of Day* series.

The artist also explored the same effect in the *Rouen Cathedral* series (fig. 6). However, the changing light in these works is far more dramatic than in the *Haystacks* cycle. The chosen motif is not a temporary haystack that lasts only for a winter, but that of a monolithic designated as a beacon of human architectural achievement, conquest over nature, and, more importantly, conquest over time. The cathedral has lasted for hundreds of years, appearing to be unchanging, epitomising the eternal nature of Western culture and religion.¹⁷

However, by repeatedly rendering the cathedral in a wide range of complementary colours he witnessed play across its façade, Monet alters our perception of the structure itself. When the works are viewed together as a series, the changeable nature of the monument is evident; the façade of the ancient building melts into a soft and malleable pool of swirling hues and pastel tones, constantly shifting, separating, and then reforming from painting to painting. This mirrors what Korean Minimalist painter, sculptor, and academic Lee Ufan described the difference between Eastern and Western ideas of eternity to be:

¹⁵ Karin Sagner-Düchting (ed.), *Monet and Modernism* (New York and London: Prestel Verlag, 2001), 35

¹⁶ Quote from 'Colour Story: Winsor Violet (Dioxazine) from Winsor & Newton,' *Opus Art Supply*, June 11, 2021: <https://opusartsupplies.com/articles/winsor-violet-winsor-newton/> (accessed: 24 June 2021), para 5

¹⁷ Sagner-Düchting, 34

[...] the notion of eternity in the West is articulated in structures – unchanged and static – whilst in Asian philosophies, eternity is encapsulated in change.¹⁸

Thus, Monet moved with an Eastern philosophical understanding toward a viewpoint that everything is changeable, and that even the nature of apparently everlasting objects will alter sooner or later: everything exists in a state of flux.

¹⁸ Ying, 44



Figure 4, Fra Angelico, **Annunciation**, 1437-46, fresco, 230 x 312.5cm, Museo Nazionale de San Marco, Florence

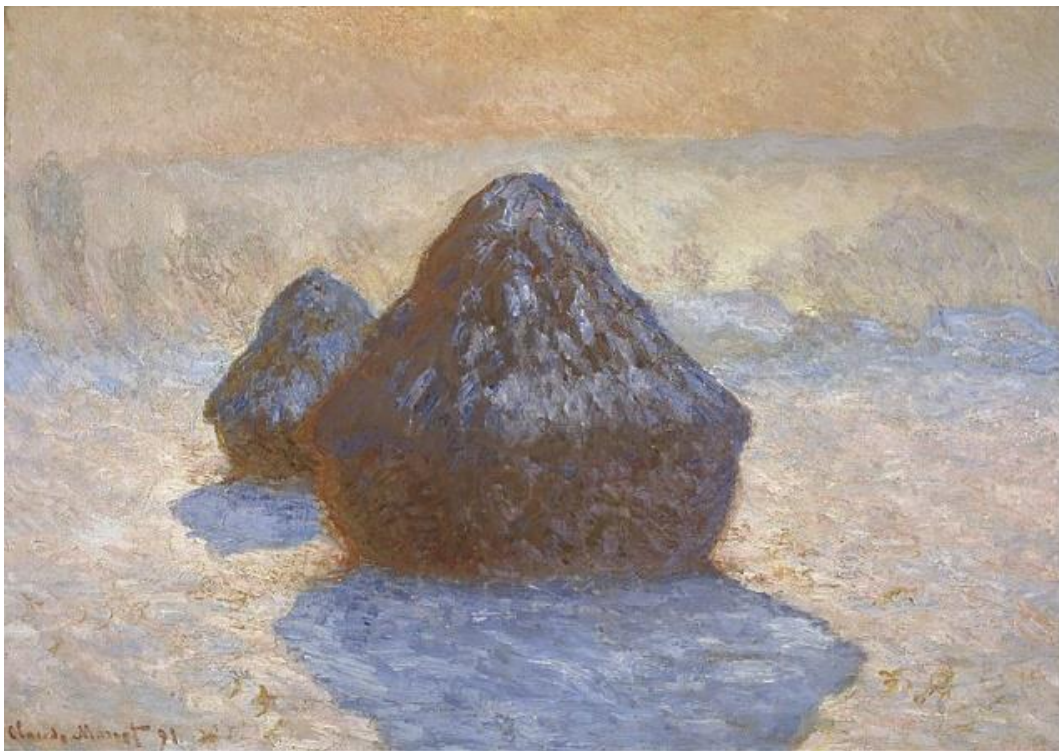


Figure 5, Claude Monet, **Haystacks: Snow Effect**, 1891, oil on canvas, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh



Figure 6, Claude Monet, **Rouen Cathedral: Facade (Sunset)**, 1892, oil on canvas, Musee Marmottan Monet, Paris

Iteration

As mentioned above, the *Time of Day* drawings I viewed as a kind of documentation through the act of iteration. Like Monet's studies, I was capturing a moment in the passage of time in a repetitive way. After completing these drawings, the instinctual urge to repeat myself (creatively) stayed with me for the rest of the MFA; I would continue to re-create the structure motif in multiple ways and in multiple situations. But before moving on to discuss my exploration of the 'scapes through painting, I will explore the concept of iteration in more detail. This section will include more artists whose work is relevant to my thesis project both visually and contextually.

Another artist who dedicated the bulk of their oeuvre to the act of repeating motifs – and to a far greater degree than Monet – is Josef Albers. Specifically, his [Adobe/Variation](#) and [Homage to the Square](#) series are, in my opinion, some of the best examples of prolific iteration in Modernist painting.

Albers painted the *Adobe/Variation* series over a two-year period, during which he executed 200 studies. He began them after his sixth visit to Mexico with his wife, artist Anni Albers, in 1947. The colours and geometric patterns in the works are reminiscent of the Mexican flat-roofed adobe dwellings he experienced in his visit. However, Albers always maintained that his compositions and the titles should be considered as poetic language rather than references to anything physical.¹⁹ The structure motif he painted in these works, their shape, and position in the composition echo my own structure motifs. However, his shapes are more abstracted and do not contain a single-point perspective or any orthogonal lines creating the illusion of deep space within the picture. Nevertheless, the motifs in the centre of his compositions contain small “windows” which I imagine open out onto the “landscape” beyond, like how my own structures function.

Stepping off from that cycle, Albers pushed the notion of iteration in painting much further in his *Homage to the Square* series. He spent 25 years on their development which resulted in over 2000 works.²⁰ This series consisted of four variations of squares nested in squares. Each square was lower to the bottom edge of the picture plane than the top, giving a sense of weight or gravity, a representational device usually rejected by abstractionists.²¹ This sense of gravity, the centralised composition, the nested squares stepping down toward the centre, and use of atmospheric colour all aide in giving a sense of depth to his *Homages*. Thus, his version of abstraction still retained a form of representation and illusionism, albeit in a way that is not immediately obvious. This is further evidenced in the titles he gave his works which were always of an architectural nature, such as *Factory*, *Skyscraper*, and *Pergola* (although the titles were meant to be read as “poetic”).²²

¹⁹ 'Josef Albers on his Variant Paintings,' *Guggenheim Museum* (Nov. 2017), <https://www.guggenheim.org/audio/track/josef-albers-on-his-variant-paintings> (accessed: 11 July 2021)

²⁰ Charles Darwent, *Josef Albers: Life and Work* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 19

²¹ I am thinking of Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square*, exhibited in 1915 at the *Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0,10* in St Petersburg. The Russian artist described his form of abstraction as “suprematism,” an attempt to free art from the oppression of representation as well as depth. He announced that he had “painted the last painting” with his *Black Square*. It was a call taken up at the Bauhaus School of Art in Germany, at which Albers was first a student and then a professor. One critic even remarked of the Bauhaus in the 1920s: ‘Three days in Weimer and one can never look at a square again [...] Malevich invented the square a decade ago. How fortunate [for the Bauhaus artists] that he didn't patent it.’ Ibid.

²² Pepe Karmel, 'A Modern Master of Bottles, Scraps, and Squares,' *New York Times* (25 June 1995), 33

What I find most relevant to my work, is how the design of the *Homages* created a dynamism through the placement of the coloured squares in relation to each other. This colour-play helped establish a silent dialogue between the squares in each of the works. Each colour was carefully considered so our perception of each square within the work is affected by the relationship with the next. We view each square differently because of its proximity to and colour interaction with the next, following a similar path of enquiry as Monet's studies in the effects of light on an object.²³

Before moving onto the next artist of concern, I want to briefly elaborate on the notion of iteration further. It is used as a method of exploration, resulting in a deeper understanding of the nature and function of a selected subject or motif. It also aides in the definition of a topic in ways a single encounter could never achieve. As Robin Schuldenfrei (2020) postulates:

Iteration describes, diversely, the pushing forward of new conceptualisations of a form, a change to a new material or media, or a new mode of organising (conceptually or physically) a given work or its parts, so that new works, stronger conceptual ideas, and new understandings arise [...] Processes of iteration can help to better define the object under study [...] in a productively recursive loop.²⁴

Schuldenfrei goes on to suggest that the nature of iteration is ultimately concerned to the idea of duration. When an artist performs an iterative act in the creation of a work a durational period of change/alteration is inferred.²⁵ Iteration, then, becomes the span linking two or more events. It is a kind of pause that sits 'between the actions of production that define it,' and this pause represents 'a gap, a rupture, a void.'²⁶ When an artist occupies this space between the results of iteration an alternative perspective may be discovered, allowing a new light (a different angle of illumination) to be shed on the issue at hand, permitting another façade to be discovered.

Consequently, the iterative process of my series can be considered as a search for a deeper understanding of the subject, i.e., the structure motif, (and its relationship to pictorial space and architectural space). The motif, as I have explained above, was formed out of the technique of psychic automatism, meaning I had no conscious, predetermined concept of what they were prior creating them. Therefore, they contain an element of mystery even to myself and, I believe, that is why I quickly executed six variations, six iterations. I was instinctually searching for a deeper understanding through repetition. Furthermore, as described by Schuldenfrei, this search is an act of "conceptually or physically" organising and re-organising parts of the subject, which is exactly what I did in shifting of the position of the slats within the structure. There is a performative element to my '*scapes*, that of placing and re-placing, which is further emphasised by the change

²³ Ibid, 44

²⁴ Robin Schuldenfrei, *Iteration: Episodes in the Mediation of Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), viii

²⁵ Ibid, 178

²⁶ Ibid

in the angle of illumination. This causes a subtle alteration in perception of the structure motif, just as Monet's own perception of the Rouen Cathedral was altered depending on changes to the atmosphere.²⁷

Continuing this line of enquiry, Donald Judd is another artist dedicated to the act of iteration in his work, and I will focus specifically on his 15 untitled works in concrete, 1980–1984, he created for the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas (fig. 7). The site Judd chose where he planned to provide permanent large-scale public art installations in the 1980s, was the former military fort D.A. Russell, a site consisting of 340 acres on which he invited many artists to exhibit.

Laid out in a kilometre-long row on the border of the property, Judd's [15 groups](#) consist of varying combinations of cubes. Each structure is orientated differently to each other, the surrounding landscape, and the passage of the sun over the course of a day.²⁸ Despite becoming aware of this cycle of works part way through the second year of this study, these concrete monuments share similarities to my structure motifs in both design and the fact that they are placed out in a flat, windswept landscape. Furthermore, the shadows that occur inside the structures over the course of the day is what I envisioned happening in those first six drawings I titled *Time of Day*. Judd's cubes are even monochromatic like my drawings, as they are constructed out of unadorned grey concrete. Additionally, each structure's "opening" (what I call the "front" and "back" of my own motifs) is different in each group. Some are opened on the long axis, whereas some are opened at the narrower "ends."

Interestingly, Judd's Minimalist aesthetics mirror that of Eastern artistic sensibilities, much like my own work does. For myself, it was the influence of having lived in Japan twice and studied the language and culture for many years, not to mention also having a meditation practice based on Zen Buddhist notions of 無. The work of Judd and the Minimalists can also be said to have been influenced by Zen Buddhism.²⁹ According to Goh Sze Ying (2018), Judd's rejection of '[...] the salient and most objectionable relics of European art,'³⁰ was an act of "emptying" his art of any unnecessary clutter. Ying suggests that this act mirrors Taoist philosophy where the concept of emptiness, like Zen Buddhism's notion of 無, is a space from which the Chinese term "qi" (the universal energy of life) comes from.³¹ By removing any distractions Judd could then imbue his art with a sense of calm and quietness treasured by Eastern cultures, especially Japanese, which I have also experienced when living in the country.

²⁷ Sagner-Düchting, 34

²⁸ 'Collection: Donald Judd,' *Chinati Foundation*, 2021, <https://chinati.org/collection/donald-judd/> (accessed 24 September 2021), para 2

²⁹ Eugene Tan, *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object* (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore), 11

³⁰ Ying, 42

³¹ *Ibid*, 44



Figure 7, Donald Judd, **Untitled**, 1980-1984, Chianti Foundation, Marfa, Texas. Library of Congress Prints and Photography Division, Washington, D.C. <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>

Walking around the void painting ‘scapes

I spent the majority of 2020 experimenting with painting the ‘scapes and changing the scale and surfaces (panel vs canvas). In 2021 I worked on immersion environments for displaying my paintings, as well as furthering the compositional and colour experiments within the oil on panel series. I produced multiple works and I will discuss a select few here.

The first oil painted variation of my ‘scapes still retained the light/white “ground” and black “sky” of the *Time of Day* drawings (fig. 8). I utilised loose canvas, a surface I was not familiar with up until that point in my arts career as I usually opted to paint on wooden panels. The canvas I used had a defect in the top right corner, leaving a light spot even after several coats of overpainting. At the time, I thought it looked reminiscent of a star and left it in place, emphasising it to look more star-like. Up until that point, I thought the imagery of the ‘scapes was perhaps representational of a celestial terrain; a place where there was little or no atmosphere with nothing blocking direct access to the inky black void of space. After completing this painting, I felt the “star” was unnecessary and distracting from the rest of the composition. I decided the ‘scape had nothing to do with a literal interpretation of such a place.

After several iterations executed in oils following the first painted ‘scape, I incrementally reduced the scale of the structure motif and explored more intense colour combinations. I knew from the first painting on canvas that the “sky” could not be entirely black again and I also felt the white “ground” had also run its course and should be left behind. The fault in the canvas also pushed me back to the familiar surface of panels and I decided not to use canvas again (with one large exception, which I will discuss in the Section Three). During this period of experimentation, I achieved what Albers described as ‘vibrating boundaries’³² within my compositions, the effect created when complementary colours of an equal light intensity are paired together (fig. 9). However, the aesthetics were becoming harsh, to the point of being unnecessarily distracting like the “star,” and I abruptly abandoned these experiments in extreme colour-play. I wanted to return a sense of calm to the imagery.

I then prepared a square panel with phthalo blue-green for the background and used an intense blood-red to paint the shadow-work in the interior of the structure motif. The result was a more relaxed image, but one that still retained a vibrancy and Albers-esque colour interaction. Additionally, all the ‘scapes thus far had a horizon line that was above the centre of the picture plane, and the format – aside from the original six drawings – had been portrait. I knew a landscape format would representationally take the ‘scapes too close to landscape painting of art historical precedent, so I decided to create square panels instead. I then moved the horizon line directly to the centre of the square format, creating a uniform “above” and “below” with the structure then occupying the centre of the picture plane. This was a more simplified layout which balanced the composition,

³² Josef Albers, *Interaction of Colour* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 186

creating a bifurcation of the picture plane, not too dissimilar to Albers' *Adobe/Variation* series and the division and distribution of colours on the surface.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the discussion of Western religious iconography above, another example of an *Annunciation* came to mind. Jan Van Eyck's *Annunciation* painted in 1434-36 (fig. 10) is much smaller in comparison to Fra Angelico's and was painted on panel.³³ The scene takes place inside an intricately decorated Gothic church of a basilica influence (flat wooden roof instead of barrel vaulting), containing pointed arched windows, through which the divine light penetrates. Mary is depicted wearing luxurious clothing of a vibrant ultramarine blue – although this is nothing compared to Gabriel's elaborately embroidered priest's cope underneath which we can glimpse his chasuble, a bejewelled medallion clasped across his chest. And then there are the resplendent rainbow wings, illuminated by the divine light permeating the shadowy interior of the space.

Thinking of my initial reference to Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* when I created the *Time of Day* series, I now considered my structure motifs as having more of a connection to Van Eyck's, even though my work was still essentially a minimalist structure located in a minimalist landscape. This was not only because I was using bright colours (which is largely missing from Fra Angelico's works due to the medium of fresco painting), but also because I was utilising panels again. The Van Eyck brothers experimented broadly with the technique of oil painting,³⁴ allowing the northern painters to create hyper-naturalistic representations of subjects. They became masters of illusionism and the technique of *trompe l'oeil*. Furthermore, the ability to layer fine coats of paint in glazes created more vibrant colours and the wooden surfaces preferred by northern artists allowed for this effect to materialise better than paper, linen, canvas, or fresco permitted.

Consequently, I saw this new panel as containing the numinous light prevalent in late Gothic religious iconography of the northern tradition. The quality of light those artists painted was, of course, of a religious nature, emulating their Christian ideology. However, I am not Christian, nor am I religious in the Western sense of the term "religious." If I am to align myself with the idea of religiosity, then I would have to claim I am religious in the Eastern sense of the term, in an Eastern religio-philosophical way, as explained in my personal history in Section One.

Although I was beginning to involve my 'scapes with the work of abstractionists like Albers and post-Modernist artists such as Judd, it seems I had not completely left behind my tendency to emulate northern European religious painting.

Due to the ratio of phthalo blue-green to red and yellow I used on this new panel created the illusion of the structure floating above the background, that it was not on the surface of the painting at all, but physically in front of it (fig. 11). Also, I had rapidly shrunk the structure compared to the previous versions, so

³³ It was originally a panel painting, but now exists as oil on canvas. Paolo Lecaldano, *The Complete Paintings of the Van Eycks*, introduction by Robert Hughes, notes and catalogue by Giorgio T. Faggin (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 94

³⁴ But they did not *invent* oil painting, which is still a common misconception of the brothers, thanks to Giorgio Vasari; the technique of oil painting had been around for centuries before the Renaissance. Ashok Roy, "Van Eyck's Technique: The Myth and the Reality" in *Investigating Jan van Eyck*, ed. Susan Foster, Sue Jones and Delphine Cool (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2000), 97

that it was much smaller on the horizon. Coupled with the colour effect, there was a sense of a forward and backward movement; it had both the quality of receding into the distance (size) and emerging from the picture plane (colour). While I was painting this panel and creating the push-pull effect of the motif on the background, the memory of the dream-nightmare was triggered, and I then understood the 'scapes were not of a celestial environment but somehow connected to the visuals from my childhood memory. I titled the painting *Cause and Affect*.

From that point of re-experiencing the sensation of the dream-nightmare in *Cause and Affect*, I decided there had to be more variations of this new square format and experiment with other colour combinations that could produce the same visual effect. I also toyed with the idea of expanding the surface of the picture but keeping the structure the same size to enhance the receding quality of the motif, which I will discuss next.

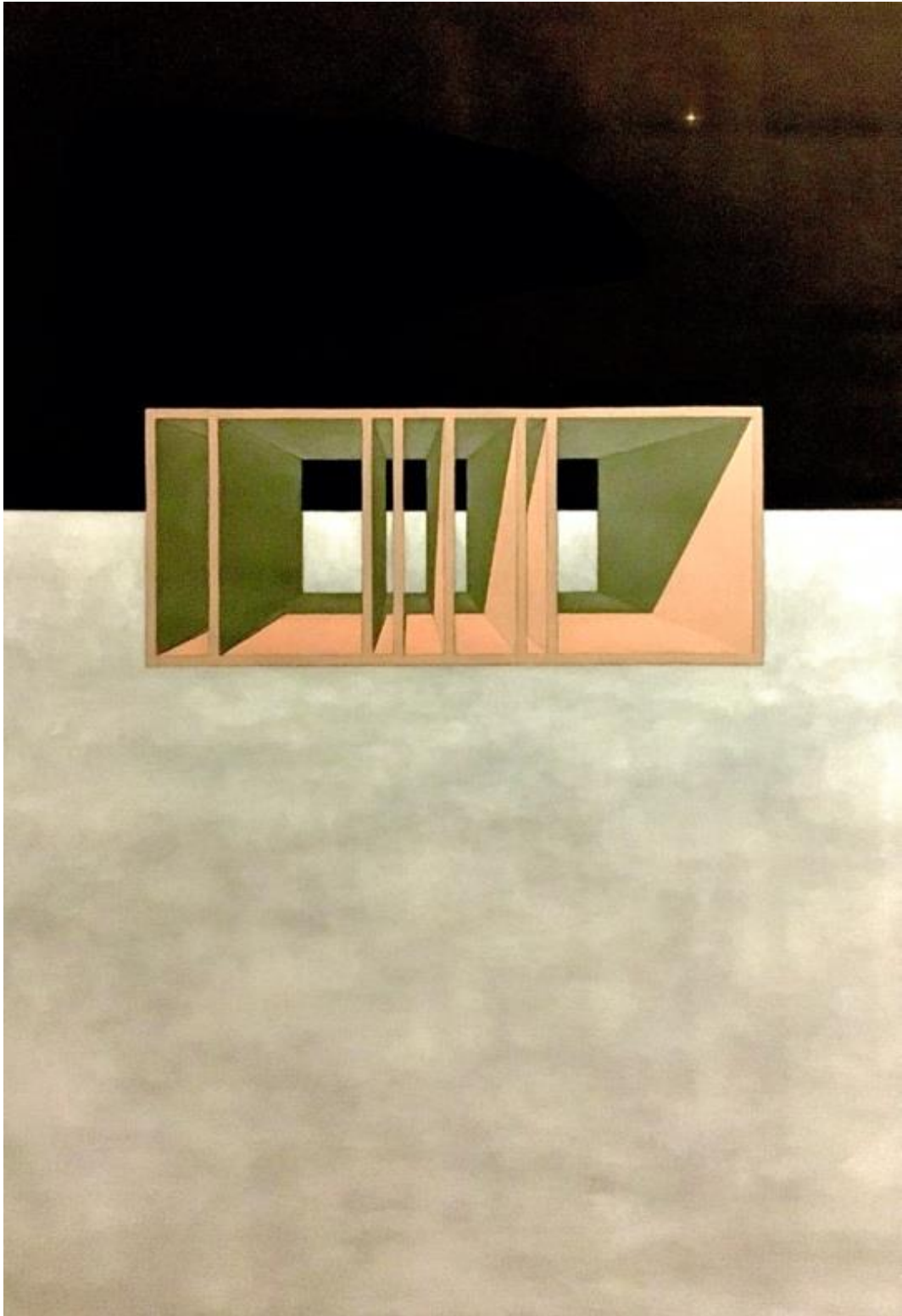


Figure 8, Untitled, 2020, oil on canvas, 130 x 95cm



*Figure 9, **Untitled** (unfinished), 2020, oil on panel, 120 x 100cm*



Figure 10, Jan van Eyck, **Annunciation**, 1434-36, oil on canvas transferred from panel, 90.2 x 31.4cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Figure 11, Cause and Affect, 2020, oil on panel, 120 x 120cm

SECTION 3: Space for Painting

Immersive experiences

The act of iteration expanded out and beyond the surface of the paintings at the end of 2020. This manifested in the creation of four environments I called “immersion experiences.”

In the first, I tried to exaggerate the emerging-receding effect I experienced in *Cause and Affect* by placing the painting in the small basement room 10A10 in the old Museum building, Block 10 at Massey University (in the same corridor as my studio space). The room measures approximately 3.4 x 4m and had been entirely painted a gloss black by a previous student, including the walls, floor, and ceiling, providing the opportunity to have control over the illumination of my painting. I installed a single spotlight and lowered the brightness and size of the spot so there was a small circular pool of dim light on the very centre of the panel (fig. 12). This created a tenebrous atmosphere, in which if you turned away from the dimly lit painting the dark seemed to press back into the eyeballs (with the door closed). The response from the audience was split; half found it intriguing, while the others felt uncomfortable being in the space and confused over why I made the decision to “hide” the painting in such a space. Indeed, they did not realise it was a painting at first, as the way I illuminated the work created the illusion of a projection.

In the second immersion experiment I utilised the Sprinkler Room in Block 6, where I expanded the ‘*scape* environment onto the walls of the gallery space itself. I then hung another panel painting of a ‘*scape* on the wall, creating a visual tautology (fig. 13). I did not find the wall-painted version of the ‘*scape* to be as effective as my oil painted panels.

The poor quality of the wall painting became more apparent in the third iteration of the immersion experience, in which I returned to 10A10. This time I did not paint the entire space as a ‘*scape*, but painted two sections on opposing walls, and only illuminated one with a single spotlight, leaving the other wall in shadow (fig. 14). The resulting responses from the audience was that it took them a long time to realise that the other wall also had a ‘*scape* on it. After this last dark-room experiment, I decided to move onto further experimentation in spatial colour to further explore the properties of the space itself and how my paintings could interact more successfully with it.



Figure 12, Install view of **Cause and Affect** in first immersion experiment, September 2020, 10A10, Block 10, Massey University, Wellington



Figure 13, Install view of second immersion experiment, March 2021, Sprinkler Room, Block 6, Massey University, Wellington

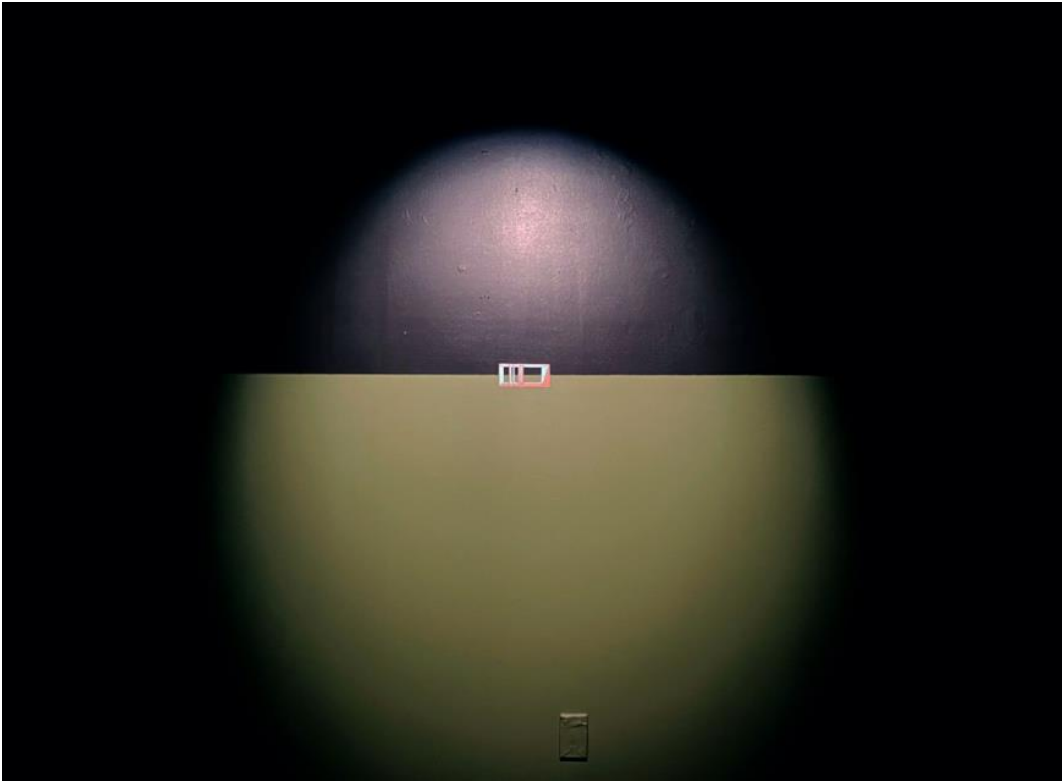


Figure 14, Wall painting from third immersion experiment, May 2021, 10A10, Block 10, Massey University, Wellington

Think pink

After the first immersion experiment at the end of 2020, I decided to undercoat a large unused canvas I had in the studio. The canvas measures approximately 4m wide by 1.5m high and the colour I used was pink. I do not particularly care for the colour pink, and typically file it under the title “*Op-Shop Tchotchke*”. The colour I used was pale, sort of washed out, as if it was tired of being pink and had lost its vibrancy (I would have given it the sub-heading of “*Old Lady Sweater*” in my judgemental filing system). For some reason that day I picked up the random test pot I had in my studio and started painting with it. I had the thought of using it as an undercoat, an experiment to see if it would work with the phthalo blue-green I had been utilising a lot during the MFA and was thinking it would eventually be completely overpainted.

Once I finished covering the canvas in the sea of pink, I was projected back to my childhood home. At that moment the colour seemed very close to the pink my father had used for the interior decorating of the house he built in the late 1970s. After discussing it with my father, the pink of that house was almost identical to the one I used on the canvas. I decided to retain the colour instead of overpainting it, and this time added three structure motifs evenly spaced along the line of bifurcation (fig. 15).

However, the poor quality of the canvas became evident after several coats of oil painting became blotchy, and eventually I had to abandon the idea of a large-scale ‘scape in 50 shades of pink and returned to the square format on panel – a more resolved surface. If I am to attempt another horizontally elongated picture plane in the future (keeping it as a painted object) I would be interested to utilise a modular panelling system for ease of transportation and installation in gallery environments.

P-618

Returning to the square format, I created a phthalo blue-green background again, but this time painted a pink structure motif containing a light blue shadow. The surface of this panel was more textured compared to the surface of *Cause and Affect*, as I had used a mini roller paint applicator for sealing the panel with a white commercial undercoat, resulting in a slightly rough appearance like that of a fine stucco. This caused the oil paint to cling to the surface differently, creating a slightly bluer hue than *Cause and Affect*, even though it was the same oil paint used (phthalo blue-green). I named the new painting *P-618* (fig. 16).

The title came from a conversation I had with my friend Hannah, who visited my studio while I was still working on the giant pink canvas. She said the colour reminded her of “Baker-Miller pink,” a colour named after Chief Warrant Officer Gene Baker and Captain Ron Miller of the US Naval Correctional Centre in Seattle, Washington.³⁵ Swiss professor Alexander Schauss, in a study published in the *Journal of Orthomolecular Psychiatry* in 1979, theorised a particular shade of pink he named “P-618” can cause loss of muscular strength in men if they were exposed to it for long periods of time. This was tested in Seattle by Baker and Miller, who combined one pint of red paint with one gallon of white paint and covered the walls and ceiling of a holding cell with the pink mixture, leaving only the floor unpainted. According to Schauss’ report, the experiment in Seattle at the prison was a resounding success. The two naval offices reported no incidents of violence over a period of 156 days, a far cry from what had been a ‘whale of a problem’ previously.³⁶

Since then, many prisons across the United States and Europe have adopted this method of “colour therapy” in dealing with aggression levels in inmates. However, there have been further scientific studies over the decades that prove there is little or no evidence to support the idea pink (specifically Baker-Miller pink, “P-618”) causes a calming effect and loss of muscular strength in men.³⁷ Furthermore, it has been proposed by Oliver Genschow, et al. (2014), that a person’s sociocultural upbringing has an impact on how an individual perceives colour, calling into question the usefulness of Baker-Miller pink, even if it were proven to work.³⁸ The subjects tested in these experiments have all been male criminals held in modern, hyper-masculine detention centres, where signs of weakness in an individual could be a death sentence in the eyes of the other inmates. Using a colour associated in our Western culture with the feminine (and blue being for boys), the inmates may have been adversely affected by being isolated to a completely pink cell, causing them to feel their “manhood” was being called into question because of the (perceived) notion of femininity enveloping them. Thus, pink is a loaded colour.³⁹

³⁵ Alexander G. Schauss, ‘Tranquilising Effect of Colour Reduces Aggressive Behaviour and Potential Violence,’ in *Orthomolecular Psychiatry*, 8, No. 4 (1979), 118

³⁶ Ibid, 219

³⁷ To read their report, see: Genschow, O., and T. Noll, M. Wanke, R. Gersbach. “Does Baker-Miller Pink Reduce Aggression in Prison Detention Cells? A Critical Empirical Examination,” in *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 21, no.5 (December 2014), 482-489.

³⁸ Ibid, 488

³⁹ According to Kassia St Clair (2016) the colour became a cultural phenomenon in the United States, finding its way into other parts of the culture outside penal institutions. During the 1980s, the reigning Mr California was challenged to do bicep curls on national television after staring at a pink card. Comically, he failed to complete even one rep. It was

The concept of Baker-Miller pink amused me, and I became interested in the idea that colour could elicit or inform behavioural responses, and how this concept was so readily embraced within a context of confinement. By naming the painting *P-618*, I was applying this notion of “control” on my structure motif, as if by doing so would allow me to further understand the imagery by altering its “behaviour,” as if it was a criminal. The idea of pink began to seep into every area of my arts practice, I would eventually take this idea of colour-induced behavioural control one step further in the final iteration of a immersion experiment.

reported that university college football teams would paint the visitor’s changing rooms pink to give the home team a better advantage. However, this stopped once a rule was introduced stating the home team could paint the visitor’s room whatever colour they so desired, only if they painted their own locker room the same colour. Furthermore, “drunk-tank pink” became another name for Baker-Miller pink in the States when local police authorities across the country decided to coat their holding cells in pink to subdue aggressively drunk offenders. But ultimately, it does not matter whether Baker-Miller pink is proven to work or not. Once an idea has found its way into mainstream consciousness, it is very difficult to alter it, no matter how much empirical evidence may be presented to the masses to prove the opposite is true. See: Adam Alter, *Drunk Tank Pink: And Other Unexpected Forces That Shape How We Think, Feel, and Behave* (New York: The Penguin Group Limited, 2013), 23; also see: Kassia St Clair, *The Secret Lives of Colour* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2016), 119.



*Figure 15, **Untitled** (unfinished), 2020-2021, oil on canvas, 150 x 400cm (approx.)*

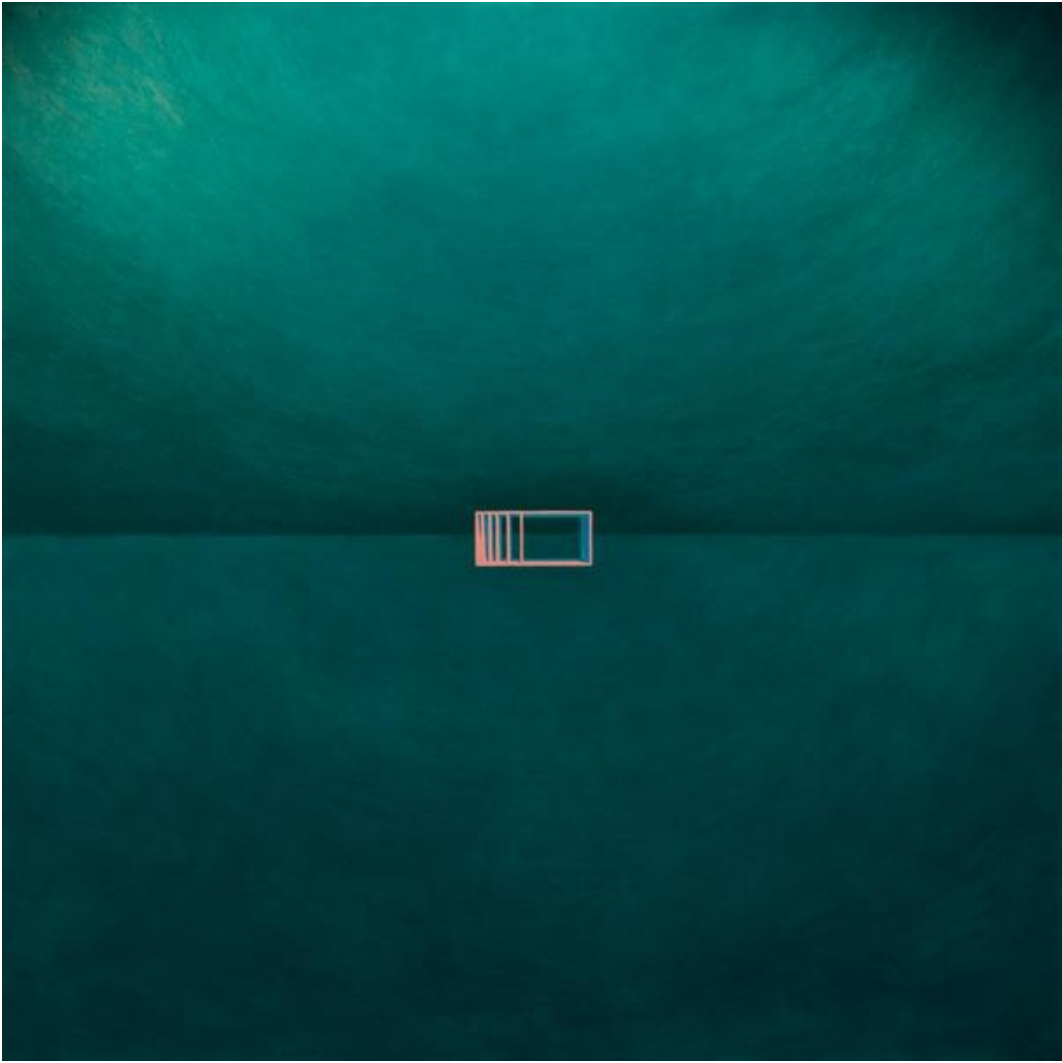


Figure 16, P-618, 2021, oil on panel, 120 x 120cm

The Womb Room

I attempted to recreate a cell-like situation in which to place my new painting, *P-618*. I used 10A10 again for this purpose, given its qualities as an enclosed space, with low ceiling height, exposed concrete girders and claustrophobic feel. Initially I painted the entire room grey to mitigate the gloss black and to provide a lighter basecoat for the pink to then be painted over. The feel of the room was instantly changed by the grey colour, and it looked more like how I imagined a real prison cell might be (in a detention centre not deploying Baker-Miller pink). After I finished painting the room pink, it was a slight flesh-tone hue, rather than the red bias of Baker-Miller pink. I was already committed (pun intended) to the idea, and because of the specific shade of pink I used – which colour matched the structure motif in *P-618* – I decided to nickname the space the “*Womb Room*.”

When the room is viewed from the end of the corridor (with the lights on, door open), the colour is incredibly bright, like the walls inside the room are made of glass through which a brilliant sunset is permeating. This triggered another memory from my childhood. I vividly recall the feeling of being in the hallway of my childhood home when the sun was at the right point to direct its light through the end bedroom window and (with the door open), down the length of the hallway. The sunlight would bounce off the pink on the walls, intensifying the yellow-orange glow of the sun, mingling together to produce a bright but soft, peachy pink glow. As a child, this would trigger a melancholic feeling, a sort of sadness mixed with confusion and awe at being momentarily blinded. It felt as though I was trapped in an enclosed space, one constructed of walls made of bright colour that was pressing in on me. Ultimately it was only light, and if I stretched my arm out, I would find nothing in front of me but empty space. Thinking about that memory while looking at *Womb Room* from the corridor, I understood the feeling was also one that I experienced in my recurring dream-nightmare.

And If You Gaze Long Into the Corner, the Corner Also Gazes Into you

Even though the concept of Baker-Miller pink was the influence behind titling my work *P-618*, the purpose of converting 10A10 into a pink space was also to see what would happen aesthetically if I surrounded *P-618* with the same shade of pink I used in the structure, and whether the phthalo blue-green would be intensified or altered by such an environment. This proved to be a fruitful endeavour as the resulting display experience was beyond what I had envisioned.

Once installed in the *Womb Room*, I illuminated it with a single spotlight, much like I had done in the previous experiments (fig. 17). However, the surrounding pink created a much lighter environment and the feeling in the room was much “peppier” than the black I had utilised previously. The panel painting changed drastically when I utilised the spotlight in comparison to having the main fluorescent tube lighting on. The spotlight created a more harmonious contrast between painting and the surrounding pink, drawing the attention of the audience toward the painting as the spotlight directed focus. When the main fluorescent lights were on and the whole space was brightly and evenly illuminated, however, the phthalo blue-green darkened substantially, providing the illusion of a deeper space behind the pink structure. The response from the audience was understandably livelier and there was more humour evident in the conversation this time around.

One comment I found interesting was that the corners were very visible, as in the eye was drawn into the corners of the room (with the main lights on) as it was brighter and the full-coverage paint treatment invited the viewer to look everywhere in the room, not just at the painting. This caused the audience to pay more attention to the space in which they were standing, rather than focusing on the painting, which almost became a footnote to the immersive experience.

I had done an about-face, going from hiding my paintings in a dark room and only allowing a part of the work to be viewed while completely removing the ability of the audience to interact with the space itself, to then having the focus be taken away from the painting (even though it was fully illuminated). I had created a “spatial interaction” in which my painting was engaging with the space, and consequently so too was the audience.

To return to the notion of duration as intrinsically part of the work for a moment, and in relation to my immersive experiments, another comment was made about the “theatrical” quality of my displays, i.e., the severely controlled illumination of the paintings and the nature of the room I was using (10A10). This was mentioned again during the *Womb Room* critique. It was also a critique levelled at the Minimalists by art critic Michael Fried. While doing so, he alludes to the notion of *enantiodromia*, and, for all intents and purposes, could be critiquing my own work and my attempt at pulling my dream-nightmare paradox into my thesis project:

The literalist preoccupation with time – more precisely, with the duration of the experience – is, I [Fried] suggest, paradigmatically theatrical, as though theatre confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of time; or as though the sense which,

*at bottom, theatre addresses is a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, simultaneously approaching and receding, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective.*⁴⁰

Moreover, Fried compares Surrealist tendencies to the work of the Minimalists (which I find interesting in relation to the somewhat idiosyncratic suite of art influences within my practice). He pointed to the literalism of Minimalism being akin to Surrealist sensibilities, that both ‘[...] deploy and isolate objects and persons in “situations” – the closed room and the abandoned artificial landscape,’⁴¹ which directly references Judd’s use of a military base for his Chinati Foundation project, and the “artificial landscape” I have created in my ‘scapes. It seems Surrealism has caught up with me again.

⁴⁰ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 166-7

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 171

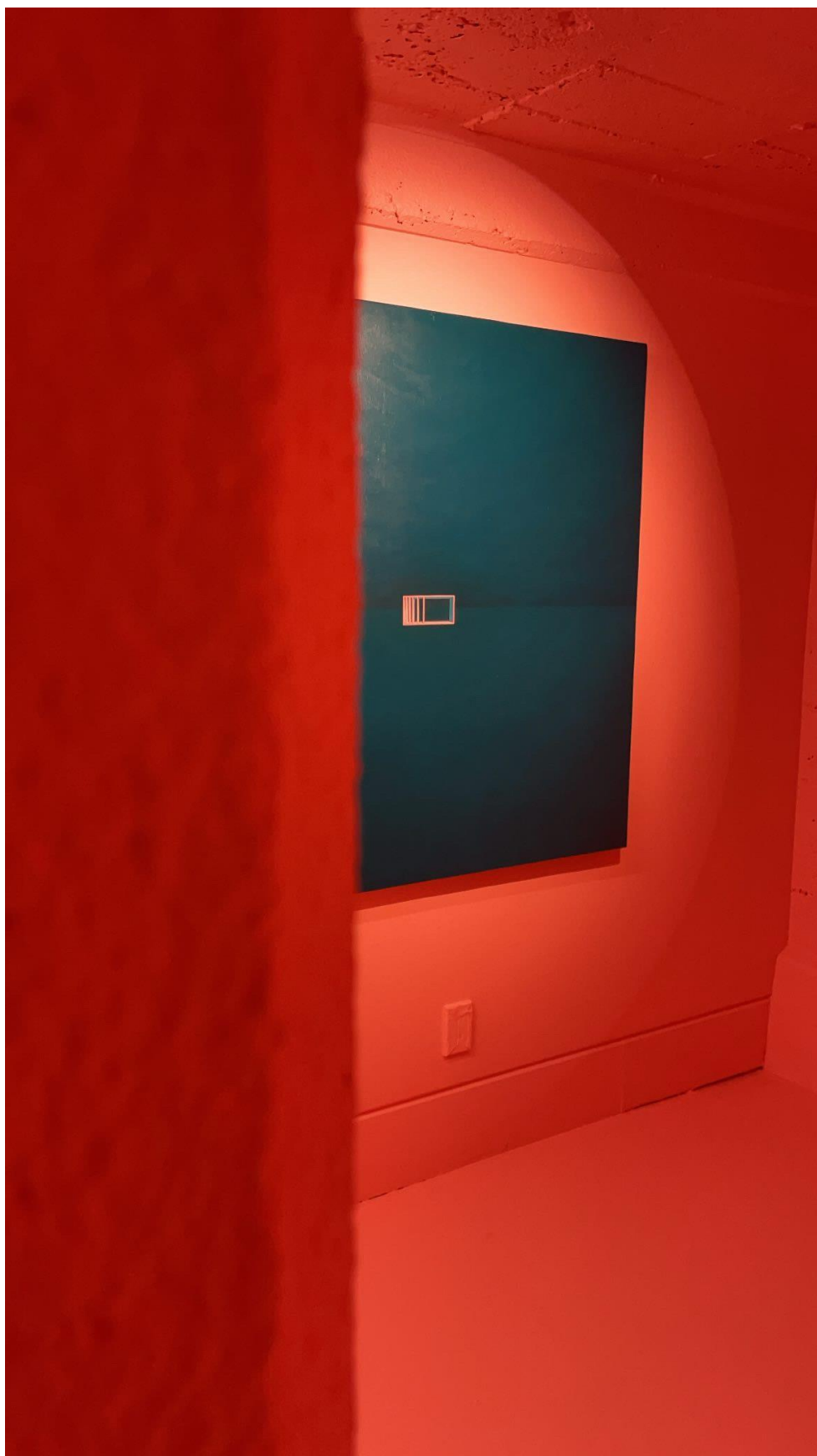


Figure 17, Install view of P-618 in the "Womb Room", August 2021, 10A10, Block 10, Massey University, Wellington

SECTION 4: Install at Te Whare Hēra

For the past two years I have come to understand that what I have been working toward in an iterative way is not necessarily a final resolution. Each step I have taken through drawing, then painting, then installation is another step taken on a journey, not a step toward an end goal. Iteration is, of course, a form of searching. My drawings were one searching, and my paintings were another searching. Therefore, I suggest that my immersive experiences are yet another relevant form of searching. I am hoping that the act of placing my paintings in diverse environments and situations will aide me in taking the next step in the iterative process (a placing and a re-placing). This leads me to the final display for my thesis project.

The space at Te Whare Hēra has an uncommon floorplan. It is not a typical square gallery space, but one that has a stepped wall containing mostly windows and a large, angled interior wall. When I first saw the space, I had just finished the *Womb Room* experiment at Massey. I knew that if I committed to the same idea for Te Whare Hēra, the full sunlight entering the space through the wall of windows (when the clouds part) would hit the pink and rebound off every painted surface, blinding anyone caught in the room. So, instead of a immersion of pink, I intend to take advantage of the shape of the room and the path the sunlight traces across the floor of the gallery. Having a strip of pink on the floor running from the door to the end wall and up the wall to the ceiling, should create a similar effect to the *Womb Room* (albeit in a subtler way) when the sunlight traces its path across the pink. I am intrigued to find out how both artificial light (spotlights) and daylight will affect the painting *P-618* at different times of the day. It may result that the painting's colour alters dramatically, causing its surface to document the passage of time, whereas at other times the work may not change at all.

Envisioning this gallery situation reminds me of the work of Andrew Beck, who creates a form of spatial interaction in his use of [photography](#), painting, and installation. Moreover, Beck's photography and [expansion](#) of picture surface into the gallery environment is what I am interested in and have been exploring during the MFA. His 2014 exhibition at the Govett-Brewster gallery's Open Window, *Shadow Subsets*, mixed his photography with drawing and sculptural elements that employed both natural and artificial light to cast shadows.⁴² The work '[...] allowed the viewer to focus on their experiences of light in the present moment,'⁴³ a sentiment I aim to elicit from the audience in my final presentation.

I have been working toward this idea in the immersive experiments at Massey, and in a more subtle way in the use of shadow-play in the structure motifs themselves. My spatial interaction experiences, however, were unusual in the sense that the paintings almost became a footnote of the experience. But the intention behind the installations was not only to have the audience interact with the paintings in an alternative way, but to have a dialogue develop between the painting(s) and the space in which they were hung. The aesthetics of the painting I was attempting to enhance via the environment that surrounded them.

⁴² Govett-Brewster Gallery, <https://govettbrewster.com/exhibitions/open-window-andrew-beck-shadow-subsets> (accessed 31 September 2021)

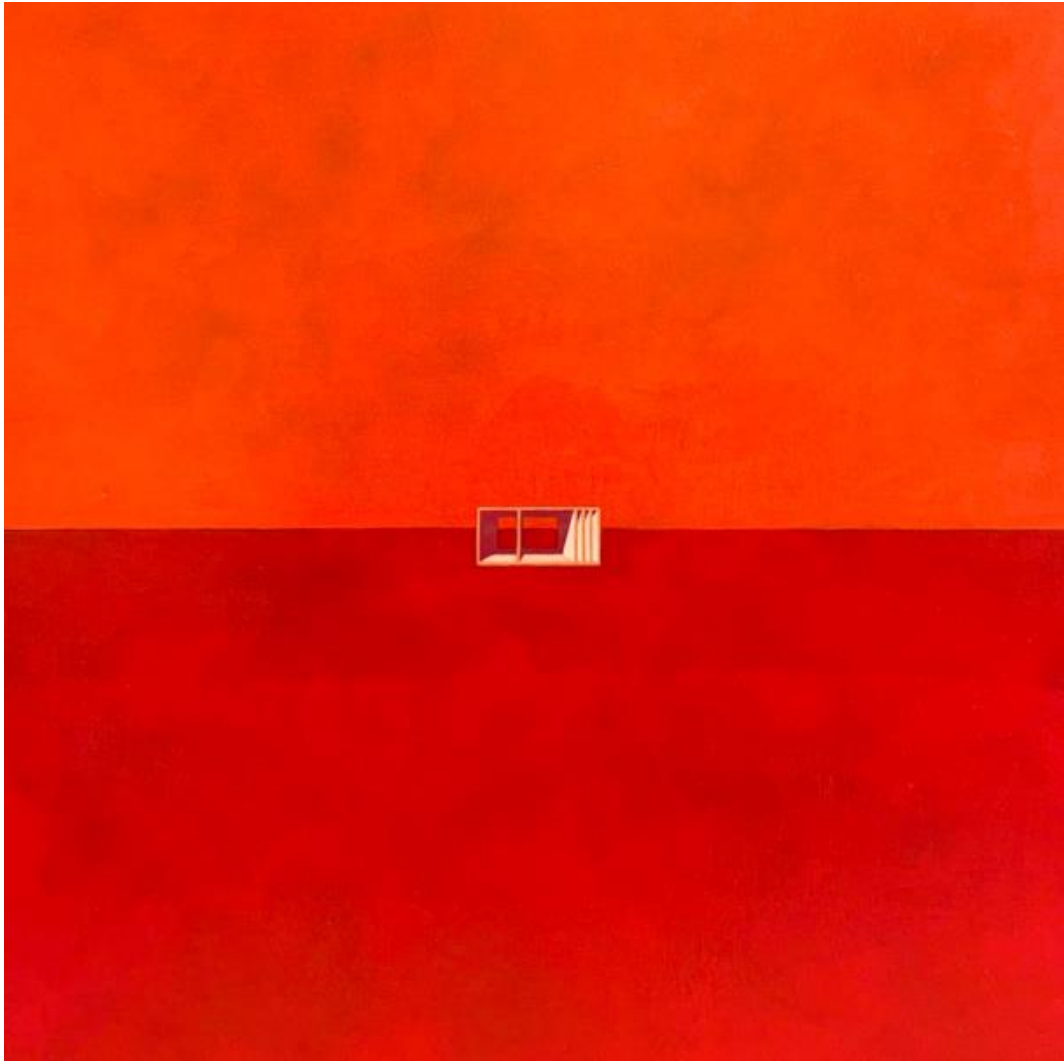
⁴³ Ibid, para 5

Furthermore, I will include two different versions of the 'scapes, one being *P-618* which will be placed on the pink wall, and the other will be a two-toned red 'scape (fig. 18) that will occupy the space at the other end of the room, far enough away to be an autonomous piece, but still residing in the same space to be affected by the potential change of atmosphere when the pink floor is activated by the sunlight.

Therefore, I am aiming for the final submission of my MFA thesis project at Te Whare Hēra to be another iteration of spatial interaction between my 'scapes and their surroundings, which in turn will influence the experience of the viewer. By working with the space and going beyond the surface of the painting to include the display environment in my practice, I hope to have my objects (paintings) actively intermingle with light, atmosphere, and space.

Furthermore, through this interaction with the site itself (i.e., perched on the end of a wharf, above the sea, the flattest surface on the planet when seen at a great distance, but ultimately the most changeable), I aim to include the instability of this environment in the reading of the work as encompassing the notion of *enantiodromia*, that all is flux, and nothing remains the same. This site-specificity will hopefully feed back into the imagery of *P-618* (closed loop?), as the painting can be visually interpreted as a kind of "sea-scape" due to the atmospheric quality of the phthalo blue-green colour. Imagining the establishment of this relationship between my work and this space in this way, I am reminded again of Heraclitus and his quote, 'It is not possible to step into the same river twice,'⁴⁴ indicating the instability and constant change of the surface on which we stand; an Eastern idea of eternity.

⁴⁴ 'Heraclitus,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (8 February 2007) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus/> (accessed: 2 November 2007), para 17



*Figure 18, **Untitled**, 2021, oil on panel, 120 x 120cm*

CONCLUSION

Never the same ever again, we all remain unchanged

Since embarking on this thesis project my art practice has both changed dramatically but also continued some consistent routes of enquiry, like Monet's Rouen Cathedral morphing into a puddle of colour and texture on the surface of the canvas but always existing as the static monument he saw every morning from his room window across the street.⁴⁵ Having explored a range of art historical influences during the MFA, I felt as though I was moving away from the self-designation of Surrealist, as I slowly melded "sky" and "ground" in my *'scapes*, blurring further the notion of representation. I thought I was becoming more abstract the longer I performed the act of iteration. However, just like my recurrent emulation of late Gothic panel painting of the northern tradition, it seems Surrealism continues to follow right behind me as I push forward in finding new conceptualisations of my form.

As this exegesis has articulated, I am very compelled by the idea of 無, and I have attempted to explain in this document how my structure motifs are influenced by and adhere to Zen Buddhist aesthetic ideals and Japanese artistic sensibilities.⁴⁶ I am also aware of the process of iteration, repeating the same motif over and over, each time creating a different version of it, could be seen as a way of keeping the "monument" in a constant state of flux. I continue to wonder whether this project exemplifies a Western typology through the visual representation of monumental architecture signifying the notion of unchanged eternity, while prolifically altering the forms, imbuing them with an Eastern understanding of eternity and the notion of *enantiodromia*.

While discussing the topic of iteration in conjuncture with Judd's Minimalism, I was put in mind of Wumen's commentary following his recount of the *wu (mu) kōan* I described in Section One: 'The Great Way is gateless, approach in a thousand ways.' The act of iteration, then, could be considered a means to approach the "gateless gate" though repeating the steps a thousand different ways. Considering Judd's work in this way, I see his cubes as the physical manifestation of this "thousand ways" approach, this iterative search, which I also see in my own structure motifs. Therefore, I view my own iterative works as representing this search for the gateless gate through which my work may one day step.

But perhaps it is a case of existing in that constant state of flux; to occupy a space built on a foundation of *enantiodromia*. My work, as described in the discussion of the final install at Te Whare Hēra, is not necessarily about finally understanding what the structure motifs *are*, or even what the *'scapes* represent, but that it is more about the process of discovery and re-discovery of the image. Iteration, as it appears to me, is how my structures are designed to function and what they are supposed to endure. I may continue searching for the gate, but perhaps the structures are there to be used for that purpose and cannot exist if the gate is passed.

There is something in the act of arranging and re-arranging (of the slats in my structures), aligning and re-aligning (of the illumination of structures and paintings), placing and re-placing (of my paintings in different

⁴⁵ Sagner-Düchting, 34

⁴⁶ Tan, 10-11

spaces) that holds a kind of numinous experience for me. This is caused by the durational element of iteration, the “gap” or “void” that Schildenfrei mentioned, which is further exemplified by the notion of 無. By doing so, I may not only further my understanding of my *scapes*, but I might also become aware of myself and my relationship to my paintings, and how this can go beyond the surface of the painting itself by having the audience become aware of their own relationship to my work in the viewing experience.

Future aesthetics

And finally, from the beginning of the thesis project, I have had an urge to convert my structure form into a digital animation where I could be free to manipulate both the position of the slats inside the structure and the position of the light source. If I create a moving image of the ‘*scapes*, where everything is in a constant state of flux, i.e., slats moving, illumination shifting, structure receding and approaching, this could further reinforce the notion of *enantiodromia* in my work, as well as potentially draw out more of the dream-nightmare feeling by doing so. This could be executed as a video work, but during the immersion experiments I worked on this year, I also kept imagining it as a virtual reality (VR) experience.

This idea, in part, is influenced by [TERMINUS](#), a collaborative project by Jess Johnson and Simon Ward, originally commissioned by the National Gallery of Australia. They employed VR technology to fully immerse the audience in the visuals, surrounding the viewer with a moving and interactive experience in five parts. At The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt display in 2020 this also included large quilts co-produced by Johnson and her mother Cynthia Johnson, which was an intriguing combination of a highly analogue craft-based making process with high-end digital spatial rendering. Although my ‘*scapes* are devoid of ornament, complex geometric forms, elaborate pathways, or psychedelic visualisation like Johnson’s imagery, I am intrigued as to the effect a digitally animated VR version of my work could create, and whether the visual language of my imagery could embrace notions of a visualisation of the mystical, the metaphysical, the esoteric.

On the other hand, the visual effects I create in my paintings are successful because they *are* paintings. I am very aware of this tension and paradox. Spending hours hand-rendering iterations of the structure under a range of conditions of light and atmosphere, is different to programming a 3-D spatial digital rendering and altering light logics at the press of a button/alteration of code.

I would be fascinated to see the conversion of my visuals into digital animation, but I also wonder how successful it would be. As Johnson stated in an interview, in the physical creation of images through the medium of drawing and painting mistakes often are made that then become incorporated into the final design.⁴⁷ I also do this: a large part of my final painted object is the result of accidents and redirection of intention through “mistakes” made in the creative process. This was also a major part of my immersive experiments.

But I still wonder, what would happen to this imagery if it were digitised?

⁴⁷ “Terminus Interview,” uploaded by Jess Johnson, 12 Jun 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7iC3kvzsC0> (accessed: 25 September 2021)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: 吹き抜き屋台

Another art historical reference I saw in ‘*scapes*’ was something entirely different to lineages in European art. While living in Japan, as mentioned in Section 1, I became familiar with Japanese *emakimono* (“picture-scrolls”) from the Heian period (794-1185), which I studied in Japanese art history classes, and some of which I viewed in art museums around the country. The style of painting during this period is known as the Yamato-e tradition and was unique for the representation of buildings or structures painted in the technique called *fukinuki yatai*, typically translated as “blown-off roof”.⁴⁸ This style allowed the artist to depict interior scenes of buildings they were illustrating more easily. Sometimes *shōji* (traditional sliding rice paper screens) separating rooms might also be left out of the composition (fig. 6).⁴⁹ Furthermore, artists of this period would utilise a severe flat perspective and the structures were always viewed from an elevated and slightly angled bird’s-eye position, often showing both interior rooms and exterior gardens within the same image. Considering the way Japanese architecture functions in real life it is perhaps no surprise that the paintings visualised the inside-outside flow of historical and contemporary living spaces Japan. The style gave the artists an opportunity to bring nature into the reading of the story to mirror and/or enhance the emotional states of the characters depicted.⁵⁰ It is also visually reminiscent of stage design in theatre productions, especially those seen in traditional *Noh* plays.

Just like those traditional plays, the use of flat perspective and the *fukinuki yatai* technique in these works illustrates a quintessential Japanese aesthetic sensibility: simplification of design. It is reduced, clean, and clear of unnecessary ornamentation. The artists who executed these picture-scrolls of the Heian period were masters of economisation, resulting in a unique austere visual language. Although my drawings are almost devoid of everything entirely, I suggest that *emakimono* and the technique of *fukinuki yatai* are visually connected to my ‘*scapes*’, which I observe as expressing similar sensitivities as the Japanese art I have referenced. I am thinking of how I have represented a “blown-off roof,” but applied this to the “front” and “back” parts of the structure, to expose the interior scene for the audience to see. While in my ‘*scapes*’ there are no people sitting on *tatami* mats, no heroic characters or courtesans, no depicted events taking place, no stage for the Tale of Genji to be played out, there is an inference of human relationship to the structure and fields of space depicted.

Appendix 2: “site-spinkificity”

There was another reason I used 10A10 repeatedly, one which orbited back to notions of incarceration and control. The old Dominion building (where both my studio and 10A10 is located) is on the site the old Mount Cook Prison once occupied. The imposing brick monolith was one of eight intended wings of a prison complex to be laid out in a circle surrounding a central tower topped with a dome reaching 46 meters into the air. It was

⁴⁸ 吹く “*fu-ku*” means to blow/to puff/to breathe, and 抜く “*nu-ku*” means to omit/remove (*nuku* also means to extract or to draw out). 屋台 “*ya-tai*,” when separated, means house or roof (*ya*), and platform or stage (*tai*). Together *ya-tai* is a framework (of a house, etc.). In Japanese picture scrolls, *yatai* is translated as “roof” because it was the roof of the buildings depicted that the artists omitted.

⁴⁹ The tradition was kept alive for centuries, finding a new appreciation during the heyday of the *ukiyo-e* woodblock print; a time when Japanese art became widespread in Europe, influencing the art of the Impressionists, the most famous case being Vincent van Gogh’s oil painted versions of *ukiyo-e* he encountered.

⁵⁰ Additionally, because of the nature of flat perspective there was no way a horizon line or the sky could be logically depicted. To get around this problem, and to help with the representation of mood in the work, stylised clouds or fog would be shown slowly encroaching in upon the scenes, confining them within a sea of mystery. These clouds also served as a separator between scenes to create a more easily readable narrative.

designed reminiscent of the panopticon system.⁵¹ The prison was to be the largest in the English-speaking world. Eventually only the one wing was constructed, and no permanent prisoners were housed there.⁵²

On researching the building, I was drawn to the (morbid) aesthetics of the structure, specifically the window cavities. The barred windows of the building were deeply set into the structure which created long shadows on the walls of the window opening. A photograph of this effect can be found [here](#).⁵³ This was to deprive the inmates of direct sunlight in their cells, a form of psychological control through deprivation. Interestingly, the play on imagery of the brick Prison windows echoes what I have been producing in the shadow-play of my spatial compositions. There is only one difference: the shadows in my structures are filled with light.

This also lends associative meaning to my interest in Jungian psychology, specifically the concept of “shadow” in the human psyche, also known as shadow material, the shadow archetype, or the id (in Freudian psychology). The shadow is either the unconscious part of the personality that the ego does not identify with, or the entirety of the unconscious itself and, according to Jung, can be negative or positive. However, because we tend to reject or remain ignorant of undesirable aspects of our personality, the shadow can be largely negative.⁵⁴ Jung stipulated that if this material becomes relentlessly suppressed it can become an autonomous entity within the personality, re-emerging of its own volition as “complexes,” states of mind in which the personality finds difficulty accepting traits perceived as threatening in others, e.g., “inferiority complex” or “mother complex” (the latter being more recognisable as a Freudian concept). This can occur when a person is under duress, gripped by anxiety, or drunk. These characteristics of the shadow are usually of an emotional nature and can develop a sort of possessive quality that takes over the ego-personality at inappropriate (or, perhaps, entirely appropriate) times. Once this occurs, these features can be difficult to influence or control, turning into what is known in Jungian psychology as “projection.” When projection happens the negative traits within the individual that are suppressed become the trait(s) despised in others. According to Anthony Storr (1986):

*‘The shadow might be said to be responsible for those slips of the tongue and other “mistakes” [...] which reveal feelings and motives which the conscious self disowns. The shadow is also often projected on to others. Examination of those attributes which a man most condemns in other people (greed, intolerance, disregard for others etc.) usually shows that, unacknowledged, he himself possesses them.’*⁵⁵

I associate this idea of shadow with the concept of the penal institution. They are designed to house individuals deemed to be incongruous to the smooth function of society. Society’s shadow material is hidden away from public view, to be forgotten about and suppressed (although in the case of Mt Cook Gaol, the prisoners may have been hidden inside the building, but the building itself was on prominent display in the heart of central Wellington). Therefore, I saw the shadow-play on the window cavities of the old brick building function as a metaphor for what resided inside.

This brings me back to my own shadow-play inside the structure motifs. Since researching Jung’s theories on the shadow of the psyche, I have considered the shadows in my work to also be a metaphor for the same concept. Whether I am representing my own shadow or that of humanity’s shadow in general, I have not

⁵¹ Although, the central command would have needed to physically walk down each wing to observe prisoners in their cells, rather than have full viewability from the centre as was the purpose of Jeremy Bentham’s design. See: William C Bader Jr, “Jeremy Bentham: Businessman or Philanthropist?” in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned With British Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Autumn, 1975), 248; also see: Janet Semple, *Bentham’s prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁵² Foundations for two more blocks had been prepped when the project was halted by then Prime Minister Richard Seddon. Andrea O’Neill, “Mt Cook Gaol A Loathed Landmark on Wellington’s Finest Site – 150 Years of News,” *Dominion Post*, 16 September, 2015.

⁵³ *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/36765/mt-cook-prison-1896> (accessed: 15 June 2021)

⁵⁴ Anthony Storr, *Jung: Selected Writings* (London: Fontana Press, 1986), 91

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 87

decided. Do I wish for the shadow-play of my spatial compositions to be read as a literal representation of the window frames of the old Mt Cook Prison (and my own hidden anarchic and nihilistic tendencies), or should they be understood as a metaphor for the very natural part of the human condition our culture tells us we must suppress, i.e., the antithetical character of the human condition?

I currently reside in a studio space directly underneath the Great Hall located in the centre of Block 10. I often wonder where the old Mt Cook Gaol was situated on this site. Was the Dominion Building built directly over the layout of the old prison? Is the space where I create my work located within the previous walls of the brick monolith? Is the space 10A10 occupies now – being the centre of the current building – located at the centre of the old prison too? How much does the history of the site influence what I do? Or maybe the question is: am I folding too much associative meaning over my work, and by doing so stifling the ability of the audience to view it as an oil painting on panel?