



Australian
National
University

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Research School of Humanities and the Arts

SCHOOL OF ART & DESIGN

VISUAL ARTS GRADUATE PROGRAM

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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**Margin for Error: *Rules-based systems of painting
and the anticipation of irregular outcomes.***

EXEGESIS SUBMITTED IN PART FULFILMENT FOR

THE DEGREE OF THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

July 2021

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Declaration of Originality

I, Emma Langridge, hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my supervisors Peter Alwast and Ruth Waller, and in particular, Julie Brooke, whose consistency and calm has kept me on track. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Jessica Friedmann, for her eagle-eyed proofreading, and to the many friends whose assistance I stubbornly refused. Thanks to my friends here and abroad for your encouraging words, including those who provided hospitality, interviews, friendship and more, during my field research journey and beyond. Finally, special thanks to Stevie Griffin, for his boundless patience, humour and support.

This research is supported by an
Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship.

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ABSTRACT

Margin for Error:

Rules-based systems of painting and the anticipation of irregular outcomes

My practice-led research explores modes of painting where restrictions on materials and methods generate unpredictable outcomes. I focus on non-objective, process-based painting, employing rigorous and repetitive methodologies which, I will argue, are essentially a form of machine-mimicry. When the machine encounters a disrupting element, the task continues unabated, forming a glitch.

This idea developed from an interrogation of my own art practice, in which a highly disciplined approach paradoxically precipitates the unpredictable bleed of paint, misalignments and inaccuracies. This has led me to explore self-imposed limitations and highly restricted visual vocabulary on the one hand, and the phenomena of glitch and malfunction on the other.

I conduct an examination of motives, processes and materials in my own practice, determining the conditions which facilitate glitch and the particular form in which it is manifested. I focus on the history of glitch and malfunction in sound-related media, proposing that glitch can occur in the plastic arts under certain conditions created by the artist. I draw on the work of Sol Lewitt and Jack Whitten, as well as my contemporaries, in order to relate this tendency to a broader trend which confronts and ultimately embraces the aesthetics of decay, entropy, fracture and rupture.

Initially I ask, what is glitch in non-objective, process-based painting and what criteria would need to be met for such a description? Coming to suspect that glitch may be an aesthetic dead-end, I develop tactics for development and expansion, via visual splits and ruptures, whilst maintaining my rules-based practice.

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INTRODUCTION

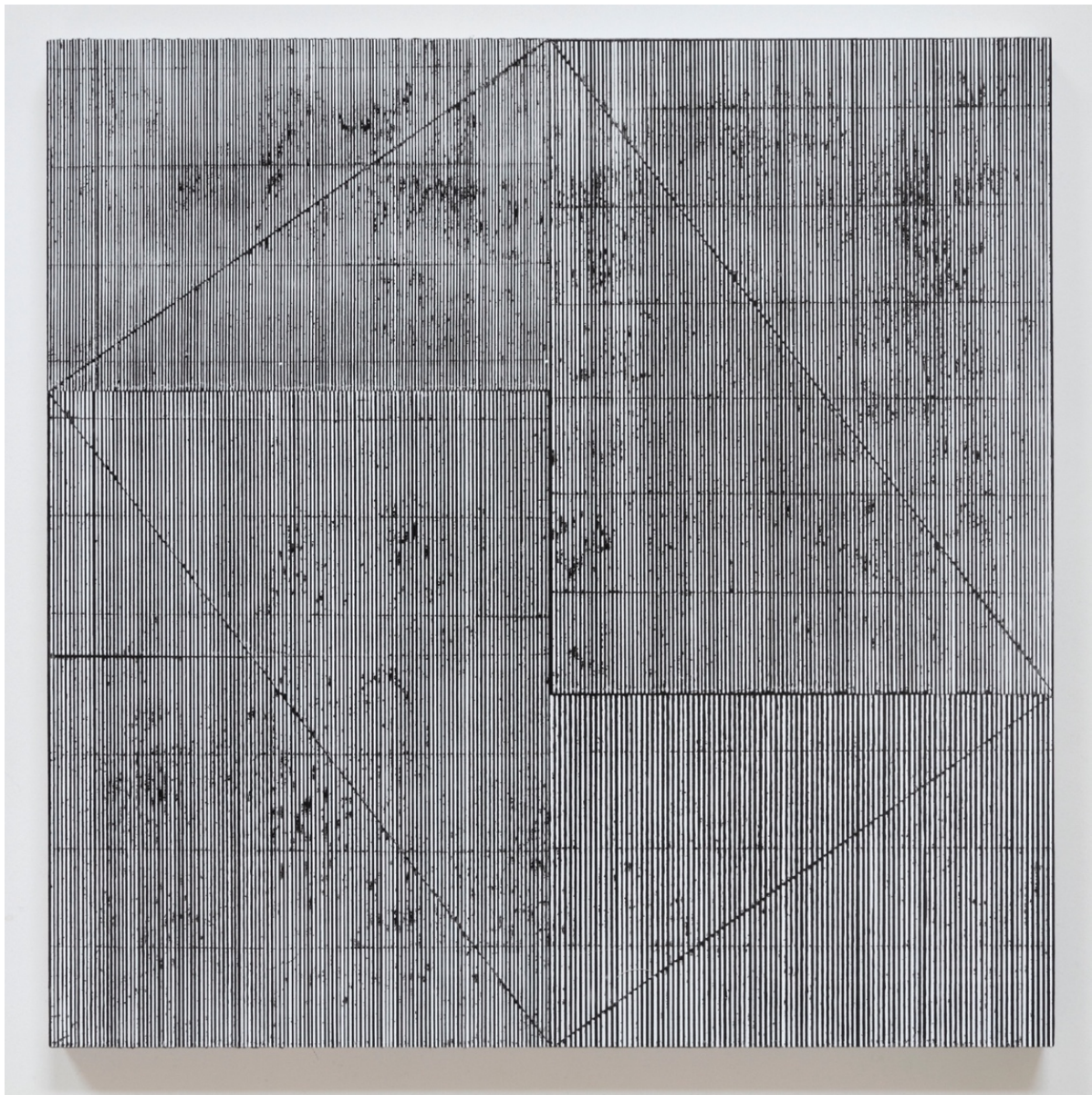


Figure 1. *Selvage*, 2015, enamel and acrylic on wood, 50 x 50 cm.

My research investigates the relationship between restricted modes of painting and unpredictable outcomes. There are many artists for whom the paradoxical connection between controlled input and disordered output is vital. I was curious to learn how and why these artists exert control over their process, restricting their materials and methods to a narrow range, in order to invite aberration, imprecision, and randomness. In my own studio practice, this relationship between measured input and unpredictable output is central. I work using a predetermined labour-intensive method and employ a limited set of materials, the combination of which results in a glitched and imperfect outcome (fig. 1).

My research focuses on the overlap between non-objective painting, which is concerned with qualities such as line, form, and colour, and process-based art, where the emphasis is on the way an artwork is generated. In particular, I concentrate on material practice where there is a clear delineation between plan, execution, and outcome. Specifically, an artist will create a governing plan of how the artwork will unfold, before commencing on the seemingly perfunctory affair of execution. I have come to think of these strictly organised and regimented processes as programmatic modes of making, where the action of the artist resembles that of a simple machine. During the making of the artwork, the plan is not adjusted, leading to various irregularities and aberrations. These are neither contrived nor corrected, but simply occur. Essentially, a situation is set up and allowed to unfold.

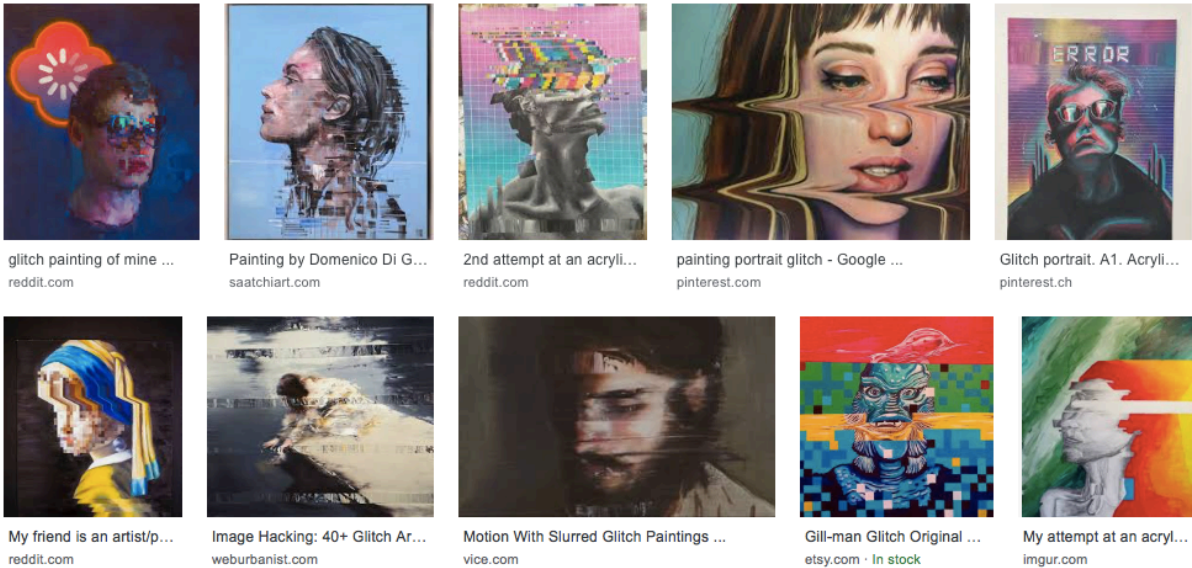


Figure 2. Google Image Search results for “glitch + painting” (generated 23 January, 2020).

Initially, I compare this type of practice with glitch art, which employs time-based media including analogue and digital technologies in its production. I ask, what criteria are required in order to describe a painting outcome as glitch art? There are many paintings which *depict* glitch, by which I mean paintings which replicate digital glitches in the medium of paint. These however can be considered figurative. They use as their subject matter digitally generated glitches and these are rendered in a representational manner. One only needs to do an online search using the words *glitch* and *painting* to find innumerable examples (fig. 2). Put simply, glitch can occur, be generated or produced through a process, but the examples most often provided as instances of glitch painting are actually paintings *of* glitches, lifted from their native digital environment and wrought in paint.

In glitch art, technological means are employed to generate unexpected, corrupted outcomes which might be presented as static or moving images, interactive games, websites, and the like. In process-based art, the focus is on the operations by which an artwork comes to be, rather than the art object itself. Mechanisms or systems set in motion by the artist might involve natural phenomena such as gravity, decay, or accretion, or the artist may employ a predetermined system of working. Though neither genre entirely captures what is happening in my work, they frame a gap in the existing research, which my work attempts to address. I have chosen to draw the comparison with glitch art because I feel that it has been overlooked, or at best, misinterpreted when discussing painting.

What can be revealed by drawing these comparisons? As I explain in Chapter 1, pursuing glitch alone as a painting outcome risks encountering a creative dead end, not by being entirely predictable, but by producing outcomes which become increasingly knowable. The research journey outlined in this exegesis documents how I have expanded my practice by asking how an immutable system can produce new outcomes.

I have found that contextualising the paint-glitch within the wider spectrum of malfunction allows the generated outcomes to evolve, and avoids predictability and repetition. By drawing parallels with concepts from audiology and the digital arts, such as noise and glitch, I have begun to recognise that these kinds of partial failures are inevitable or intrinsic to every system, whether it is on a cellular, planetary, or universal scale. Gradually, by addressing themes of decay and fracture, my art practice has expanded from being the product of its own self-fulfilling internal logic, to encompassing more expansive themes, such as the steady and inevitable entropy of all things.

In this introduction, I will discuss an exhibition which took place at the very beginning of my practice-led journey, and which provided the germ of my research questions. Following this, I will introduce the idea of noise within art practice, via three specific examples from the fields of sound-based and visual art. By correlating the thematic focus of the exhibition with these examples, I will frame the gap in knowledge represented by current research on process-based art and glitch. This will provide a backdrop for the trajectory of my own studio research.

THE *POST-OP* EXHIBITION

I began my research journey on the last day of March, 2014. At the end of April, I received an exhibition catalogue in the mail, sent by a friend in Paris. The exhibition was entitled *Post-Op: Perceptual Gone Painterly 1958–2014*, and its importance to my research cannot be overstated. This exhibition presented the work of twenty artists, transcending many movements within non-objective art, from the mid-twentieth century Zero Group (which itself includes auto-destructive, kinetic, colour-field and process-based artists), through conceptual art, to the neo-geo artists of the late twentieth century. The theme, though never referred to as such, is glitch and visual noise.

Curator Matthieu Poirier describes the included work as representing:

the dialogue between two aesthetics which are often considered as contradictory: the minimal, systematic geometry of optical art ... and an informal tendency to emphasise the various operations, traces, digressions and other physical accidents inherent in manual execution.¹

The title of the exhibition intentionally invites interpretation as both post-optical and post-operative, which Poirier defines as simultaneously *after 'optical art,'* a movement “deliberately confined to the picture plane,” and *after an operation.*² This latter sense is described as “the post-operative phase, after a surgical act (manual or mechanical) on the integrity of a body.”³ Each of the paintings and drawings presented is formed from the accrual of innumerable, near-identical marks, more often than

¹ Matthieu Poirier, catalogue essay for the exhibition *Post-Op: Perceptual Gone Painterly, 1958–2014* (Paris: Galerie Perrotin, 2014), 11.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

not in the form of parallel or radiating lines, dots, or other simple motifs (fig. 3). Additionally, each work's production is mediated in some way, whether through the employment of rulers and knives, or methods such as screen-printing and laser-cutting.



Figure 3. *Post-Op: Perceptual Gone Painterly* (installation image), 2014, Galleries Perrotin, (left & centre) Kazuko Miyamoto and (right) Eric Baudart.

Crucially, these diverse methodologies produce work which looks in some way blemished. More specifically, though a mechanistic method has been employed in each instance, the outcome includes relics of an imperfect process. These manifest variously, as, for example, imprecision between measured elements, non-uniform marks, and tremulous linework (fig. 4). Poirier observes that “this corrupting action is always partial: in a fragile equilibrium, the connection to the effect is never broken.”⁴ By this, he refers to the balance between signal and noise, whereby the grids, stripes, or other repeated motifs are never lost entirely to the encroaching interference.

⁴ *Ibid*, 12.

See also Hugh S. Manon and Daniel Temkin, “Notes on Glitch,” *World Picture Journal*, winter, 2011, http://worldpicturejournal.com/WP_6/Manon.html, point, point 34: “Glitching tends to seek liminal states, i.e. a half-crashed file, or a digital image that our analog fingering has only partly ruined, taking it almost but not quite beyond legibility. As any glitch artist will tell you, it is easy to kill a file. It is considerably more difficult to render a file undead, suspending it in a state of zombie-like decay. Glitch strives for this in-between zone: partial failure, but also a partial success.”

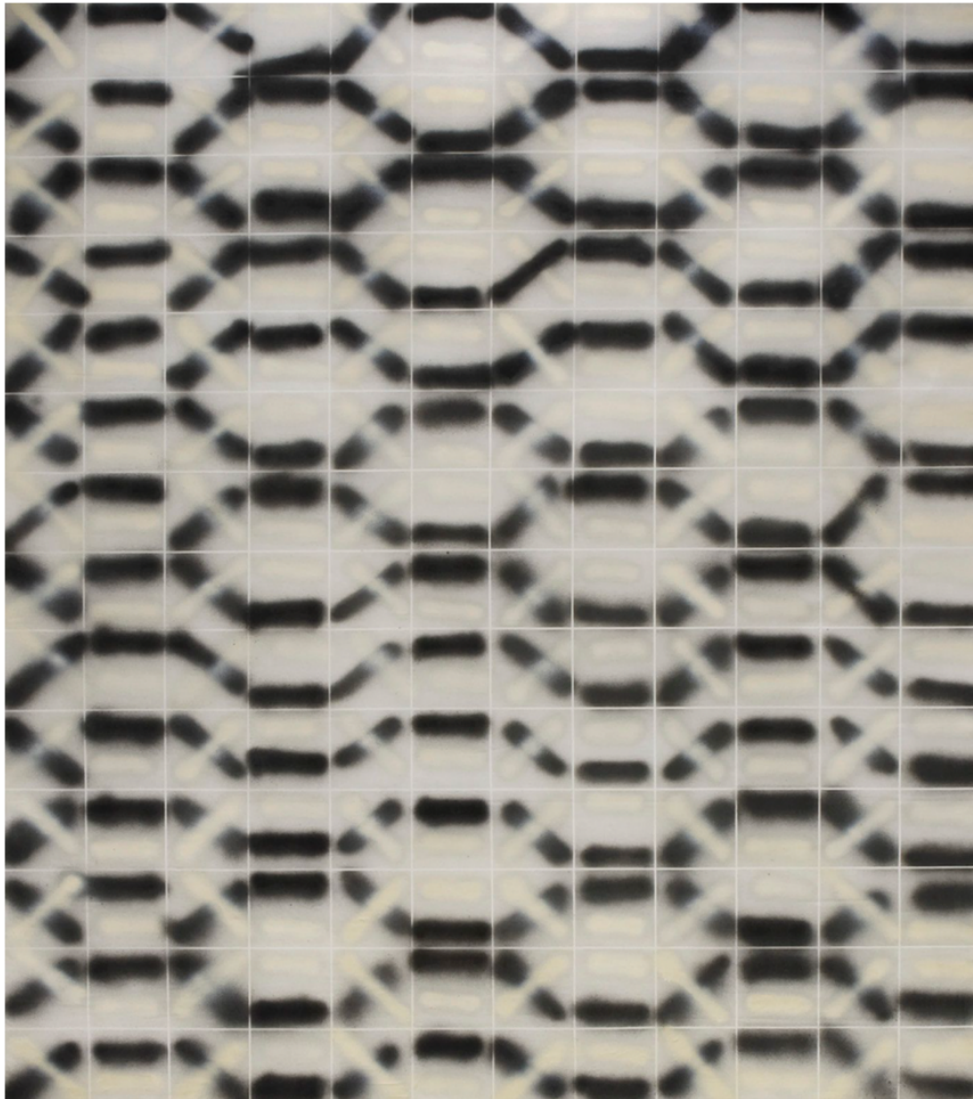


Figure 4. Kazuko Miyamoto, *Untitled (yellow and black spray paint over white grid)*, 1972, acrylic, enamel spray paint on canvas, 201 x 176 cm.

Poirier locates this tendency at the crossroads of “the minimal, systematic geometry of optical art” and the “informal tendency to emphasise the various operations, traces, digressions and other physical accidents inherent in manual execution.”⁵ As such, errant marks hint at the artists’ methodology and materials. By way of example, Eric Baudart’s *Papier Millimétré / Graph Paper* (fig. 5), is impossible to describe without also describing what it reveals about the process. The materials are listed as “graph paper and frame” and we can presume that the frame includes the cardboard backing, which is identifiable in the detailed image below, and that the gridded paper is adhered to the frame

⁵ Poirier, *Post-Op*, 1.

before each horizontal and vertical line is incised with a blade. This presumption is based on the grid of indentations which appears in the spaces exposed by the process itself.



Figure 5. Eric Baudart, *Papier Millimétré / Graph Paper*, 2014, graph paper and frame, 150 x 193 x 25 cm.

The finished artwork is a partially destroyed grid, situated at the midpoint between a complete object and its obliteration. By presenting this material failure in the final work, the destructive process reveals itself. Listening to the artist in interview, certain words stand out in his description of the work. The aberrations are referred to variously as *micro-seismology*, *incidents*, and *stigmata*, each of which exist as *events* in the production of the work.⁶ Similarly, Florian Quistrebert, who paints in tandem with his brother Michaël, speaks of the surprises and accidents which arise in their layered paintings. In this case, moiré patterns, seen as unexpected curved forms, arise without contrivance where the layers of striations interact (fig. 6).

⁶ Eric Baudart, interview with the artist, "Post-Op. Perceptual Gone Painterly. 1958–2014," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZWBA7YSml4&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=GaleriePerrotin.

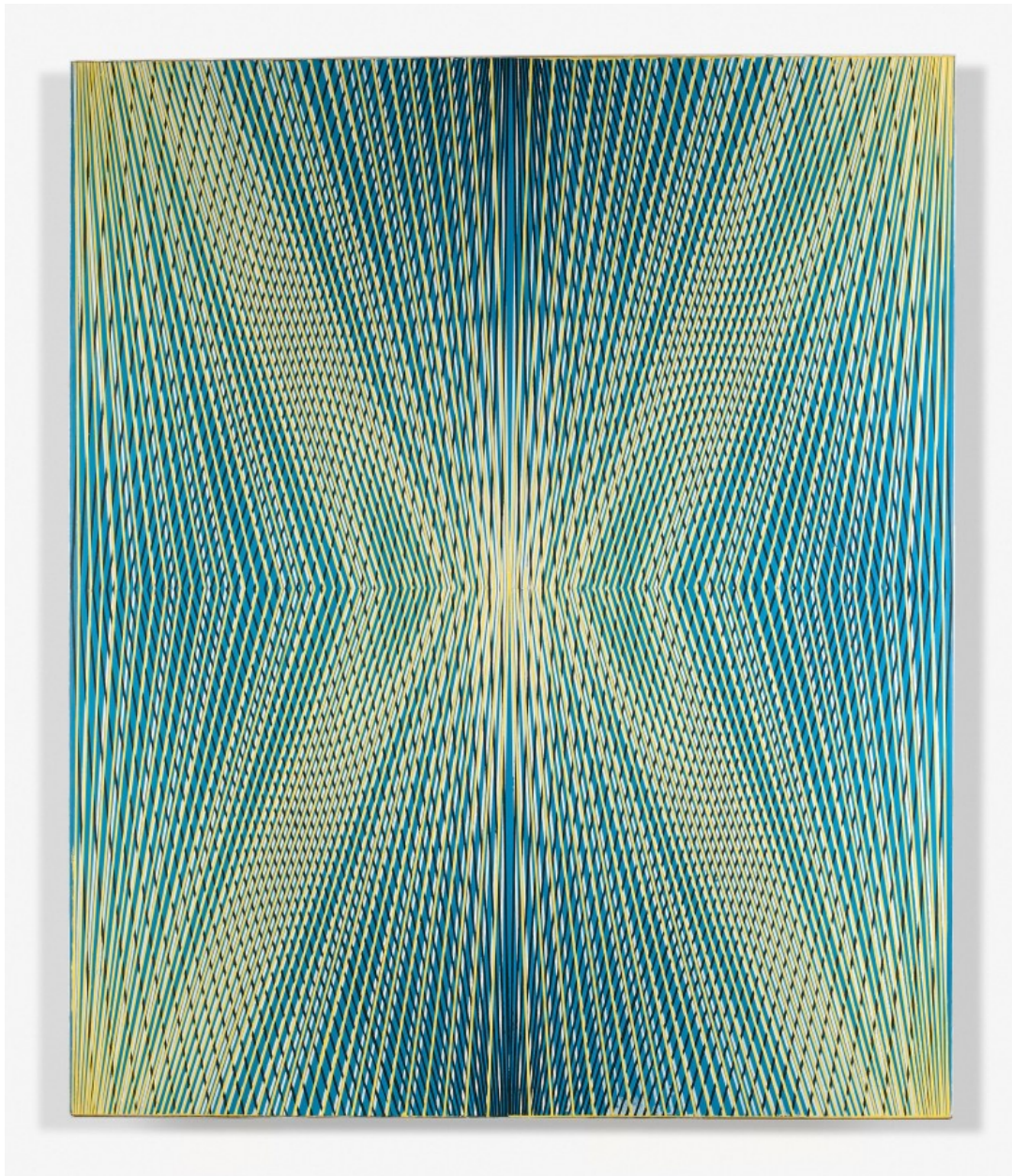


Figure 6. Florian & Michaël Quistrebert, *God 3*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 240 x 200 cm.

Each of the artists included in the *Post-Op* exhibition has a programmatic approach to their work, with a system put in place before commencement. The methodologies are for the most part carried out using laborious, time-consuming, and repetitive actions. The final outcome is a revelation, exposing the various material considerations which have preceded it. The curator of this exhibition has drawn together artists for whom visual noise has been framed as central. As I will elucidate in the first chapter, this aligns with process-based art broadly, and glitch art more specifically, despite the eschewal of digital and analogue technologies in favour of paint and other handwrought media.

Noise is a concept lifted from audiology, but often used to describe its visual equivalent. In the world of sound technology, the term relates to any audible element which is unintentionally recorded or transmitted, polluting the intended signal. This might be the hiss of an old cassette tape, background static over the radio, or any number of elements above and beyond the intended subject. I employ concepts such as noise and glitch, because these incorporate both my methodology and contextual research. In particular, the reframing of incidental background noise as subject matter in visual and sound-based art has become fundamental to my research.

THREE EXAMPLES: CAGE, BASINSKI, AND BURN

Though the absorption of noise and the glitch into sound-art and music has occurred relatively recently, a critical step towards this development occurred around the middle of the 20th century.⁷ This involved the creation of a seminal artwork in which incidental background noise was not only acceptable, but reframed as the subject matter. John Cage's composition, *4'33"*, is a three-part sound-work where the musician is instructed to *not* play their instrument for the allotted time (fig. 7).⁸ During the very first public performance of this work, no sound was purposefully made. The auditorium, however, was filled with the incidental noise of the audience shuffling in their seats, of the wind outside.⁹

Cage describes the revelation which was the catalyst for this work: "Suddenly I saw that the music, all the music was already there."¹⁰ Composer and biographer David Revill explains that the artist "conceived of a procedure which would enable him to derive the details of his music from the little glitches and imperfections which can be seen on sheets of paper."¹¹ Revill reveals that the concept arose after Cage encountered Robert Rauschenberg's white paintings. Rauschenberg stated that "a

⁷ Michael Betancourt, *Glitch Art in Theory and Practice: Critical Failures and Post-Digital Aesthetics* (New York, Routledge, 2017), 34–35.

⁸ The premiere of this performance was given on August 29, 1952, by David Tudor, at the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock, New York.

⁹ David Revill, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage, a life* (New York: Arcade, 1993), 165.

¹⁰ Kim Cascone, "The Aesthetics of Failure: "Post-Digital" Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music," *Computer Music Journal* Vol. 24, Issue 4 (Winter 2000): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1162/014892600559489>, 17.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 17.

canvas is never empty” because its surface acts as a landing-ground for shadows, dust, and light.¹² By situating Cage’s inspiration in the paintings of Rauchenberg, the synaesthetic aspect of noise is heightened. In the following two examples, however, the foregrounded noise is respectively either audible or visible.

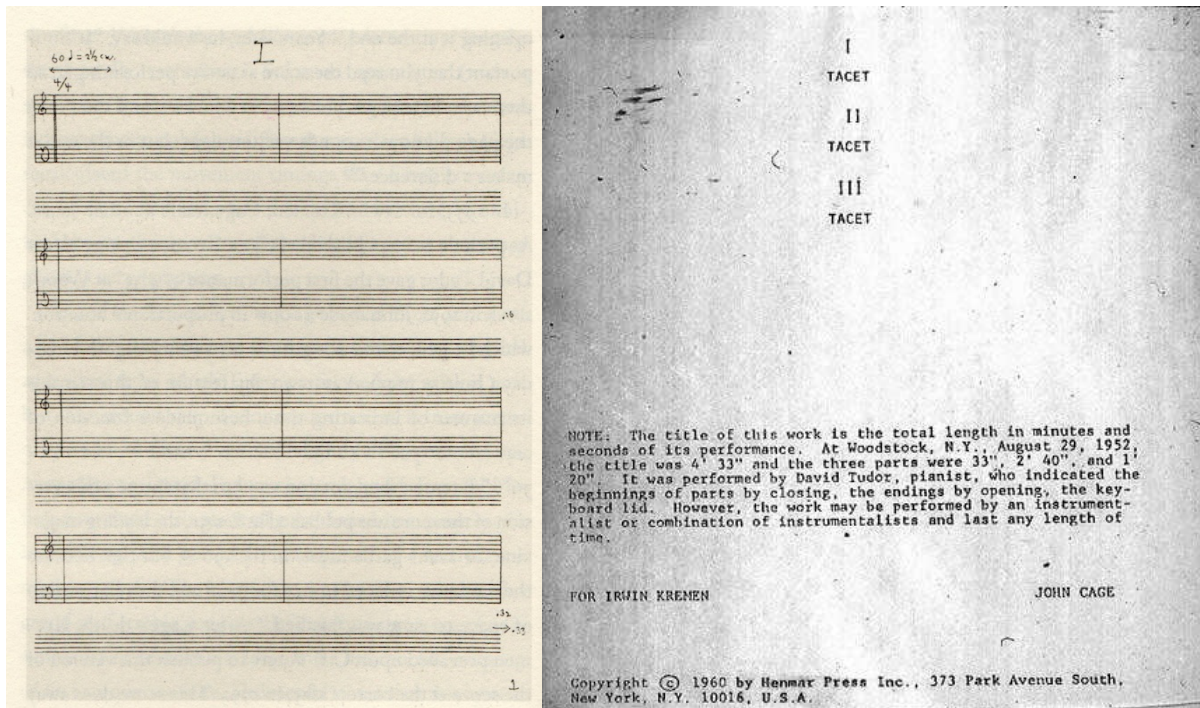


Figure 7. Two scores for John Cage’s 4’33”, (left) 1952 (right) 1960, ink on paper, dimensions variable.

Composer William Basinski’s best-known work is a sound series known as *The Disintegration Loops*. These recordings were created when the artist attempted to digitise several aged audio cassette loops and instead recorded the sounds of the magnetic tape crumbling as it wound through the tape player (fig. 8).¹³ His use of playback technology is but one example of the way that a mediating device can remove the mark of the hand, replacing it with relics of the process. This in turn reveals aspects of the material and, as such, is often described as an example of process-based art.

¹² Revill, *John Cage, a life*, 164.

¹³ William Basinski, *The Disintegration Loops*, composed, recorded and mixed by William Basinski, 1982–2001, Musex International (BMI), 2013, compact disc set, liner notes by Anthony.

This broad category involves the manipulation of material through any number of actions—suspending, pouring, dropping—as well as natural mechanisms like condensing, decomposing, and melting. In Basinski’s case, the aged tape loops began to disintegrate as they wound repeatedly past the tape head, creating a breath-like, distorted soundscape composed of remnants of the original score, combined with inverted sounds, static, and interference. This result demonstrates the fragility of the original medium, drawing attention to and speaking to themes such as entropy and impermanence.



Figure 8. William Basinski working with cassette loops. Photograph by Peter J. Kierzkowski.

Finally, in seeking analogy between sound-based and visual artworks which foreground noise, it is hard to find a closer correlation than that of Australian conceptual artist Ian Burn’s series of twelve *Xerox Books*. To create each book, Burn took a blank sheet of A4 paper and photocopied it using a Xerox machine. The resulting photocopy was then used as the master and this was in turn photocopied. The copy produced then became the master and so on, until there were 100 consecutive copies, which were bound into a book (fig. 9). Despite the use of unblemished paper, each page is nonetheless increasingly polluted by the visual noise of mechanical imperfection. Theoretically, if the technology employed had been transparent in its reproduction of the blank page, each copy would be an identical unmarked page. Instead, from the first copy onwards, small marks appear and accrue so that by the last page the entire field is marked with small specks.

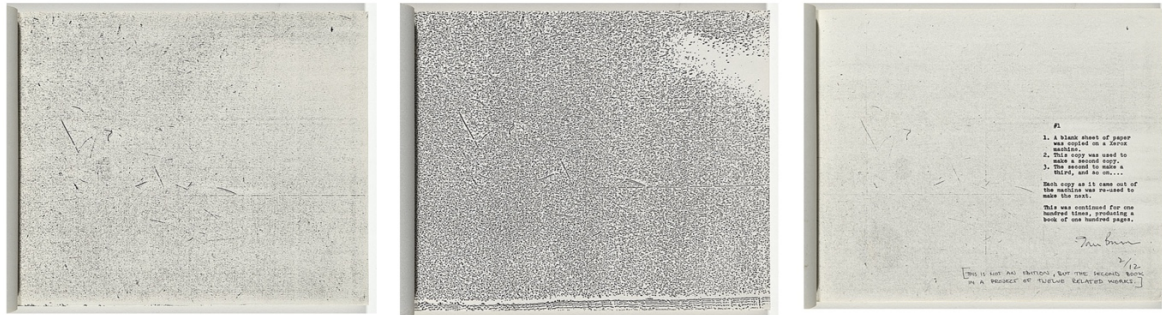


Figure 9. Ian Burn, *Xerox Book #1* (detail), 1968, paper and toner, book, 21.2 x 27.6 cm.

These toner deposits represent pollution of the blank page by an imperfect mechanical system. Marks on the glass and the toner-drum of the copier, dust on the paper and in the machine—each contribute to the visual corruption. As each copy is made, the previous marks are duplicated and more are added, forming visual noise where silence (blankness) would be anticipated. It is important to observe that Burn *allowed* this noise to accrue, rather than simulating or contriving the effect, reframing noise as signal.¹⁴ In a recording environment, effects such as *leakage* or *spill* are undesirable. However, when this type of event is accepted and absorbed into an art practice, it becomes central.

In each of these examples, the background noise is accepted and brought to the fore. In Burn's case, noise is created by mechanical imperfections; in Cage's, by any and all sounds which may happen to occur during the performance. Basinski's series, on the other hand documents the gradual disintegration of the materials involved. In all works, a system is decided upon by the artist, then set into motion before a result is achieved. The plan in this instance is the input, the program or intention to carry out a certain action, where the process refers to the actual execution of this plan without interference from the maker. The outcome is the product or output of the plan and process, which reveals the glitch or the noise to an unpredictable degree, to the artist and the viewer equally.

My research focuses on painting and drawing processes which are mediated by hand-held tools, such as blades and rulers, and which are limited to the accrual of repeated marks, in particular the parallel line (fig. 10). The outcome, however, is of a similar nature, and we can see partial corruption in the paint-glitch. Substituting the human body for the mechanism of production and commanding it to

¹⁴ Sam Vladimirski, "How an Office Tool Changed the Art Game," Medium, Jan 28, 2020, <https://medium.com/@samuelvladimirsky/copy-art-copy-art-copy-art-c063e757391f>.

operate without amendment through a series of identical, repetitive actions draws attention to the parallel between two disparate types of media.



Figure 10. My materials: ballpoint pen; ruler; masking tape; scalpel.

STRIPES

I employ a single motif in my paintings—the stripe—and there are innumerable artists who have focused on this same device with differing outcomes. Varying the quality, thickness, and trajectory of the lines inevitably changes the outcome. Each artist may have specific motivations in limiting their visual repertoire to the stripe or line; however the motif itself carries with it certain historical baggage.

To stripe a surface ... serves to distinguish it, to point it out, to oppose it or associate it with another surface, and thus to classify it, to keep an eye on it, to verify it, even to censor it.¹⁵

Professor of medieval history and Western symbiology, Michel Pastoreau, explains that over the past eight centuries, stripes have been employed to draw the eye and with it, attention, to create a warning or alert the viewer. In the medieval Western world, striped clothing indicated that the wearer was an outcast or reprobate: '[stripes] disturb or pervert the established order; they all have more or less to do with the devil'.¹⁶ Pastoreau states that this association could be due to the disruptive visual effect of stripes, but that it likely derives from a literal interpretation of a passage in the bible which forbids the wearing of "two cloths."¹⁷ At any rate, by the 12th and 13th centuries, "the demeaning, pejorative, or clearly diabolic quality of striped dress" had been firmly established (fig. 11).

Over time, the meaning of the stripe has evolved and expanded. Where the medieval stripe was an indicator of disorder and transgression, the modern and contemporary stripe has gradually transformed into a mechanism for setting things in order. Through the Renaissance and Romantic periods, striped clothing indicated virtue. But by the 16th and 17th centuries, this meaning broadened to denote hygiene, danger, aristocracy, exoticism, the uniform, alongside its original negative connotations, so that the romantic and revolutionary stripe co-exists with the striped prisoner.¹⁸ These myriad, often contradictory meanings each transgress the chromatic order and so indicate a deviation.¹⁹ Though the cultural connotations of the stripe motif have faded over time, it is still today employed graphically to draw attention and dominate the visual field.²⁰

¹⁵ Michel Pastoreau and Jodi Gladding, *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes*, (New York: Washington Square Press, 2003), 89.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 22:9–11 (NIV)

¹⁸ Pastoreau, *The Devil's Cloth*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 22.



Figure 11. (top) Unknown photographer, prisoners in Utah; (lower left) Unknown artist, *The devils darling*, (British political cartoon satirising Napoleon's exile to Elba), 1814; (lower right) Pietro Lorenzetti, *Carmelite hermits at the Spring of Elijah* (detail from the predella of the altarpiece), tempera and gold on wood, 1329.

I would add to this that the visually striking nature of this motif is due to its characteristic uniformity, which has the capacity to set a surface apart from its surroundings. Further, the consistent nature of stripes raises in us the expectation that the pattern continues. Like a drumbeat, stripes operate as a framework within which deviation can be thrown into sharp relief. Paradoxically, despite the ability of stripes to disrupt the visual field, they are themselves disrupted by the effects of the glitch.

During the course of my research journey, I have investigated a diverse range of subjects, exploring the motivations and implications of establishing rules or strictures for the generation of non-objective paintings. Recurring subjects include labour and the immersive process, and the link between control and acceptance of error or accident. The research is divided into two parts, the first being a discussion of my practice as a discrete system, followed by an account of the development of this system to include a range of new tactics.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In Chapter 1, I conduct a deep exploration of my existing practice, which involves a minute examination of motives, processes, and materials. I determine the conditions which facilitate glitch and the particular form in which painted noise is manifested. I contextualise my research by providing an overview of glitch in its accepted form, correlating these conditions to those within formalist, non-objective, and process-based painting. By positing that the same event can occur in the plastic arts under certain conditions created by the artist and investigating how glitch might arise, I differentiate aspects of painted and drawn glitch. In discussing labour and the immersive practice, I ascertain that these are employed in a form of machine-mimicry. Specifically, I draw a clear connection between the particular limitations and immersive, programmatic methods employed and their corresponding outcomes.

I then investigate the graphite wall drawings of Sol Lewitt, to assess what reframing the handwrought mark as glitch achieves. I embark upon my own studio journey by initiating a drawing project, incorporating insights gained through experimentation and, in particular, investigating the link between glitch and materiality. This almost immediately draws attention to the repetitive nature of

the blemished outcome, and I am forced to ask whether this aesthetic is sufficient to sustain a painting practice.

In Chapter 2, I address my suspicion that glitch may ultimately lead to an aesthetic dead-end and be an insufficient foundation for an ongoing art practice. This observation drives me to seek expanded methods for developing my work without disrupting the strictly regimented process already established. I determine that the broader spectrum of destructive practice from which glitch is drawn is a possible direction, and begin to develop a range of new methodologies via the splitting and fracturing of forms.

To advance my studio research, I increase the amount of physical handling required to make a painting, enhancing the aggregation of corruption in the final work. I look to the circular form as a method for simultaneously implying and undermining solidity, to increased scale, and to sequential work. Finally, I multiply the painting surface and expand the paintings into three dimensions to explore the fracturing of the stripe across cuboid forms. Documentation of these objects ultimately creates a feedback loop to two-dimensional images, in particular highlighting various ambiguities which arise and correlate to glitch.

In Chapter 3, I explore aspects of the compositional possibilities of painting, via the parallel practice of urban photography. I observe that much of the fractured aesthetic which I generate in my paintings is also manifested in this alternative medium. I use this relationship to explore methods of expansion into the broader category of malfunction, via visual ambiguity. This is augmented by an overview of the non-compositional methods of Ellsworth Kelly, a painter for whom photography played an understated but important role. Finally, recognising that it is a recurring subject matter of my photographs, I investigate traffic and construction signage, before drawing these various threads together to produce a resolved body of work, in the form of the *New Signal* exhibition.

In the final period of my research, I recognise its overarching expansion. What began as a study of a logical, enclosed process, and increased to include fracture and malfunction in the urban environment, expands still further to include disruptions in my own life and the broader world. In Chapter 4, I investigate the early 20th century military tactic of dazzle camouflage, which seeks to confound visual coherence. I conduct a case study of painter Jack Whitten, whose mechanised and

logical processes nonetheless generate an ineffable mood or atmosphere, and generate new methodologies aimed to inspire a sense of unease and disquiet in the viewer.

Ultimately, I reframe my art practice as a method for negotiating increasingly difficult circumstances, and determine the correlation between this coping strategy, and the compulsion to employ repetition and create uniformity, only to corrupt and distort this ordered aesthetic. I relate this tendency to a broader trend which confronts and ultimately embraces the aesthetics of decay, entropy, fracture, and rupture in a variety of artforms. I conclude with a discussion of my exhibition *Repeater*, for which I produced a body of work amalgamating the various approaches developed over the course of my research.

CHAPTER 1

In the mid-nineties, towards the end of my undergraduate studies, I developed a painting practice which has continued to this day. Employing a set of strictly limited materials and a single, inflexible method based on the stripe motif, it has always seemed to me that to change is to cheat. The methodology I have developed is laborious, time-consuming, and finicky, and depending on their size, paintings can take days, weeks, or months to complete. Despite my stubborn refusal to amend the method, even to reduce physical discomfort or make the process easier in some regard, the outcome of each painting is always a discovery, and I can never know for certain what the results will be.

To approximate a scientific approach where variables are restricted, and despite the limitations already present, I initiated my PhD research by stripping my existing practice back to its bare bones. I removed colour from my palette, limiting myself to a black and white binary, and reduced compositional elements, allowing me to focus on the most fundamental aspects of my practice. I divided my methodology into three key components: the plan, the process, and the outcome. The first of these refers to the permissible range of materials and methods available to me at the outset. The second element, the process, encompasses the laborious, gradual, and immersive series of tasks which bring the work into being. Finally, the outcome refers to everything visible in the finished painting.

There is often a presumption about what is involved in the activity of painting. An artist might work with a brush or palette knife, applying paint, moving it across a surface, adding pigment, and using it to create the desired forms. At any rate, paintings are generally *painted*. The American artist Jack Whitten instead used to state, "I don't paint a painting, I make a painting."²¹ I find that this particular turn of phrase is more accurate than the usual expression, *I paint*, because of the method I employ. Though my work is made *from* paint, I spend very little time applying the medium to the support. Instead my process is akin to stencilling, and more time is spent removing paint than adding it. Further, my chosen materials are not specifically "fine arts" media: house and industrial acrylic paint and enamel; masking tape; metal ruler; ballpoint pen; and timber. These items are everyday rather than specialised, purchased at a hardware store or simply on hand.

²¹ Jack Whitten quoted by Richard Shiff in "Image That Comes Out of Matter," *More Dimensions Than You Know, Jack Whitten Paintings 1979–1989* (London: Hauser & Wirth Publishers, 2017), 20–21.

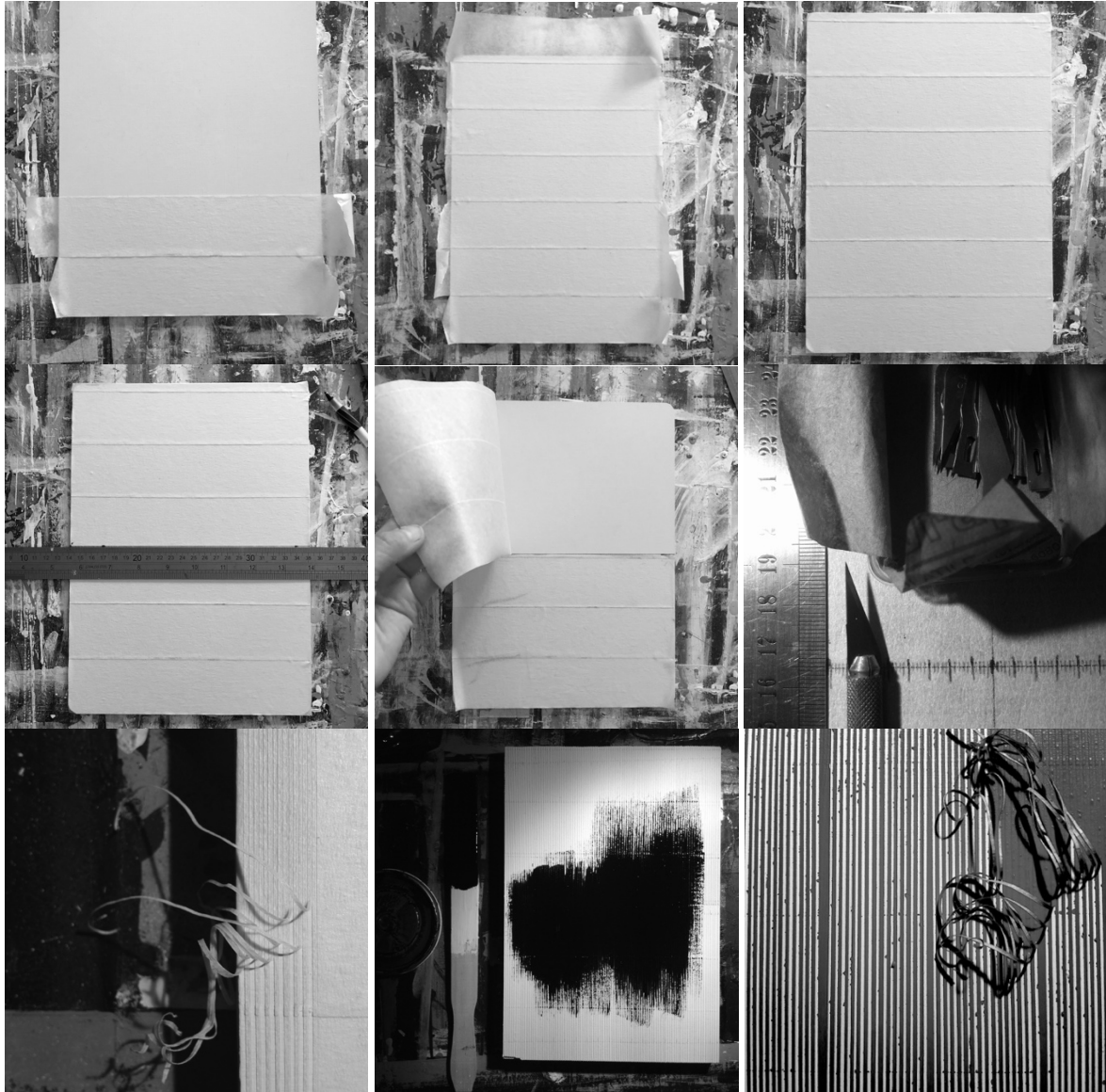


Figure 12a–i. My painting process, step by step.

I will now explain how my paintings are made. I select a timber support with minimal texture. After priming, I apply matte acrylic paint. Once dry, masking tape is applied horizontally, from the lower edge of the painting, working upwards, overlapping slightly, to create an unbroken layer that covers the entire surface (figs. 12a, b). Overhanging tape is trimmed (fig. 12c). Next, the taped layer is incised horizontally at the midpoint of the painting panel (fig. 12d). I carefully peel back and remove each section of tape before reapplying it to the surface (fig. 12e).

Increments are marked along the edge of each section and these measurements are used to incise parallel lines with a blade (fig. 12*f*). I remove every second strip of the tape, leaving a layer of thin bands of tape across the primed surface (fig. 12*g*). Once the entire surface is incised, I will often insert a simple compositional element, such as an arc or diagonal strikethrough, by scoring the taped lines. Enamel paint is then applied in a single, thick layer (fig. 12*h*). Later, after the paint has become tacky, I use my scalpel to lift and remove the remaining tape (fig. 12*i*). The painting is now complete and left to dry.

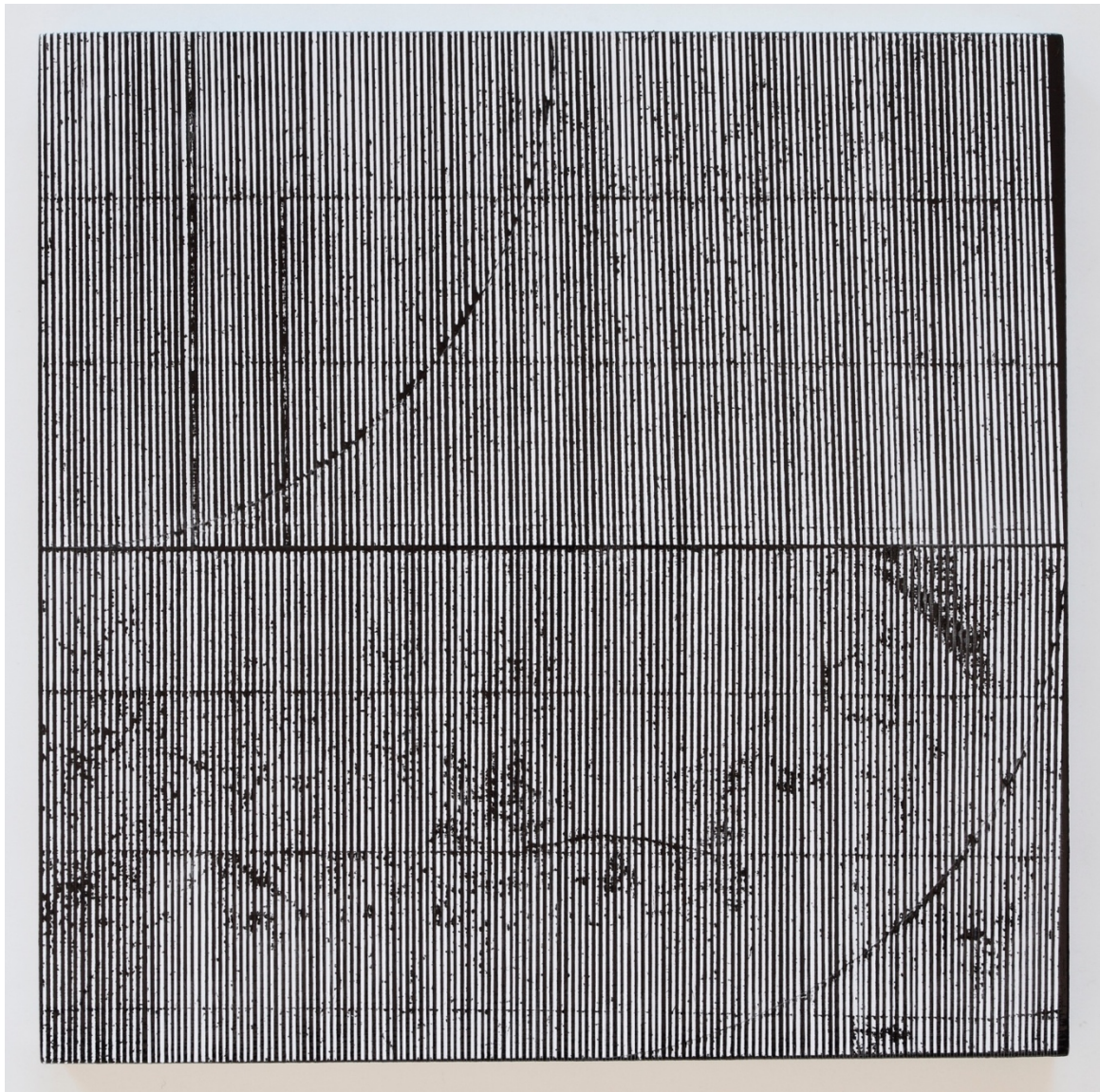


Figure 13. *30/30*, 2014, enamel and acrylic on wood, 30 x 30 cm.

At this point, something beyond the programmed method is revealed (fig. 13). If I divide the marks in the finished work into the visual equivalent of signal and noise, the signal is the field of lines or stripes, and the noise is the paint-bleed. The outcome is unpredictable, except for the relatively uniform marks running horizontally, where the tape overlaps. I allow the paint-bleed to occur by using off-the-shelf masking tape, which lends itself to this kind of aberration. The degree of paint-bleed can also be affected by external factors such as humidity and the viscosity and pigment load of the paint, not to mention the pressure of the blade, which is determined by my mood and energy level. The outcome has a direct equivalent in sound: the bleeding of an audio source output into another's input. In audiology, this effect is known as *leakage* or *spill* and is, in a recording environment, considered an undesirable event. When this type of event is accepted and absorbed into an art practice however, it begins to take on characteristics of glitch art.

In this first chapter, I will contextualise my research project by illuminating two distinct fields: process-based art and glitch art. Neither genre entirely captures what is happening in my work, but instead they frame a gap in the existing research. In contextualising my work, I will employ examples from contemporary artist peers, geographically disparate artists whose practices overlap in method and outcome. I will then discuss the aspect of labour within the immersive process, identified as everything which takes place between the plan and the outcome. A case study of the graphite wall drawings of Sol Lewitt follows, where I discuss the carefully delineated aspects of his practice as well as the overlooked affective dimension of his output. Finally, I will discuss a drawing project, embarked upon in the first year of my research, to test a precept of glitch art in a direct way, through an experiment with changed materials. This initial investigation will lead unexpectedly to an early course change, a new set of challenges and questions, and an expansion into new territory.

CONTEXT: GLITCH ART

The word *glitch* is in common use. If someone says that “there has been a glitch,” we know that there has been an unanticipated setback, but also that it is non-catastrophic. We may also presume the source of the glitch to be technical; a machine error, fault in equipment, or issue with transmission. This is a relatively recent definition. In the early Space Age, glitch was used to refer to “spikes in

electrical current,” and by 1965, it had entered general use.²² However, this specialised terminology was derived from the Yiddish *glitshn*, referring to a slippery area like a skating rink.²³ Contrarily, something smooth, gliding, and amorphous was overnight transformed into a spiked fluctuation, pointy, prickly, and occurring in clearly defined sharp bursts.

The connection here is *slippage*, where something skates from its intended path, like a turntable needle jumping its tracks from one groove into the next, disrupting playback. This shift in meaning is from something tangible to a descriptor of an abstract event, a fluctuation related to power and transmission. The glitch sits alongside concepts like wear and tear, corruption or deterioration, and the undesirable noise of the machine polluting the signal. But in recent decades *glitch* has come to have an agreeable meaning through the recognition that analogue and digital artefacts can be exploited and transformed via intention and acceptance.²⁴ As such, advances in technology facilitating the elimination of noise are paradoxically countered by a nostalgia for this now-eliminated aspect of recording and playback. The territory of glitch is now fruitful grounds for creative output, predominantly within the fields of sound art and music, digital art, and the moving image (fig. 14). These are time-based media, where generation, transmission, and playback allow the transitory glitch to reside, underscoring the fact that the term *glitch* describes both cause and effect.

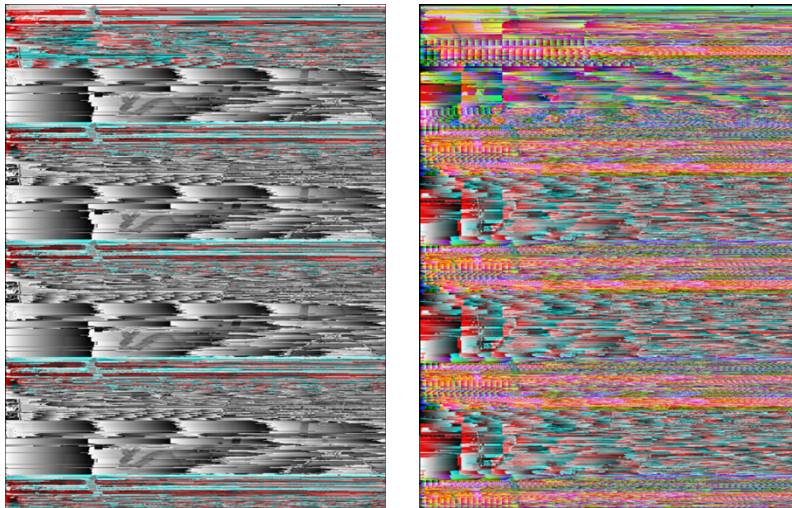


Figure 14. Rosa Menkman, *Valentines for glitches and the gun is good*, 2011, stills from digital artwork.

²² Ben Zimmer, “The hidden History of Glitch,” *Word Routes*, November 4, 2013, <https://www.vocabulary.com/articles/wordroutes/the-hidden-history-of-glitch/>.

²³ Kate Burridge, *Weeds In The Garden Of Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25–26.

²⁴ Cascone, “The Aesthetics of Failure.”



Figure 15. Two examples of a “wild glitch” captured by the author whilst viewing a lecture on YouTube. In the first, we can see the speaker despite corruption; in the second, she dissolves into the grid of pixels.

The broad characteristic of glitch art is that it is created via a mechanical system which has been pushed to or beyond its intended limits. Importantly, however, the machine is not stopped by the glitch, but instead continues to function until the task is complete.²⁵ Glitch is a balancing act, residing on a spectrum of tactics ranging from minor manipulations through to complete destruction.²⁶ At one end of this spectrum is a minor incursion, where technology is manipulated in a way which is temporary, reversible, or non-damaging. At the opposite end is annihilation of the artwork, often within the context of a performance. Between these two extremes lies the glitch. In something glitched, we detect both the signal and noise, allowing us to see the corrupting element but also to recognise what it is that has been corrupted (fig. 15).

As outlined by Caleb Kelly in *Cracked Media: The Sound of Malfunction*, the driving force behind glitch art is threefold. Firstly, as a creative strategy for being in the world, through acceptance of fallibility. Secondly, reframing the noise as signal and revealing rather than concealing the material and method. And finally, forming something new from something old, such as extending or manipulating technology to create a new sound. For something glitch-like to flourish, certain criteria must be met, such as having a simple protocol and executing it until the task is complete, despite disruptions.²⁷

GLITCH AND PAINTING PRACTICE

I chose to align my painting practice with glitch art because I feel that it has been overlooked when discussing painting. Though *glitch* is a term understood and employed in general conversation, when it comes to painting, it has been misapplied to work which representationally depicts digital glitch. I find this curious given that the unexpected marks in my own work—and in the work of other artists, for example those in the *Post-Op* exhibition—are frequently described as glitches. It is important to draw

²⁵ Hugh S. Manon and Daniel Temkin, “Notes on Glitch,” winter, 2011, http://worldpicturejournal.com/WP_6/Manon.html, point, point 34.

²⁶ Caleb Kelly, *Cracked Media: The Sound of Malfunction* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 32.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 286–321.

attention to the fact that the term *glitch* describes not just the outcome, but also the fault in the system which brings it into being.²⁸ It is both the error and the outcome of that error.

Though there are certain aspects of process-based art which are relevant, I do not set up a situation and then allow natural forces to act upon the materials, though there is an element of this where the paint-bleed occurs. Instead I ask, *What happens when I undertake this process?*, before setting my own body in motion, performing a repeated action like a machine. Though I have come to think of these methodologies as programmatic ways of making, where the procedure resembles the action of a simple mechanism, there are two important distinctions which must be drawn, and these are closely intertwined: the importance of physical effort, of toil and labour; and the self-awareness or reflective observation which goes on during the procedure. I will discuss these together in the next section.

LABOUR AND IMMERSIVE PRACTICE

In my painting practice, the bridge between the program or plan and the outcome is the immersive process. This consists of the performance of innumerable, identical actions, mediated by a ruler and blade. Importantly, I do not allow myself to intervene in the procedure, to perform course correction or to revisit a painting and reduce aberrations. Once the predetermined steps have been carried out, the painting is complete. Having a simple protocol allows me to work, not *without thinking*, but in a state of detachment which, in turn, helps me work *through* irregularities. The idea struck me that restrictive art practices, in particular those which involve an immersive, often laborious and repetitive process, resemble machinic making. I find the semi-detached mindset necessary, for though I work mechanically, I am not a machine.

²⁸ Manon and Temkin, "Notes on Glitch," point 2.

It has already been observed, for example by American artist Robert Morris, that for “many 20th-century artists ... some part of the systematic making process has been automated.”²⁹ When he speaks of automation, he refers to a kind of “controlled chance,” where the artist sets up an *a priori* plan to “open the work and the artist’s interacting behaviour to completing forces beyond his total personal control.”³⁰ I consider that machinic or automated making might take forms which look quite different to one another. For example, the work might be executed *by* a machine, or it might be made by the artist *in a machine-like manner*. This more often than not involves using tools and other intermediary devices to extend the artist’s gesture, so that the hand is distanced from the final artwork.

Dutch artist Antigoon blends techniques derived from his background in both graphic design and graffiti. Under the project title *Graphic Machinery*, a balance is struck between analogue and digital methods, so that his pre-planned compositions are executed by mechanical devices, such as a digital plotter. In the example below, however, this machine is attached to a paintball gun, so that the resulting artwork is machine-made and yet messily unpredictable (fig. 16). The artist’s work is on the spectrum of mechanistic painting because it literally employs a machine, which continues to operate until a set task is completed, without consideration of the outcome.



Figure 16. Antigoon, video stills from <https://www.antigoon.net/~/>

²⁹ Robert Morris, “Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated,” *Artforum*, vol 8, no. 8, April 1970, part III.

³⁰ *Ibid*, part III.



Figure 17. Frize and four assistants constructing a painting.

An example of the type of methodology where physical labour is employed in place of machinery is seen in the practice of French painter, Bernard Frize. The artist establishes a system for executing a painting prior to commencement, reducing the creative act to a series of protocols, enacted by himself and three assistants (fig. 17). Much of Frize’s oeuvre involves the interweaving of forms, so that the choreographed movements of his assistants can be gleaned from the finished work (fig. 18). By taking a “manufacturing-like approach” to production, Frize creates the arena for chance to operate, and for “painterly events or disruptions” to occur.³¹ Curator Jean-Pierre Criqui observes that the finished painting is therefore “a consequence, a record rather than a goal the artist decided to achieve; it is the image of its own execution.”³² In this way, we can see that the artist’s plan allows the process to unfold, which in turn allows for the outcome—with the artist acting as conduit.

³¹ Bernard Frize biographical information, Galleries Perrotin, accessed Jan 21, 2020
https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Bernard_Frize/4#biography

³² J. Criqui, “Bernard Frize: Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris,” *Artforum*, November 2003, p. 183

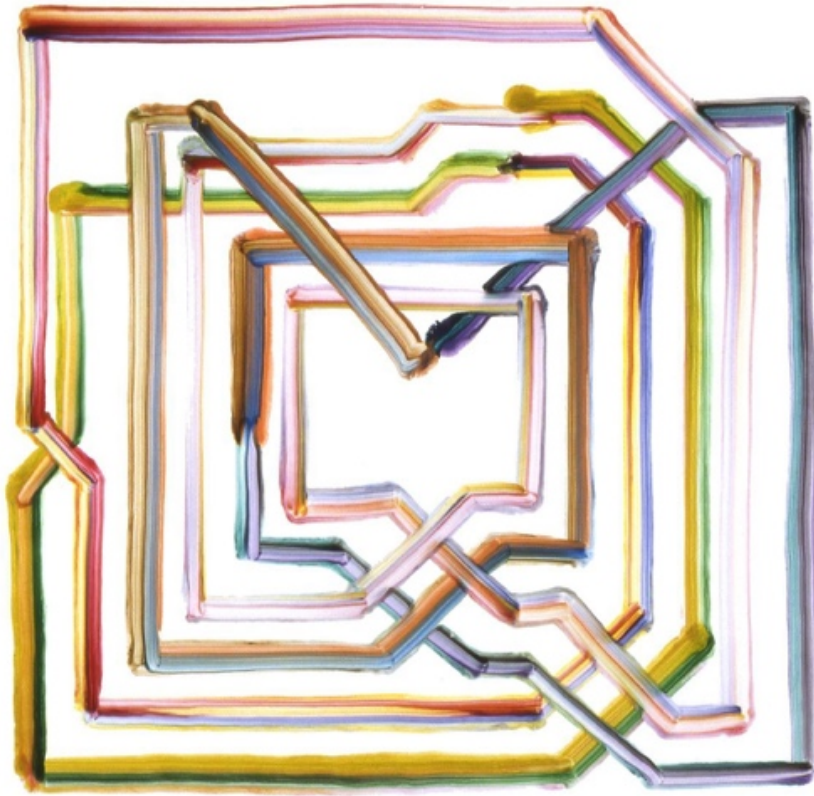


Figure 18. (upper) Bernard Frize, *Blick*, 2005, acrylic & resin on canvas, 150 x 150 cm, and (lower) Bernard Frize, *Spitz*, 1991, acrylic on canvas, 254.5 x 361.5 cm.

When performing a task which is repetitive and laborious, the importance of the unknowable outcome is heightened. In 2016, I interviewed New York based artist Rob de Oude, who stated that he would not initiate a painting if he could foresee the result.³³ His method involves placing the painting into a frame-like contraption, so that the ruler floats above the canvas, guiding his paintbrush between measured marks (fig. 19). The outcome of his intensive process often results in a moiré effect whereby layers of striations combine unexpectedly to form the illusion of ripples or curves. He does not anticipate the outcome, but instead it is revealed incrementally as he works.



Figure 19. Studio views showing some of the apparatus employed in Rob de Oude's practice. Masking tape with handwritten increments (left) and apparatus (right).

Another New York-based artist, Inger Johanne Grytting, employs perhaps the strictest method I have encountered. Standing over her work with one hand behind her back, she draws a pencil horizontally across a sheet of paper until it reaches a composition line. Grytting leans heavily on the implement, so that inevitably the tip of the pencil snaps. Each time this occurs, she moves a short distance to the right of the break and resumes the line until the demarcated area is filled. The result is a wavering field of lines, punctuated by unexpected absences where the materials have succumbed to the

³³ Rob de Oude, in conversation with author, Oct 17, 2016.

process (fig. 20). Grytting's methodology seemed even to me a little like penance. Where she insists on this strenuous activity, another artist might outsource it.

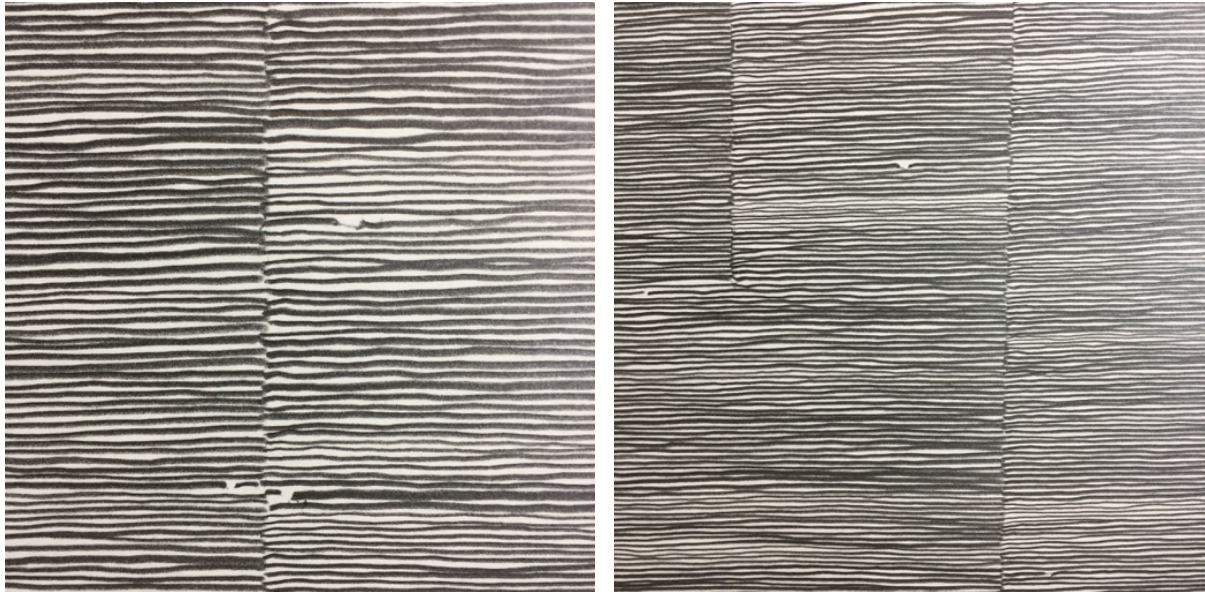


Figure 20. Details of the drawn glitch in the work of Inger Johanne Grytting, *Untitled N° 31*, 2021, pencil on paper, 635 x 635mm.

Curator Helen Molesworth observes that both laborious art-practices and those employing instructional methodologies arose in the 1960s.³⁴ She ties this to societal shifts where the post-war US workforce moved towards division of managerial and service sectors. This encouraged some artists to portray themselves as workers, where others adopted the aspect of supervisor. In the latter category, the artist becomes a conductor, setting up the situation and allowing it to unfold, using the labour of others as one might use a machine, and it is into this category which Sol Lewitt most certainly falls.

³⁴ Helen Molesworth, "Work Ethic," in *Work Ethic*, ed. Helen Molesworth (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2004), 34.

SOL LEWITT—A CASE STUDY

Lewitt’s practice is a perfect example of the managerial model, being very precisely delineated into the plan, the process, and the outcome. The artist executed his own wall drawings in the late 60s; however it did not take long for his concepts for the various works to become instructions carried out by others. Since the 1970s, Sol Lewitt’s work has been executed by trained assistants, rather than the artist’s own hand. This delegation of labour was both practical and inevitable, due to the pressure of deadlines and the scale of the work to which he was committed.³⁵ Sometimes verbal, often written on scraps of paper or the backs of envelopes, the instructions were occasionally accompanied by simple sketches (fig. 21). Over time, they evolved into neatly typed and signed documents, each complete with a certificate of authenticity. By creating instructions for artworks and outsourcing the execution to others, Sol Lewitt places his assistants in the role a machine.

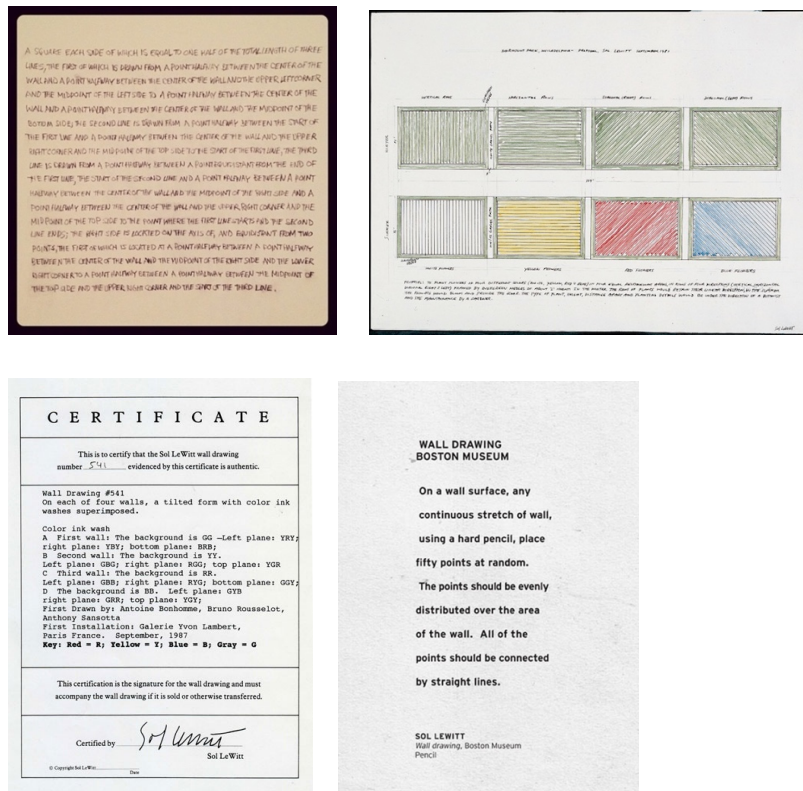


Figure 21. examples of Sol Lewitt’s instructions, dimensions variable.

³⁵ Krysten Koehn and Molleen Theodore, “Interlocutions: Teaching Sol Lewitt’s Wall Drawings In The Manner Of John Walsh,” *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (2013): 103.

Lewitt's wall drawings are set out in their entirety before a single mark is made, and the labour is standardised. The wall is cleaned, sanded, and painted, the designated area is demarcated with masking tape and paper, major construction lines are drawn, and increments are placed strategically across the wall. In a team of three, two people are employed to hold and shift a ruler, whilst a third draws the lines. The task is carried through to completion, via the gradual accrual of marks, before the tape and various means of construction are removed and the wall drawing is complete.³⁶ Lewitt's practice is therefore mediated, not just by the tools and implements, but also by the assistants.

In such a regimented system, it is paradoxical that the outcome is not uniform. The *appearance* of uniformity is achieved by constructing a large work from innumerable small marks, creating an "all-over" effect. In reality however, there are many variables which come into play during the process and these are, upon close inspection, visible in the outcome. In 2014, whilst visiting the Art Gallery of New South Wales for the exhibition *Sol Lewitt: Your mind is exactly at that line*, I saw the artist's work up close for the first time.³⁷ I was surprised at the subtle line-work, which shifted and shimmered in my field of vision, like wind-driven rain. Approaching the wall, I noticed at once that each line was minutely different in quality from the next and that certain rhythms were identifiable. Looking closely, I could identify signs of the drawing implement becoming blunt and causing a simultaneous widening and softening of the mark, occasional disruptions in the overall cadence and a raft of subtle inaccuracies insinuating themselves into the homogeneous whole.

After visiting the Sol Lewitt retrospective at MassMOCA, for which 105 wall drawings were executed posthumously, I felt more keenly that the beauty of his work is in its gentle variation (fig. 22).³⁸ Each rendering is unique because of the variables involved. The various drawings are in different geographical locations, rendered at temporally disparate times, and are not often created by the same team of people. As such, they are by necessity divergent in their execution, something the artist himself appreciated, noting that each execution has "a quality of its own."³⁹ I was surprised by this characteristic of Lewitt's work, having focused on the conceptual aspect until that point. Art historian

³⁶ YouTube, "Installation Of Sol Lewitt's Wall Drawings At The Art Gallery Of NSW," 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dmE4VvaSNc>, accessed 12.07.2015.

³⁷ *Sol Lewitt: Your mind is exactly at that line*, Feb 20–Aug 3, 2014, Art Gallery of NSW

³⁸ *Sol Lewitt: A wall drawing retrospective*, November 16 2013–October 1 2043, MassMOCA.

³⁹ Sol Lewitt and Paul Cummings, "Oral History Interview With Sol Lewitt," *Smithsonian Institution* 15 (1974): 13, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-sol-lewitt-12701>, 17.

Susan Best observes that such an oversight is characteristic of discussions around the conceptual, minimal and other art movements of the 60s and 70s.⁴⁰ Lewitt himself conceded that removal of the human hand from the process would deaden the work, removing its vitality, and after 1984, the artist moved more and more towards harnessing the variable mark-making of his assistants.⁴¹

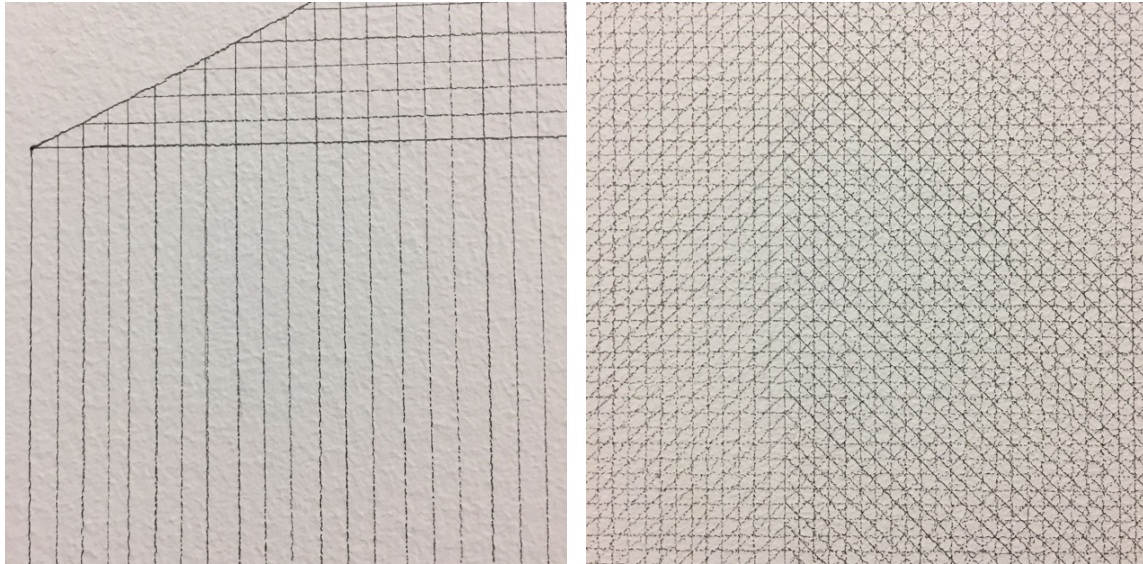


Figure 22. Sol Lewitt details, (left) *Wall Drawing 957*, 2000, dimensions variable, and (right) *Wall Drawing 47*, 1970, dimensions variable, *Sol Lewitt: A wall drawing retrospective*, November 16, 2013–October 1, 2043, MassMOCA.

In between the controlled steps of his clearly defined methodology, Lewitt has conceded several areas of flexibility. It is through these very concessions, like cracks allowing light into an otherwise sealed vessel, that his wall drawings are granted a life beyond the purely conceptual. These areas of non-control include the interpretation of the instructions, the idiosyncratic movements of each assistant and the space and surface where the work is to be executed. In the document *Wall Drawings*, he states that “imperfections on the wall surface are occasionally apparent after the drawing is completed [and] should be considered a part of the wall drawing,” insisting that the work and method not be changed to ameliorate the defect.⁴² Innumerable variables are enmeshed in the wavering fields of lines.

⁴⁰ Susan Best, *Visualizing Feeling* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 1.

⁴¹ Sol Lewitt et al., *Sol Lewitt, Drawings 1958–1992* (The Hague, 1992), Franz W. Kaiser's essay, “Drawing as notation—or just as drawing,” 5.

⁴² Sol Lewitt, “Wall Drawings,” *Arts Magazine (New York)*, no. (1970).

The artist's acceptance of inconsistencies serves to bring the viewer's attention to the means of production, such as the way the work is made, the materials employed, and the characteristics of the site of execution. This occurs when the instructions are inclusive of the aspects of the space (as in fig. 23). Equally though, it occurs when the instructions do not mention specifics of the environment where they are to be executed. As such, incidental environmental characteristics such as the texture of the wall, the surrounding space, qualities of the drawing implement, and the interpretation and quality of line performed by the assistants are all heightened in importance when it comes to the experience of the artwork.⁴³



Figure 23. The instructions for this work read, “All architectural points connected by straight lines.” Sol Lewitt, *Wall Drawing 51* (installation / detail), MassMOCA, first drawn in 1970, blue snap lines, dimensions variable.

By shifting the focus from the input (the plan or concept for the drawing), to the output (the visible outcome), we can align the various aberrations with the glitch in glitch art. Between Sol Lewitt's mind and hand, between his instructions and the interpretations of those instructions, between the idea and the various locations where that idea is made visible, there is ample space provided for variability and randomness to occur. Sol Lewitt said that “the idea becomes a machine that makes the art,” but

⁴³ “One of the challenges that the draftsmen working with coloured pencil face is that the different colour leads possess varying strengths. For example, the yellow lead is very weak, so it bends or snaps easily. Thus, draftsmen working with yellow must be careful not to bear down too hard when drawing lines on the wall,” catalogue information, MassMOCA website, <https://massmoca.org/event/walldrawing87/>.

he chose each and every cog in that machine and built variability into his system.⁴⁴ Even in the most mechanical of processes, if the hand is employed there will be a degree of unintentional mark-making which makes its way into the final work. There is a ghost in the machine that Lewitt built.

STARTING OUT: DRAWING EXPERIMENTS

If an artist uses the same form in a group of works, and changes the material, one would assume the artist's concept involved the material.⁴⁵

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the goal of the first year of my research was to think through, isolate, and identify the various factors involved in my studio practice. This required a simplification and stripping-back of what was already a highly restricted mode of working. But to test one of the key precepts of glitch practice, that this type of aberration reveals aspects of the materials and process, I realised that it would be necessary to employ at least one other set of materials. The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, a change to the materials would allow comparison to be made with the outcomes of the original enamel and acrylic paint combination. More importantly however, material substitutions would allow for more streamlined experimentation.

To this end, I established a discrete drawing project which preserved the essential steps of the painting system, whilst employing a different range of materials. In accordance with my restriction to the everyday, these materials had to be readily available and non-specialised, and as such, I chose paper and ballpoint pen. Despite this limitation, I found that the possible combinations of drawing implement and paper type are effectively boundless, in particular with the addition of drawing surface as variable.

⁴⁴ Sol Lewitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *Art-Language*, 1969, <http://www.altx.com/vizarts/conceptual.html>.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, #31.

I used a range of ballpoint pens, which affected the degree and nature of the ink-bleed, as well as the transparency and saturation of the lines. The cheap ballpoints which I use varied considerably in their output. Some produced inky deposits on each contact, whilst others created a lighter, more diaphanous veil of lines. Certain pigments dried faster, others more slowly, leading to smudges and other marks where the ruler was moved across the ink. The difference in pen nibs also impacted the drawings, so that the more pointed tips created a fine line. Others were broader and more rounded, leading to wider lines; and, as the ink supply dwindled, the quality of the line changed (fig. 24).

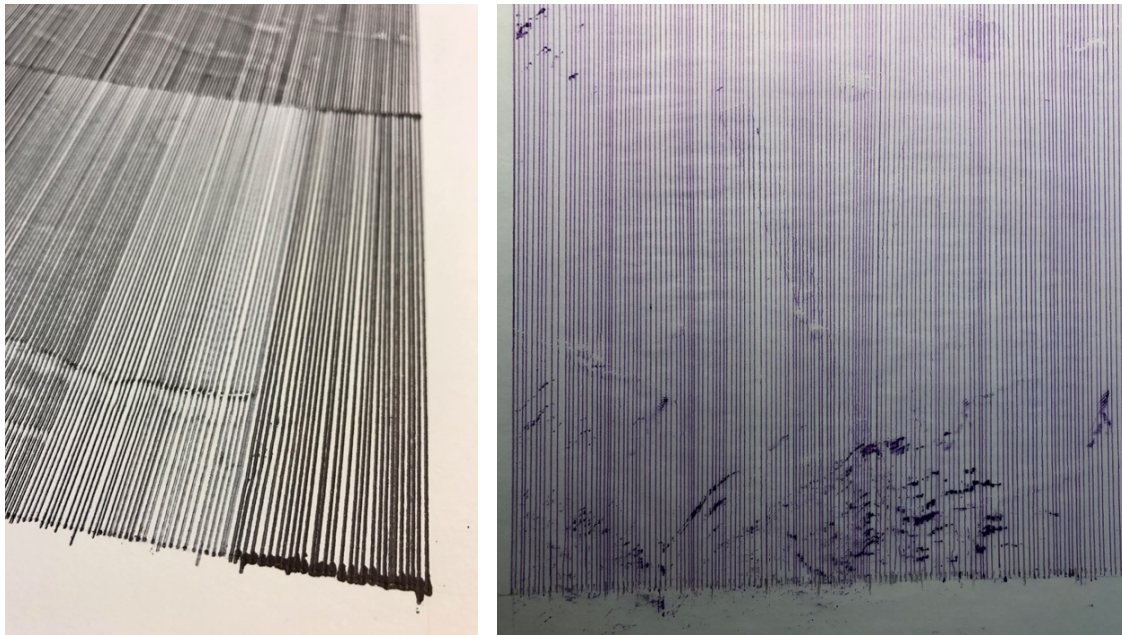


Figure 24. Bleeds, smudges, and changes to the quality of the line.

In addition to pens, I employed varying grades of paper. These ranged from light- to heavy-gauge watercolour paper, transparent drafting papers and stone paper, with each reacting differently to the pressure of the pen and viscosity of the ink. The lighter watercolour paper warped in a regular wave-like pattern as the densely packed lines accrued (fig. 25). Transparent tracing and drafting papers tended to tear more easily, due to their crispness (fig. 26). It was the curious qualities of stone paper which led to the most extreme and surprising outcomes.

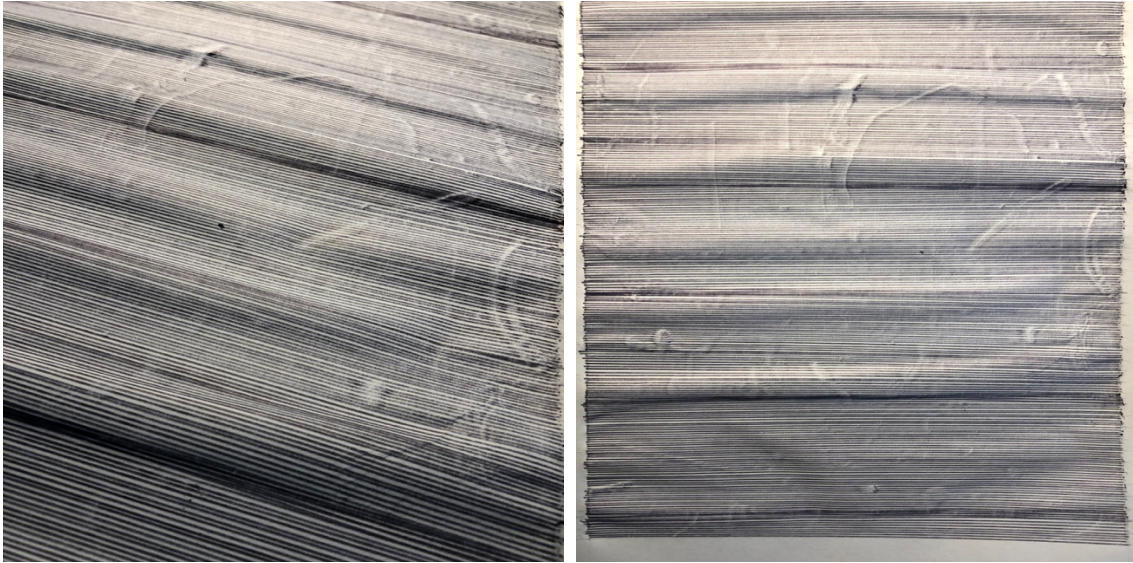


Figure 25. Light-gauge watercolour paper warping.



Figure 26. Brittle, non-absorbent tracing paper.

Composed of around 80% calcium carbonate, bound together by resin high-density polyethylene, this paper is matte, smooth, and strong. This strength however is due to flexibility rather than rigidity. This makes it resistant to tearing by allowing it to yield to the pressure of the pen. As such, as the lines accrued across its surface, the paper stretched and sagged unexpectedly, contorting to the extent that folds and ruptures increased as a drawing was developed. The resulting drawings are distorted from

their initial rectangular shape, indicating the order and direction in which the lines were applied (fig. 27).



Figure 27. Tear-resistant, flexible stone paper.

Finally, where under normal circumstances I would rest the paper on a smooth surface, I instead leant on a variety of different materials, all of which were on hand in the studio. My painting desk is heavily polluted with remnants of acrylic and enamel paint, and these show through as ghostly indicators of texture in many of the initial drawings (fig. 28). I tend to accrue packaging materials and these too became drawing surfaces, in particular a range of cardboards from parcels received. Each of these corrugated, folded, and crumpled materials disrupted the lines differently, depending on density and texture, so that the act of drawing became a form of *frottage* or rubbing (fig. 29). Once the completed drawings were removed from their respective backing, traces of the terrain beneath remained in the drawings, acting as physical index. This outcome put me in mind of the layers of the Earth's crust, where the surface gives an indication of activity deep below.



Figure 28. Heavy-gauge watercolour paper revealing traces of the drawing surface.



Figure 29. Varying surfaces and resulting drawings.

The drawings piled up, each revealing their materials and various aspects of their creation. I felt as though I could continue forever, combining with and expanding to new materials without end. Compared to my painting process, drawing is quick. I was able to see glitches and other aberrations accruing gradually during the process, rather than in one swift act of revelation. Perhaps because of this sped-up generation and incremental revelation of work, I was prompted to ask what was gained through this exercise, apart from more drawings. Each drawing is distinguished from the next by revealing aspects of the materials employed: the viscosity of ink; the absorption of paper; humidity; the desk; and surface characteristics. This is how the materials operate under these circumstances, but how many times did I need to demonstrate the same effect?

Though the outcomes might not be identical, the possible variations that occur are limited in scope. That is, having an unchanging painting system results in a uniform *type* of aberration. Further, as the natural direction of all things is towards entropy and a reduction to elemental substances, it seems logical that iterations of an unchanging process would result in outcomes of a similar nature. After all, glitch is familiar, recognisable, within its particular medium. Everyone knows the distinct sounds made by a compact disc or vinyl record skipping, and the two can never be confused. The glitch reveals its medium through the properties demonstrated by that medium. In the context of my practice, the manifestation of glitch allows the viewer to identify characteristics such as gloss, viscosity, and saturation, which in turn reveal the medium itself.

It struck me that the repetitive nature of glitch risks the genre being reduced to an aesthetic and a creative cul-de-sac. Compounding this feeling of a dead end, in the midst of the drawing project, I made two paintings, *Cant I* and *II*. My intention compositionally had been to create a tension between the flatness of the surface and the illusory sense of space. To this end, I scored a number of diagonal lines across the square format, to suggest a cube rendered in a visually ambiguous cavalier projection.⁴⁶ In *Cant I* the form is relatively complete and in the second, only two diagonals are included (fig. 30).

With economy in mind, I used the last dregs of black enamel paint on hand. This medium had been sitting unused for long enough that its viscosity had deteriorated into a solution which was difficult to recombine. Further, the weather had been unseasonably humid, altering the quality and extent of adhesion of the tape. Despite these difficulties, I persevered and worked through the various material issues. Upon completion, I was struck by the sheer quantity of paint-bleed. It was like staring into snow on a poorly tuned television set. The glitched result was above and beyond anything I had anticipated, stopping just shy of obfuscating the striations and composition lines entirely. Initially, I was pleased with the overtness of the glitch. The materials had essentially failed, revealing their characteristics and limits. The accrued glitches were essentially operating as an index for the weather, the materials, and the action of the body.

⁴⁶ A *cavalier projection* is a form of *oblique projection*. This is a technical drawing where the form is rendered as though seen from a high vantage point (such as horseback). This type of depiction tends to distend the object depicted, because the length of the diagonals are not scaled, as opposed to a *cabinet projection* which is adjusted to reduce the distorted impression of depth.

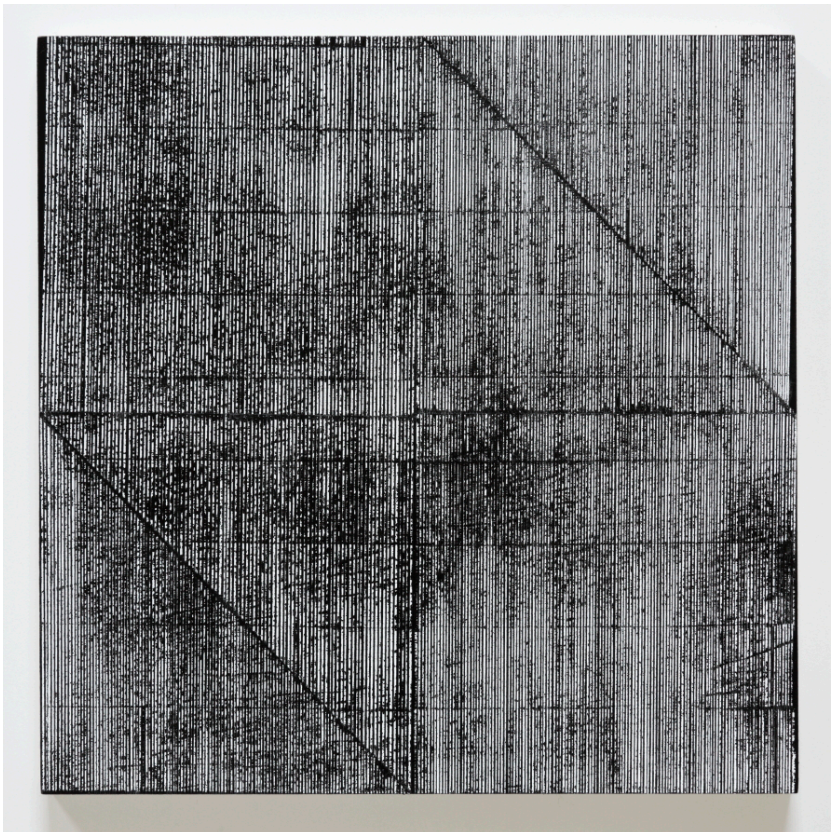
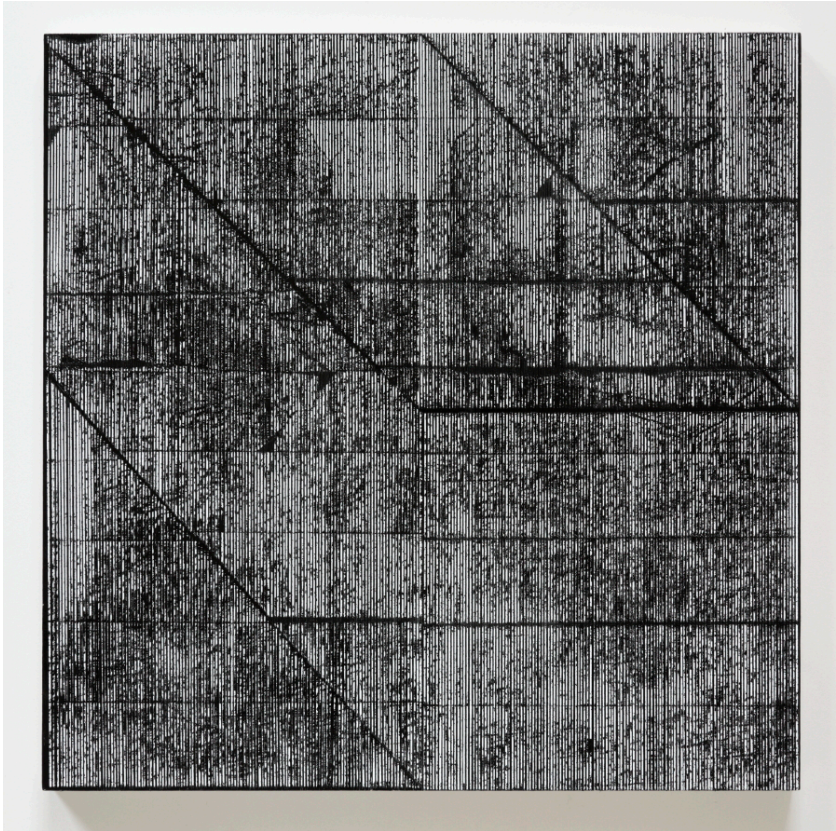


Figure 30. *Cant I & II*, 2016, enamel / acrylic on wood, each 40 x 40 cm.

However, between the infinite generation of glitched drawings and the infinitely glitched paintings, I was beginning to suspect that pursuing glitch could quickly become clichéd, an exercise in aesthetics or the mere demonstration of a paint finish. What could paintings such as *Cant I* and *II* reveal, aside from more or less glitch? As Caleb Kelly asks, “Is the use of the glitch a creative dead end, or is there a future in this process? How many times can you force something into failure before it becomes creatively uninteresting?”⁴⁷ Further, I was prompted to ask, if the process remains the same, where can change possibly occur?

Artists Hugh S. Manon and Daniel Temkin state that “the greatest weapon glitch art holds is not ingenuity, but a goalless repetition which seems to mutate of its own accord.” I was not convinced that the limited level of mutation I observed in my own practice was sufficient to allow for significant change.⁴⁸ Without development, I would surely either create and recreate the same painting continually, or at best, create work with an increasingly predictable range of outcomes. And as glitch is the unexpected consequence of programmatic making, is this latter option not a contradiction, the antithesis of glitch?

Given the conditions demanded by focusing on the glitch—that the plan is set in place, that the process cannot change and that rote performance does not allow for modification—I was curious to know how development could possibly arise. That is, how can the system produce anything new if it is itself immutable? As such, I found that simply changing materials, though demonstrating one of the precepts of glitch—that the glitch reveals the material reality—does not generate new research directions. In response to this series of observations, I expanded my project to explore possible solutions to this creative cul-de-sac, which I will explain in Chapter 2.

⁴⁷ Kelly, *Cracked Media*, 12.

⁴⁸ Manon and Temkin, “Notes,” point 52.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have described the initial investigations undertaken in the studio, involving the simplification of an existing practice and the identification of the materials and processes involved. I have contextualised my research project within the existing realms of process-based art and glitch art, whilst drawing distinction from each in order to locate a gap in knowledge. Within this framework, I have then looked to a number of contemporary artists to investigate diverse forms of programmatic making, ranging from those where the artist employs a machine, to those where the artist *becomes* the machine.

I researched the wall drawings of Sol Lewitt as a specific example where the plan, procedure, and outcome are precisely delineated, to see what is revealed by contextualising an established minimal-conceptual practice within a glitch art framework. During this period, I undertook a drawing project to test the precept that glitch reveals aspects of the process by which it has come into being, and the medium from which it is formed. I noted that the work becomes an index of time, labour, circumstance, and environment where these factors are permitted to encroach on the creation of the artwork.

Reflecting on the work undertaken in the studio, I came to understand that focusing entirely on the glitch could lead to a creative cul-de-sac. This conclusion was reinforced by the drawing exercise, which is considerably faster, less complex, and more laborious than the painting process. As I explain in Chapter 2, recognising this unexpected dead end forced me to expand into new territory. An important aspect of this exploration was that the essential methodology could not change. As such, I was challenged to find ways to increase the handling of materials, looking for areas of flexibility between unchanging steps. I began to work with a variety of new forms, including the circle and the cube, as well as diverse areas of research, including geology and plate tectonics.

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, I will address the concern that focusing on glitched outcomes could result in the repetition of near-identical aesthetic outcomes. That is, if glitch is the unexpected consequence of programmatic making, is the generation of a uniform *type* of outcome not a contradiction? This concern was triggered by the drawing project outlined in Chapter 1, in which I tested the premise that glitches reveal aspects of both the materials employed and process undertaken. Though these revelations were confirmed, I was prompted to ask what more could be gleaned from this restricted methodology. Essentially, if I could not change the systematic methodology, how was I to avoid repeating myself?

In the context of digital glitch, this repetition is swift. The methods for creating glitch in this medium involve copying, pasting, deleting, and adding data, and nowadays there are countless online tools which generate glitch instantaneously with a drag-and-drop functionality (fig. 31). In a labour-intensive painting process, however, it is time-consuming, physically strenuous, and therefore psychologically difficult to continue once the outcome is known. Confronting these contradictions became the driving force for significant shifts in my practice. In particular, I asked, *How can I expand on glitch and how can change arise if the system is immutable?* To avoid this impasse, I sought new methodologies, expanding from this singular form of disruption, and looked instead to the broader category of malfunction.

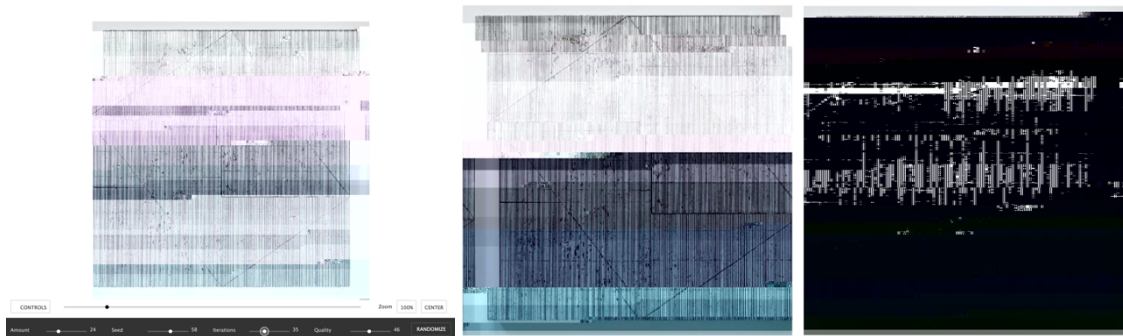


Figure 31. Using an online tool, I generated three unique glitch images from a digital photograph of a painting. The entire process, including finding the tool, took less than one minute. By contrast, the painting took three weeks to complete.

In this chapter, I will provide an account of this expansion, and of the multiple approaches, undertaken separately and in combination, that I explored. By increasing the range of techniques, and making adjustments to my practice without changing the essential framework, I effectively worked out *how to change without changing*. I found that increased handling, in particular, gives rise to increased

pollution and aberration in the work. I explored the use of different formats; for example, circular painting and three-dimensional cubic works. Through these experiments, I came to understand that the balancing act of glitch can be reiterated through a number of intertwined ambiguities.



Figure 32. Detail of stone paper drawings.

I began this period of my research by reassessing the stone paper drawings described in Chapter 1, whose execution almost destroyed the drawing itself (fig. 32). By combining my established process with a new material, the results were no longer merely glitched. Instead, the creases and crumples became a form of rupture, located within the broader range of *malfunction*. Caleb Kelly describes malfunction as extending from “manipulated, to glitched, to broken.”⁴⁹ At one end of this spectrum, reversible incursions are applied; at the other is the destructive act which might result in the permanent disabling of the technology used, or the obliteration of an artwork.

The fractured surface of the drawings is located nearer to the *broken* outcome. Preservation of both the procedure and the unexpected deviation from the plan allows me to maintain partial collapse by suggesting the possibility of a uniform striped surface. This observation led me to see that there was opportunity for more overt, less subtle glitching in the form of the cracks and fractures, signalling a direction toward more dynamic and disrupted compositions. This would allow the observer to experience malfunction from a safe distance, in particular by conserving aspects of an image which

⁴⁹ Kelly, *Cracked Media*, 32.

has been otherwise corrupted. In the words of glitch practitioners Hugh S. Manon and Daniel Temkin in their *Notes on Glitch*, “by aestheticizing error, one domesticates it, “owns” it, rendering the prospect of a real collapse familiar and somehow less scary.”⁵⁰

I recognised that the glitches, fractures, and unpredictable aberrations in my own work could not be undone, yet were not extended to the destruction of the art object. To maintain this tension, I resolved to focus on a diagrammatic approach, whereby I eschewed both fracturing of the physical object and the representation of a fractured object *in pictorial space*. I instead focused on flirting with pictorial space whilst simultaneously confounding it. That is, as glitch disrupts the field of lines and our expectation of continuity, I could exploit the expectation that a painted pictorial space might be presented on a given surface, by contradicting the visual cues. As I will explain, this involved manipulating, multiplying, and rearranging the steps in the process so that unexpected fractures could arise.

INCREASED HANDLING

By working within strict parameters and with limited means, I am by definition unable to change my technique, even when it is not ideal. For better or worse, the process simply is what it is. Initially, this decision was driven by economy and convenience because the materials are cheap and readily available. Over time, however, these practical concerns have morphed into a stubborn refusal to adapt my method for any reason, whether it be to reduce physical discomfort, save time, or make the process generally less onerous. In *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, Sol Lewitt observed that “new materials are one of the great afflictions of contemporary art [and that] some artists confuse new materials with new ideas,” and my own dogged pursuit of a single methodology stemmed at least in part from a suspicion of the temptation of new materials and their qualities.⁵¹

Further, I have never permitted myself to contrive the glitch. As such, visual noise only occurs opportunistically, *wherever it is allowed to occur*, without my inducing the effect. These aberrations

⁵⁰ Manon and Temkin, “Notes,” point 35.

⁵¹ Sol Lewitt, “Paragraphs On Conceptual Art,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10, 1967 (1967): 79–83.

arise at both the weakest points in the material and the least fixed locations in the process. The former includes the bleed of paint at the edges and overlapping sections of tape. The latter—the *least fixed points*—can be identified by determining what lies outside the unchanging aspects of the methodology. One example would be splits and score-lines, which act as compositional elements. Locating these actions in the sequence of steps, I note that each takes place between the previously established manoeuvres; for example, after the application of tape but prior to incision, or after completion of one section before moving to the next.

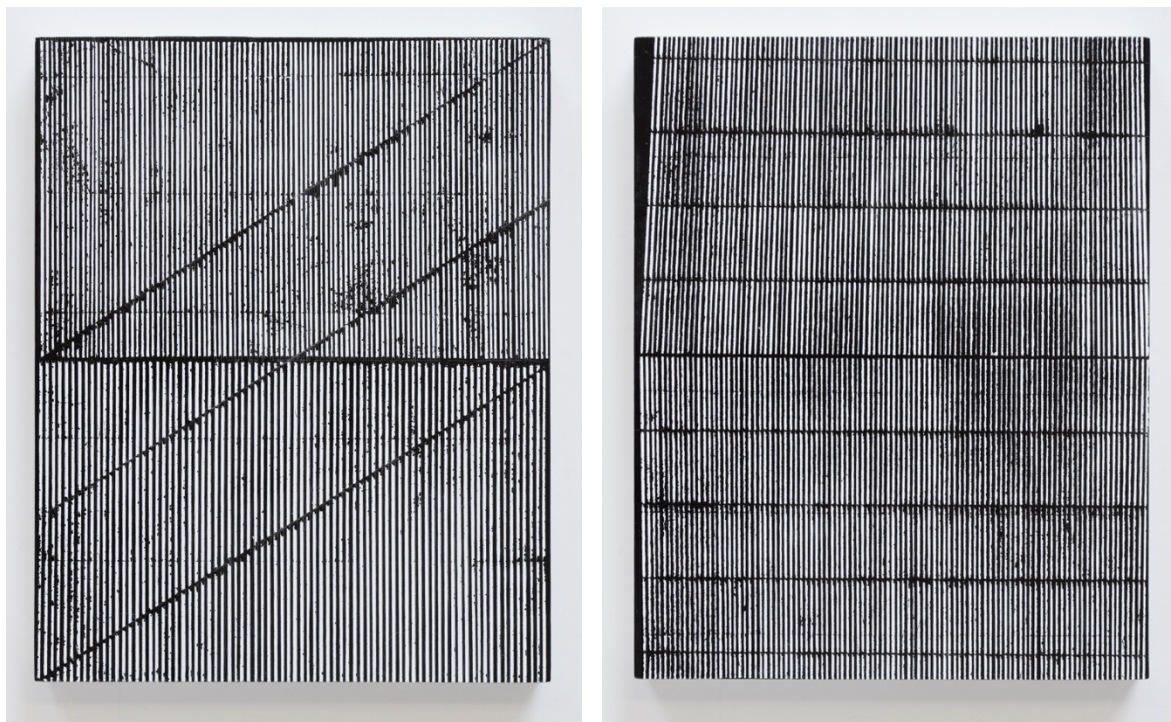


Figure 33. (left) *B&W #6 / 2015*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, 25 x 20 cm, and (right) *B&W #1 / 2015*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, 25 x 20 cm. In the painting on the right, I incised 400 vertical marks (one per millimetre, in each of the upper and lower portions), then scored horizontally nine times. The 200 strips of tape were transformed into 2000.

Like a contaminant, the painted malfunction spreads opportunistically. By this, I mean that increased handling of the materials via various means would naturally increase the number of variables at play. This could take the form of having more steps in the process or by employing a greater volume of materials—scaling up. To this end, I investigated a number of modes of working which would increase the degree of handling required to complete a painting, without altering the technique itself, so that the location for change could shift to the seams of the original process. As the steps are inalterable, the space *between the steps* became fruitful territory for development. To this end, I set out to

investigate a range of new methodologies, increasing pictorial fractures and misalignments, so that each bifurcating line, split, and break became an opportunity to heighten the cracked aesthetic.

Initially, I increased the number of score marks and compositional splits so that the striations are multiplied by being severed (fig. 33). To decide where these splits should fall, I looked to the materials themselves. I halved and quartered the painting panels, using ruler-widths alongside the imperial and metric measurements already employed. Further, I allowed misalignment to creep into the compositions, by measuring from the last set of increments rather than from the edge of the support. This meant that gradual inaccuracies pushed the lines from their intended vertical alignment, creating black apertures or voids along the edges and between sections (fig. 34).

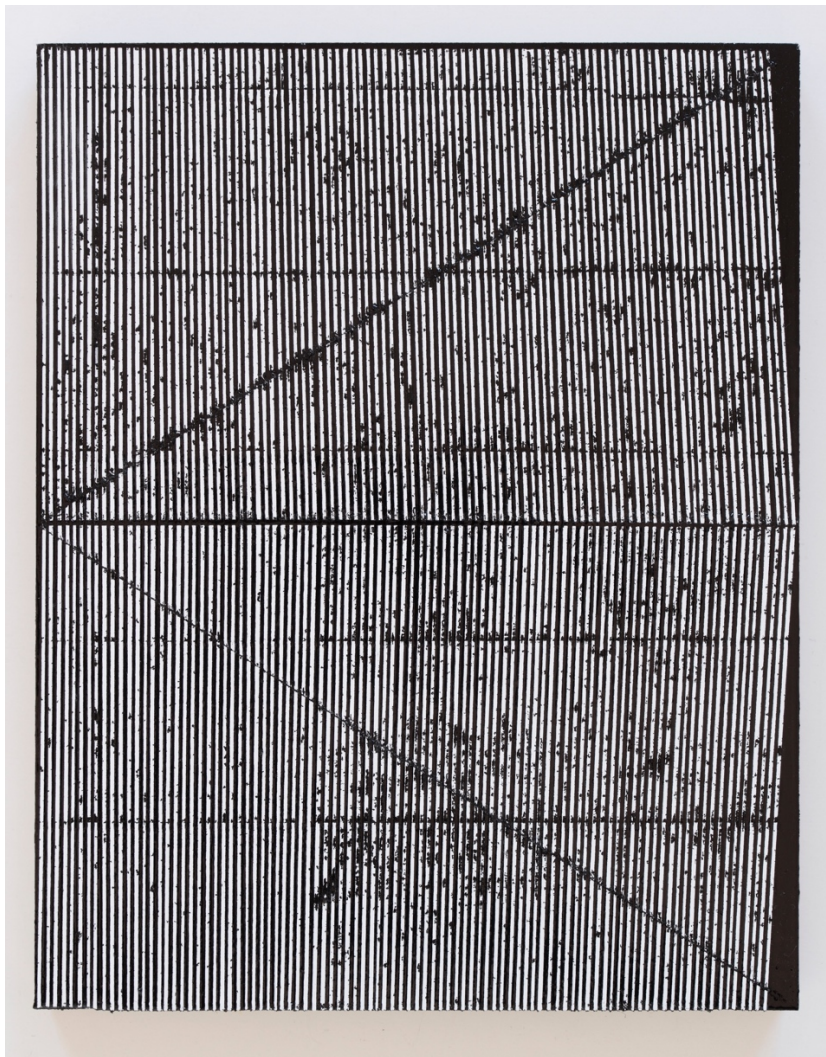


Figure 34. *B&W V / 2014*, 2014, enamel / acrylic on wood, 25 x 20 cm.

When removing and reapplying the taped sections, I began to rearrange their order, so that the top of the tape might end up on the bottom of the panel and vice versa (fig. 35). There is always a risk during this part of the process that the materials will tangle and the longer the tape's underside is exposed, the more likely dust and other pollutants will accumulate (fig. 36). I began to repeat this step—removing, adhering, removing and adhering again—increasing the degree of pollution whilst decreasing the ability of the tape to adhere.



Figure 35. Removal and reapplication of tape.



Figure 36. Tape ready to be reattached, the adhesive side exposed to the elements.

I also increased the time spent repositioning tape, so that though there was always a plan in terms of steps in the process, composition began to occur on the fly. I might, for example, replace one section of tape before realising that the position of the next would be affected. This was important because it allowed me to compose without contriving, maintaining the incidental rather than purposeful nature of my practice. I began to notice that limiting the planning and allowing aleatory forces to play their part resulted in more awkward compositions, which I might have otherwise avoided.

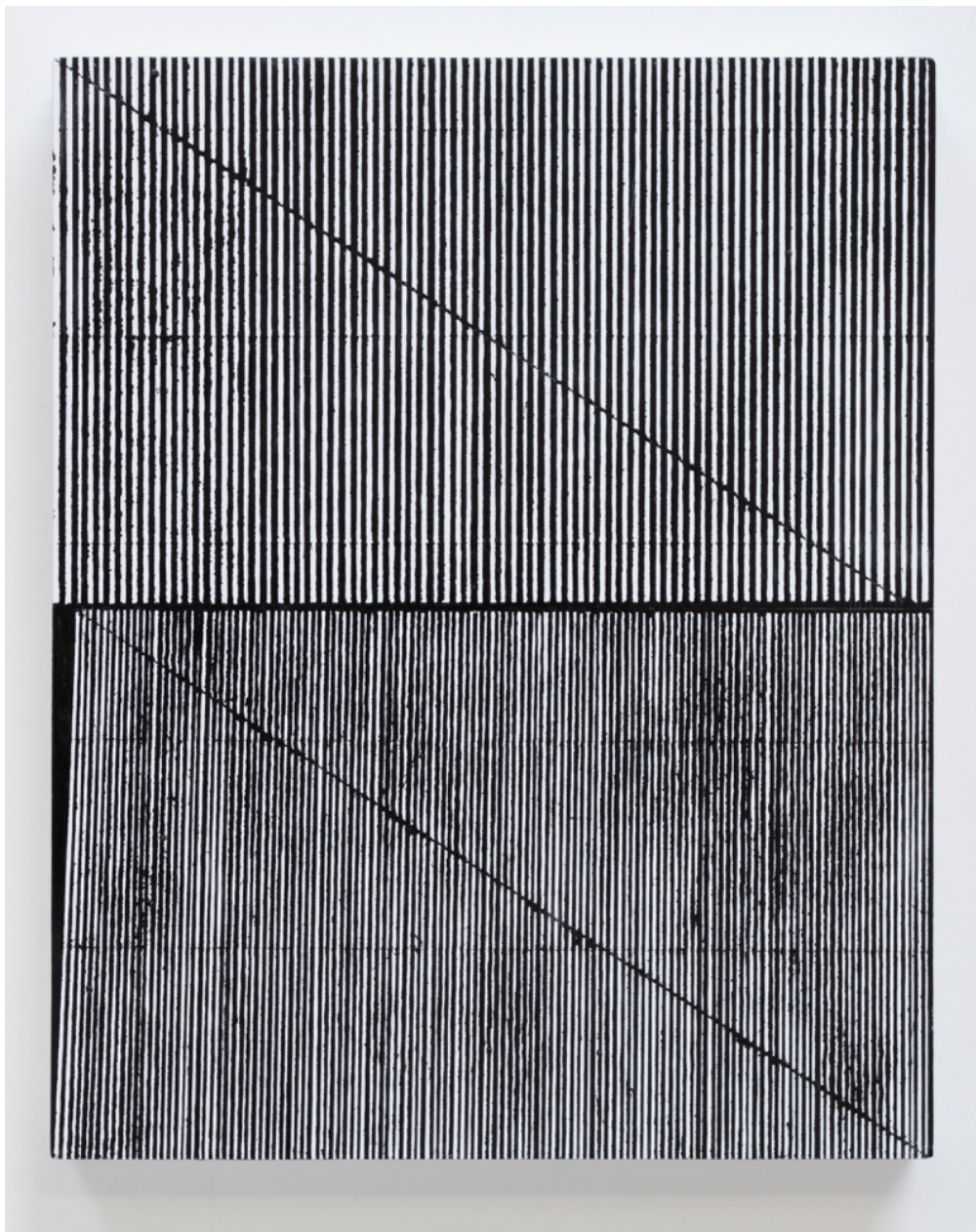


Figure 37. *B&W 2 / 2015*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, 25 x 20 cm.

It perhaps seems obvious, but an important discovery was the realisation that I could increase the *range* of increments in a painting, without simply scaling up the composition (fig. 37). Previously, I had considered that because using thicker lines reduced my workload, it was effectively cheating. But by maintaining the thinnest of lines ($1/32^{\text{nd}}$ of an inch) and increasing the upper range, compositional dynamism could be enhanced. To explore the visual collision which resulted from this method, and aiming to both split and bring together two halves, I created the *Rift* series of six small paintings (fig. 38). I chose the rectangular form, so that the parallel edges operate as a foil to the slanting lines. A low-gloss enamel was employed to reduce the subtler paint-bleed and draw attention to the more overt fracture. The central, horizontal void was entirely eliminated, so that disjointedness had to be achieved via a range of subtler methods.

Several of the resulting compositions relied entirely on a sideways shift between the upper and lower portions, emphasised by the black ground which opened at the periphery. I employed new variations to the lines to split the compositions, tapering some to fine points (fig. 38e) and introducing wider stripes to draw distinction between the two halves (fig. 38c). By increasing the width of some lines, but maintaining the fineness of others, I feel that the work achieves greater dynamism and seems to crack apart, into two distinct sections. I realised that the paintings are more effective in the instances where I incised the lines on one half, without considering what was happening on the other. To this end, I took to covering the first half of each panel before commencing the second and found that this allowed me to heighten the irreconcilability of the pictorial plane.

I experimented with the placement of secondary score lines, so that some are taken from the corner of the painting panel whilst others are from the corner of the section *within* the panel (Figures 38a, f). This enhanced the visual effect of either separating the halves or tying them together as one, depending on which placement was used. In combination with the clearly delineated halves, this created a visual switching back and forth between the flat plane of the substrate and the curious skewing of pictorial space due to variously angled lines.

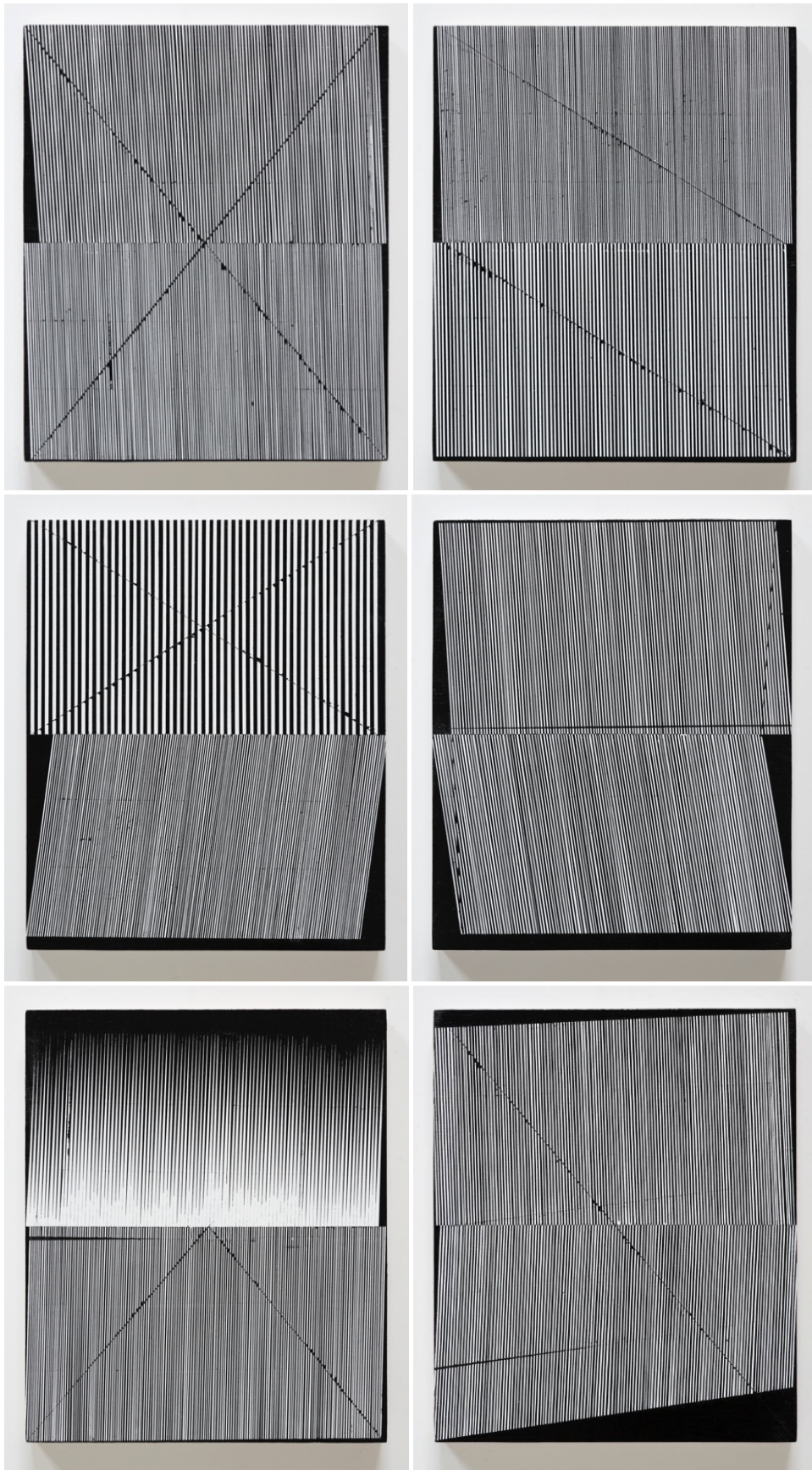


Figure 38a-f. *Rift I-VI*, 2016, enamel / acrylic on wood, each 35 x 30cm.

CIRCLES AND MOVEMENT

In my painting practice, I use titles primarily for identifying work, rather than to provide information for the viewer. As such, they are simple, and more often than not, reflect the predominant compositional element, as with the *Rift* series. However, I became aware that the titles were increasingly derived from the Earth sciences, in particular geology. As with *rift*, these descriptors relate to the movement of matter, often on a vast scale: the drift of tectonic plates; the expansion and contraction of divergent and convergent boundaries; fault lines shifting against one another. I began to think about material fracturing on the grandest of scales, the Earth's crust drifting, splitting apart, and coming together.

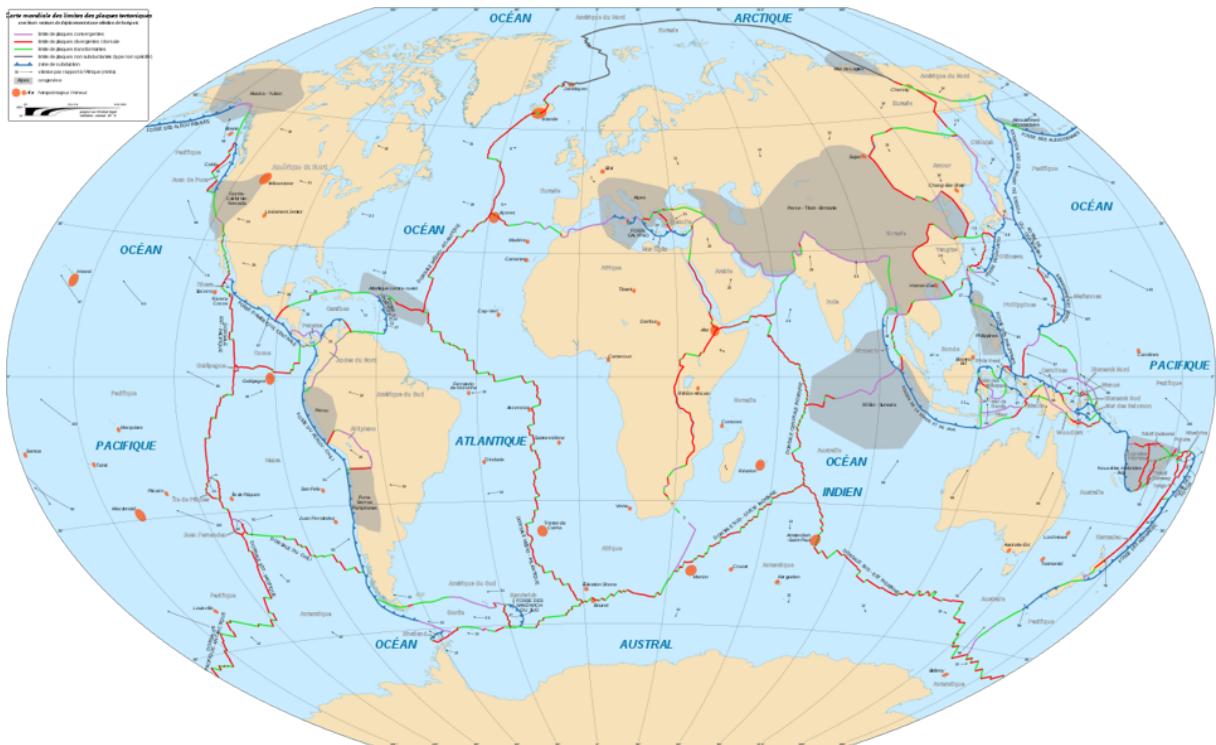


Figure 39. World map showing regularly spaced, artificial graticules, alongside the irregular boundaries of tectonic plates.

In response to this observation, I considered the parallels between the spectrum of malfunction, from minor incursion through to complete destruction, and the various geological processes which go on beneath our feet. External prompts—the invitation to contribute work to an exhibition whose title referenced the horizon-line, combined with the chance concurrence of a blood moon—prompted me

to think about the equatorial, tropical, longitudinal, and latitudinal parallels (known collectively as graticules) used in describing portions of a planetary sphere (fig. 39). In particular, I was interested in the way these abstract demarcations capture within their mesh all of the possible upheavals, drifting, and morphing of the Earth's crust.

I felt that the most direct and logical approach was to employ a circular form, which instantly transformed the bifurcating horizontal split into an equator, evoking both wholeness and fragmentation. Simultaneously and paradoxically, the change in format also suggests both a sphere, and a flat form. These various and overlapping ambiguities echo the balancing act of the glitch, being neither reversible effect nor complete destruction, but located at the precarious point between the two. The presence of contradictory forces aligned with my desire to destabilise the surface and create an uneasy imbalance. As such, I employed a number of approaches so that the initial series of circular works were an attempt at creating self-contained objects, neither expressing expansiveness nor implying a spherical aspect.

In each of the six *Citadel* paintings, I incised a bifurcating horizon line, before removing and reapplying each semicircle of tape a number of times (fig. 40). At a variety of points in the process, the overhanging tape was trimmed, so that in some cases a fracture is formed at the central division (Figs 40e–f) and in others, a black crescent appears along the circumference (Figs 40b–e). The former adds an expansive element to the composition, the latter, a constricting or collapsing element. Each composition was further differentiated by a sequence of arcs, which were scored across the lines to counteract the pictorial depth.



Figure 40. *Citadel I–VI*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, each 20cm diameter.

I felt that the truncation was most effective in *Citadel V*, where extraneous elements such as the secondary score-line are eschewed in favour of compositional clarity (fig. 41). In this example, the central split is articulated primarily by the different increments I employed on the upper and lower portions, with a slight deviation from the vertical below, so that the composition seems folded

horizontally. The two portions of the circle collide without subtlety, but also seem to be breaking apart. In light of this observation, I considered the centrifugal and centripetal implications of a picture, discussed by Rosalind Krauss in her essay "Grids."⁵²

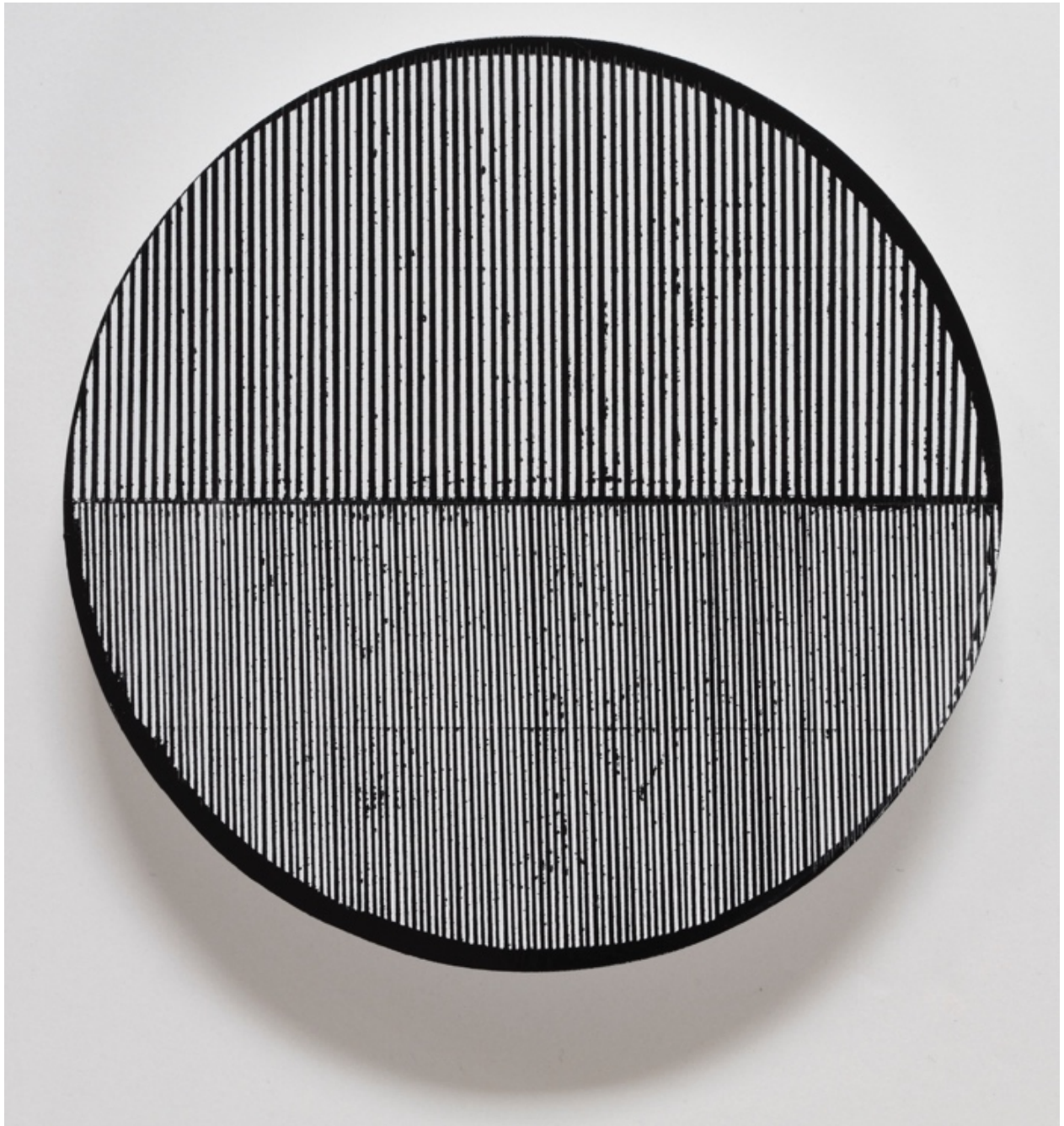


Figure 41. *Citadel V*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, 20cm diameter.

⁵² Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October*, Vol. 9 (Summer, 1979), 50–64.

In a centrifugal painting, the composition tends to dematerialise the surface by suggesting an infinite field beyond the support. The use of stripes or lines, repeated to form striations, tends towards this model due to our assumption that the motif will continue. However, in *Citadel V*, this implied continuation is foiled by the two black arcs along the periphery, which force the lines to terminate before the edge. This is the centripetal model, where the composition is contained within the boundary of the support, enhancing the material aspect of the work and making it “the object of vision.”⁵³ In painting, “this schizophrenia allows many artists [...] to think about the grid in both ways at once” and it is this ambiguity, the balance between two impulses, which felt worthy of pursuit.⁵⁴

There are parallels between Krauss’s discussion and that of composer and theorist Dick Raaijmakers’s assertion that within destructive practice, the forces of malfunction can operate in one of two directions. These are,

... outward or inward. In the first case, the order *explodes*, and its pieces fly centrifugally—literally fleeing the order—into the wide world. In the second case, it *implodes*, and its pieces, seeking for a central refuge, collapse centripetally. There is no middle course: it’s either one or the other.⁵⁵

Raaijmakers refers to situations where the objects are initially stationary, *at rest*, after which movement is applied, often in the form of a sudden force or hit. However, one of the luxuries of creating a static artwork is that it affords ambiguity. The action is frozen and forces could be moving inward *or* outward, or more accurately, inward *and* outward.

INCREASING SCALE

In creating a field of unbroken lines, paint-bleed glitches and misalignments inevitably occur between the incisions and the edge of the painting surface. A single split in this field of lines increases the chance for things to go “wrong.” The two resulting portions of the painting surface might be

⁵³ *Ibid*, 63.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 64.

⁵⁵ Dick Raaijmakers, *The Destructive Character*, (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2013), 13.

mismatched via the use of different line thicknesses and angles, or simply through misalignment. In the *Citadel* and *Rift* series, the small size of each painting tended to limit the number of fractures to just one, so my next strategy was to work at a larger size. This would allow me to increase the number of fractures possible in each work. As such, *Signal* (fig. 42) contains four separate horizontal sections, in a deliberate reference to the Earth's equator and tropical circles of latitude.



Figure 42. *Signal*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, 50cm diameter.

In this painting, each section of tape was removed and reapplied somewhat askew, allowing apertures to open at the periphery of the substrate and along the splits. I incised each portion vertically with variable width stripes, to fragment the composition further. This effect is heightened by the slight tilt of lines which occurred incidentally during execution. Finally, I scored an additional line horizontally through the midpoint of each band of striations. The resulting form was shattered and disjointed as

though slumping onto its own foundations in an attitude of collapse. Further, I observed that the all-over composition creates a feeling of claustrophobic fullness, assisted by the circular form.



Figure 43. *Sunder*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, 40cm diameter.

Next, I looked to increasing the edges between sections, the joins between planes, setting myself the challenge of fracturing the circular form vertically as well as horizontally. This presented a challenge, due to the tendency of vertical striations to drown out fractures along this axis (as in the *Cant I & II* paintings, fig. 30). I began by breaking the masked surface into 16 squares which ran beyond the edge of the painting. Each of these taped segments was removed at once and reapplied from the centre

outward, with the self-imposed stipulation that they not overlap. In replacing each square, I only allowed myself one attempt and forbade adjustment, resulting in a buckled, imprecise grid (fig. 43).

In contrast to *Signal*, each portion was incised with the same width line, using the increments on the planes immediately above and below as a guide. This was done so that any fractures would have to be articulated by other means, such as slant of the line and the occurrence of slender black voids. To emphasise the separate planes, I added diagonal score lines to each square, wherever a top-left and lower-right corner could be identified. In addition to drawing the eye to the surface of the work by allowing a line of enamel paint to accrete, these diagonals unexpectedly created the impression that the work bulges, is concave or convex, rather than flat. I found it paradoxical that this simple addition acted in two opposite ways, pulling the form apart whilst binding it together.

IMPLICATION OF MOVEMENT

By fragmenting the picture plane, I observed that there was an implication not only of material moving in different directions, but also of movement *over time*. Within a static composition such as a painting, there is a simultaneity of the perception of these events: forms could be coalescing, or they could be disintegrating. In *The Destructive Character*, Dirk Raaijmakers observes that if the sequence of photographs documenting a destructive act (such as, an object being dismantled or otherwise obliterated) is reversed, they can be interpreted as the careful reconstruction of that object.⁵⁶ It is through the sequential presentation that a narrative is conveyed.

I considered that inconclusiveness between the two implied contradictory movements was important, because it denies the viewer certainty and creates intrigue. The plane pulled asunder and yet drawn together, the centrifugal and the centripetal, planar and three-dimensional; the work is more effective when occupying the inconclusive middle ground, exploiting the immobility of the painted image. By this, I mean that a contiguous painting support can be pushed or pulled apart, without dividing the physical object at all. Instead, distorting the grid of the painting creates the appearance of apertures and voids, like magma between shifting tectonic plates. This has the power to activate the surface, make it unresolvable, illegible, or incoherent.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 63.

As a means of suggesting movement over time, I worked on a series of three squares, which I felt would emulate a narrative structure by appearing sequential. I hoped that, like a comic book, the tendency would be to read the squares as each presenting the same structure, progressing towards collapse. In *B1*, *B2*, and *B3* (fig. 44), moving from left to right or top to bottom, I increased the number of incursions so that the form appeared to buckle. This was achieved by increasing the handling of materials as the series progressed, removing and reapplying the tape layer of *B1* once, *B2* twice, and *B3* three times. Each of these increasing manipulations emphasised formal dissolution, because it allowed for more accidents to occur. Dust accrued on the adhesive; the sections began to tear and to tangle.

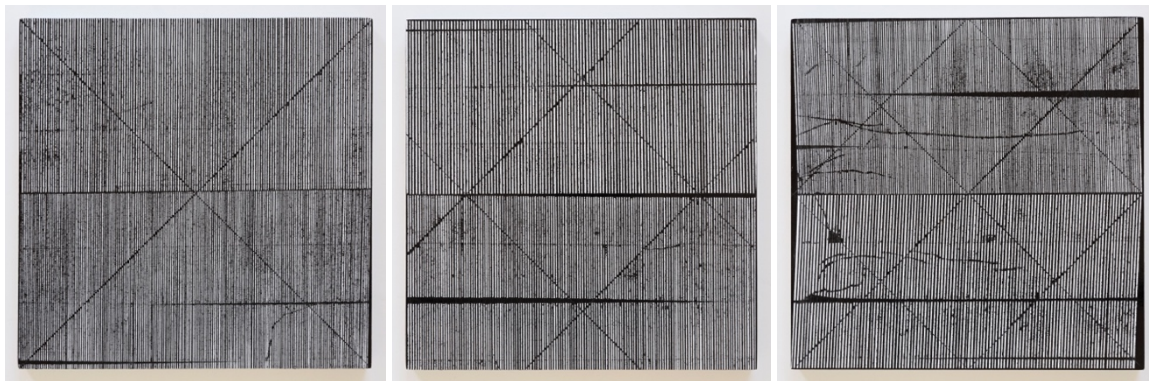


Figure 44. *B1*, *B2* and *B3*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, 30 x 30 cm each.

This series took the removal and reapplication of tape to the extreme, and there were moments when I almost lost control of the materials (fig. 45). In reflecting on these paintings, I felt that the number and nature of some lines in the third panel, created by the creased tape, were too organic, too curved, and therefore too much of a distraction. I observed, however, that as the angle of striations increased, the appearance of structural integrity diminished. Despite the success of this sequence in suggesting corruption over time, I felt that the implied narrative detracted from the larger goal of creating visual ambiguity.

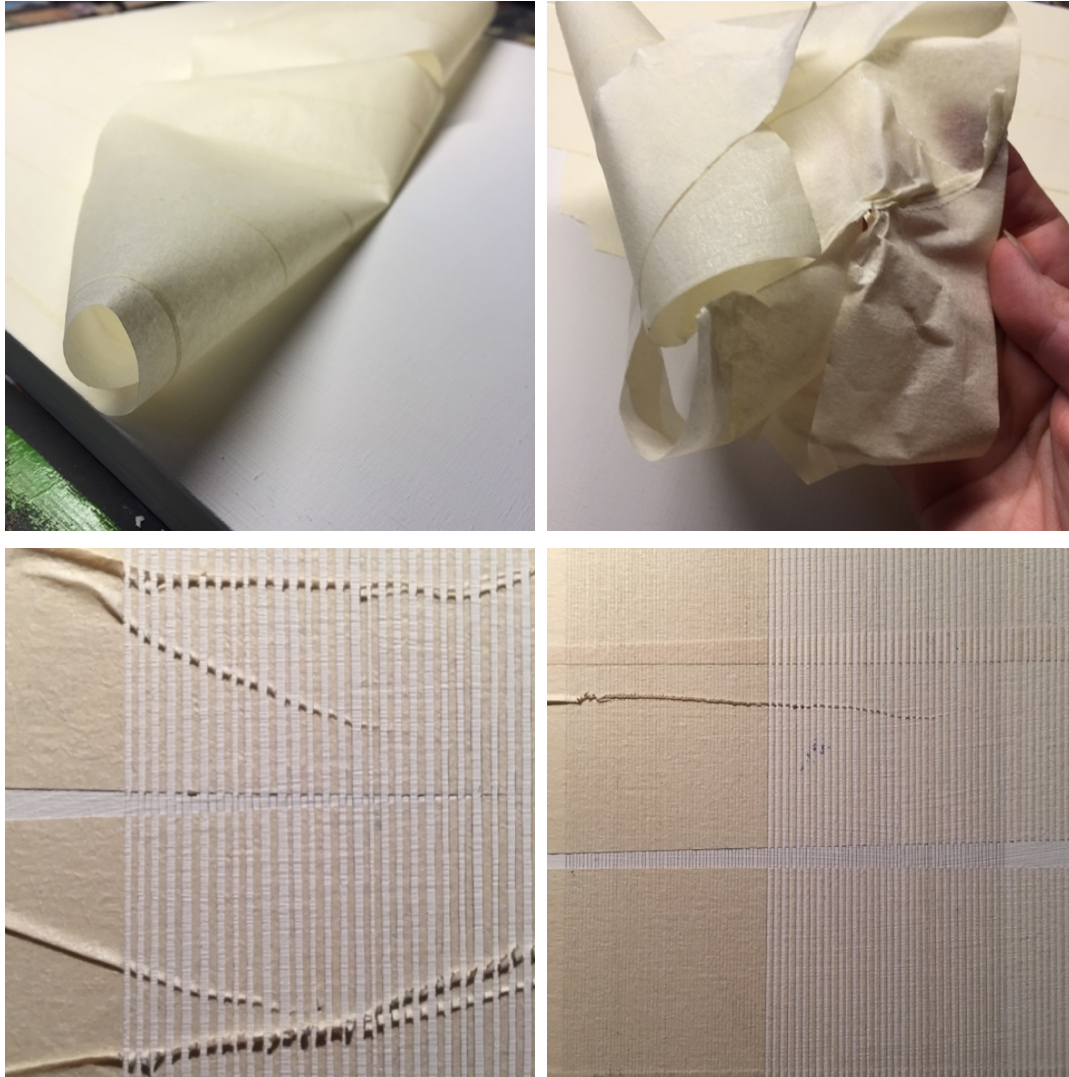


Figure 45. Encountering material difficulties.

CUBES AND THREE-DIMENSIONALITY

I became curious to know what would happen when the field of lines was fractured by physical breaks, in the form of corners and edges. To explore this, I began a series of three-dimensional paintings.

Initially, I was reluctant to make this move, as I am familiar with several artists who have worked extensively with the combination of the stripe and the three-dimensional form, and I did not wish to cover the same ground. In particular, I was thinking of the work of German artist, Edgar Diehl, who uses the pleated and folded form.

In *JoMaRu XXXIII* (fig. 46a), the artist employs an aluminium support which has been pleated so that it juts from the wall in a zigzag form. By covering this object in alternating, horizontal bands of crisp black and white, broken up by vertical composition lines, Diehl transforms the experience of this shaped support into an optically confusing encounter. Moving to the right edge of the painting, looking left along it (fig. 46b), the entire surface seems to shift and transform, contradicting assumptions about what we see.

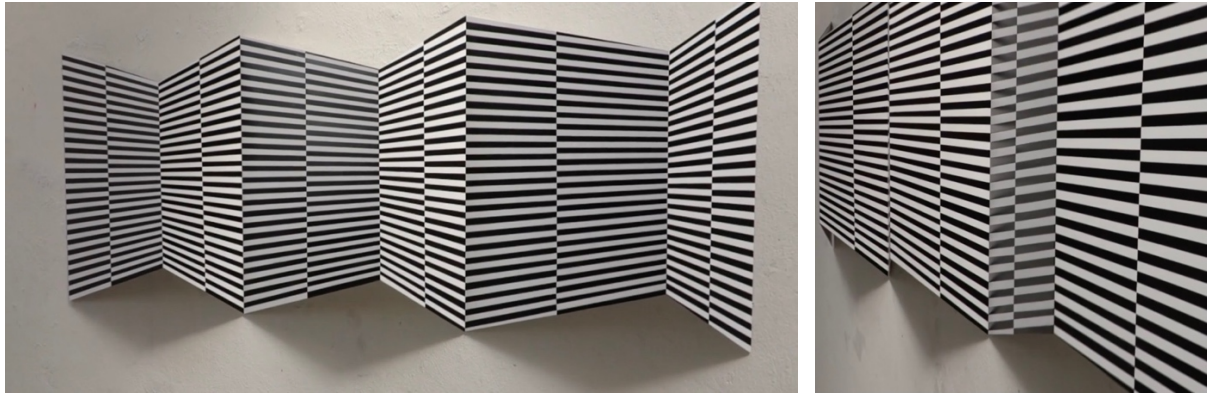


Figure 46a, b. Edgar Diehl, *JoMaRu XXXIII*, 2019, 75 x 183 x 15 cm, acrylic on formed aluminium frames. A shifting viewpoint changes the work.

I chose to focus instead on a single shape: the cube. Cubes, like circles, have an inherent cohesion and solidity and must meet certain criteria in order to be classified as such. Each cube has six sides, twelve edges, and eight corners. All angles are 90°; all edges are either parallel or perpendicular in relation to one another; and the planes are square. I sought to exploit the recognisable uniformity of the cube form and to break apart the fields of lines using the physical junctures created by the edges.

In the initial series of small cubes (fig. 47), I worked on two hinged sides at a time. Because I was working on preformed wooden objects, this involved continuing the lines so that they appeared to “wrap” around the object like a skin. This means that there are six edges where lines terminate and six where they continue (fig. 48). I created several more cubes with increasing size, so that—as for the circular work—more fractures and compositional elements could be included. Each size is used to explore a slightly different way of breaking apart the surface of the cube. I employed both regular and irregular compositions, some being entirely striped while others are equal parts stripe and black void.

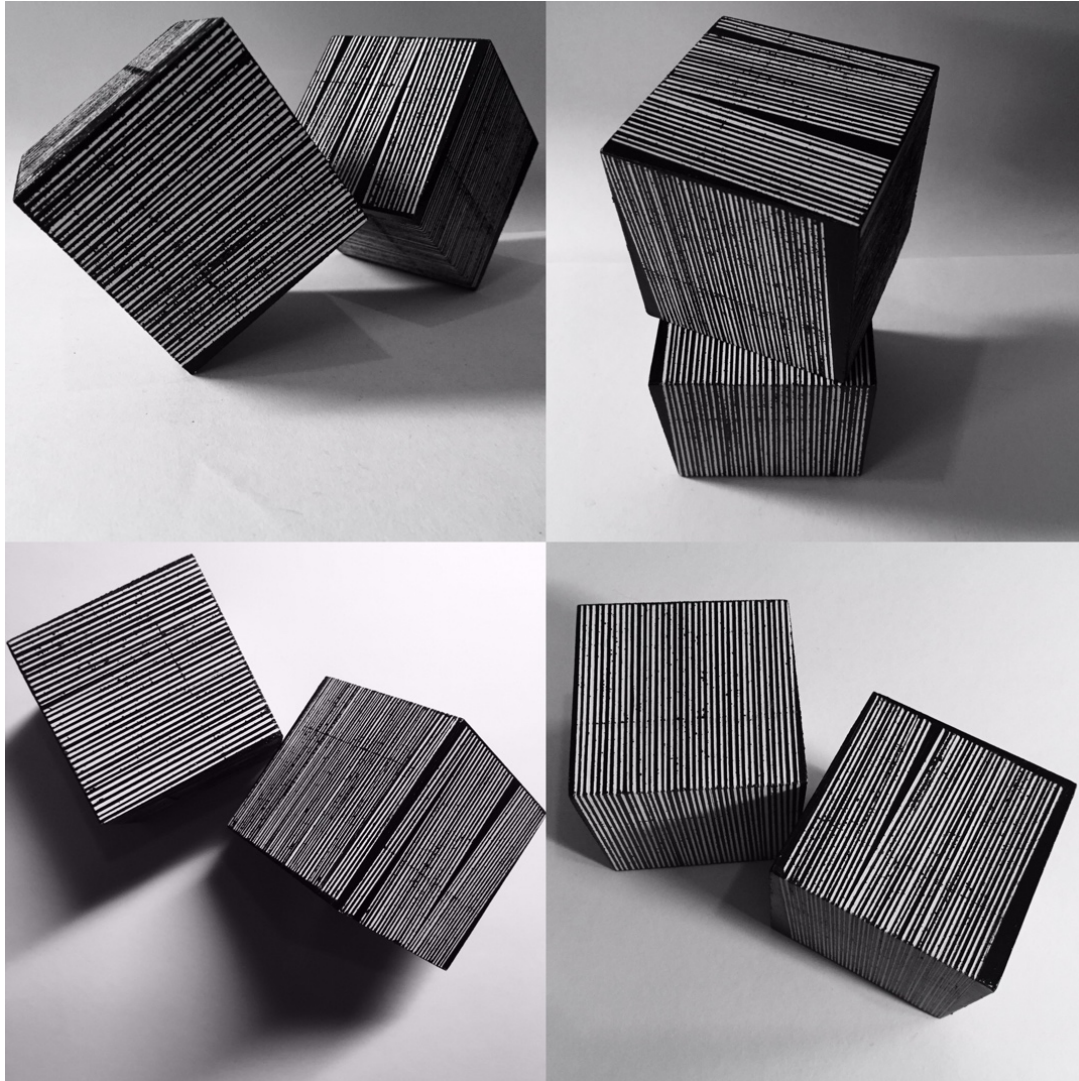


Figure 47. Small cubes, 2016, enamel / acrylic on wood, each 7 x 7 x 7 cm.

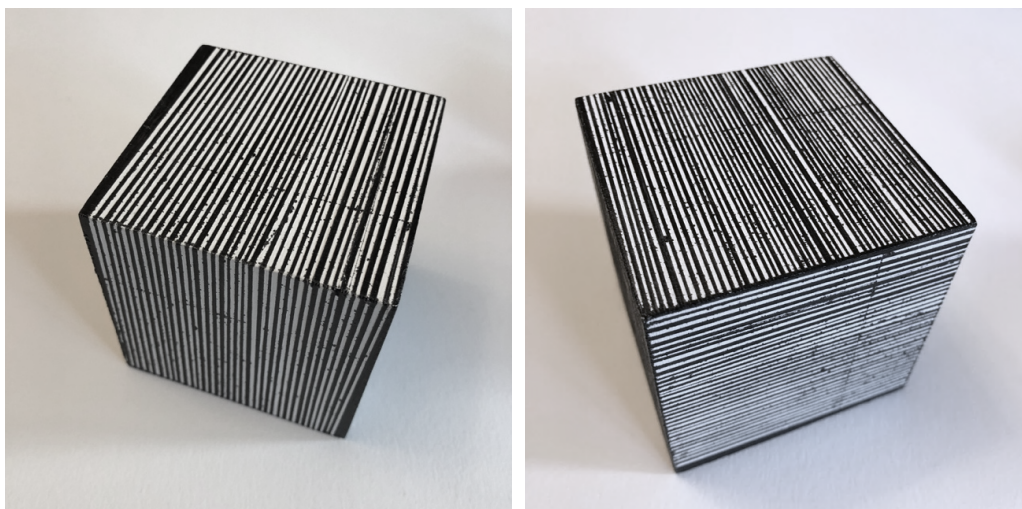


Figure 48. (left) Lines wrapping around edges and (right) terminating at the edge.

In choosing the initial and smallest format, I had failed to anticipate the difficulties which would present themselves during the striping of each cube. The small scale (with each edge being approximately nine centimetres) meant that I had very little surface area upon which to rest the ruler, making the process of incising striations particularly difficult. Specifically, as each plane was formed, slight skews began to appear, fractures and voids where the stripes did not hit the edges cleanly. Though I intended to create regular lines, they veered and pulled apart from one another like snagged fabric (fig. 49).

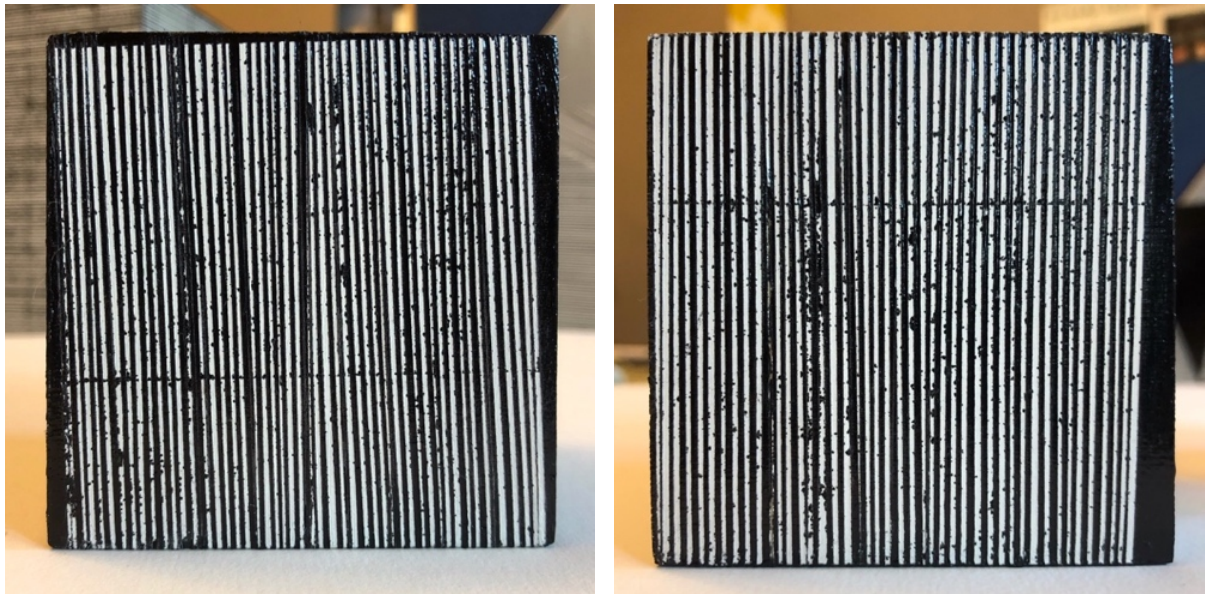


Figure 49. Lines veering due to the impractical size of the first cubes, 7 x 7 x 7 cm.

By setting up a difficult situation, the impracticality of my technique manifested without being foreseen and this resulted in the regular shapes being wrapped in irregular lines. In the subsequent larger series, this outcome was reduced, but not eliminated. In some cubes, I created a regular six-sided composition (fig. 50), while others are asymmetrical and chaotic (fig. 51). I endeavoured to mark each cube uniquely, altering the composition on each, so that by the end of the series, no two are identical. At the same time, the naturally occurring human errors, due to the difficulty of working on this format, persisted.



Figure 50. Medium-sized cube with regular composition formed by repeating a parallelogram, 15 x 15 x 15 cm.

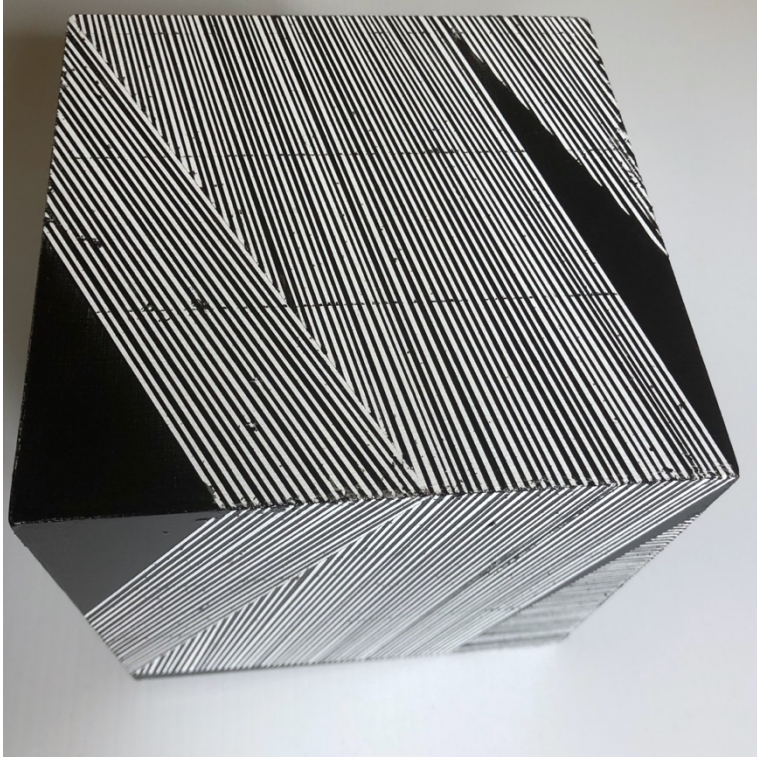


Figure 51. Chaotic composition, 15 x 15 x 15 cm.

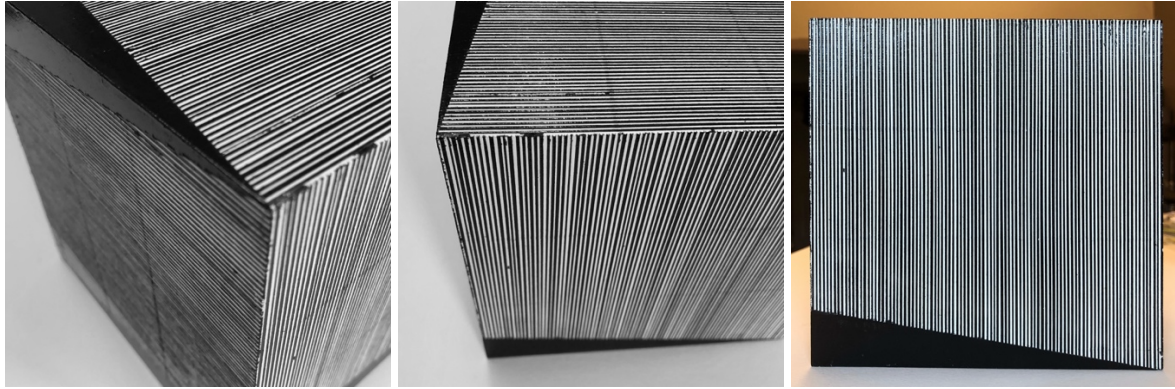


Figure 52. Depending on viewpoint, three, four, or five sides can be obscured.

I realised that painting all six sides meant that any method of display would obscure portions of each piece, implying that they were designed to be handled and manipulated, that they were playthings. Further, by assembling and dismantling the various arrangements, I noticed that this form always obscures a minimum of three sides from the viewer (fig. 52). By arranging the objects into varying formations, an endless array of compositional possibilities was revealed. I thought of Lewitt and his numerous series showing variations of cubes, in particular the *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* which exist in a number of iterations and formats (fig. 53). Further, I became increasingly interested in the interplay *between* the cubes, revealing breaks between the sides of multiple objects, not just the sides of each object individually (fig. 54).

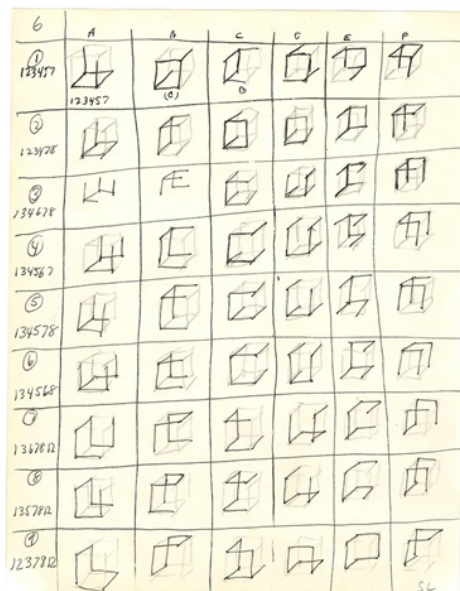


Figure 53. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/sol-lewitt/>Sol Lewitt, *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes, 6 (1 to 25)*, ca. 1967, ink on paper, 28 x 21.5 cm.

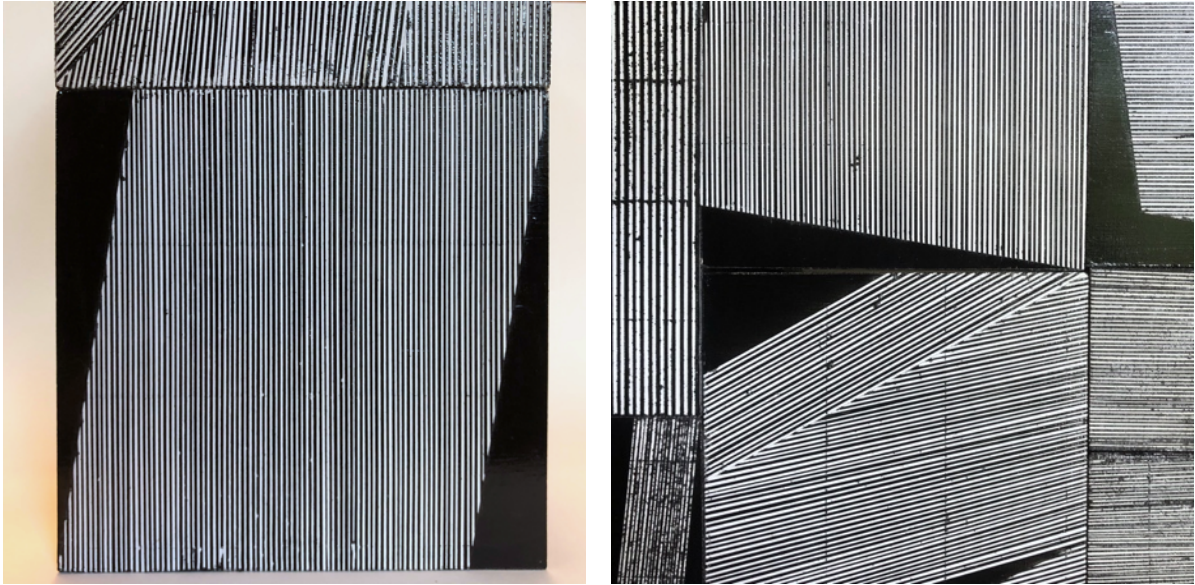


Figure 54. Breaks and interactions between the sides of multiple cubes.

The pleasure in handling these objects and the combinatorial play which occurred led me to create three flattened forms, to be printed and assembled by anyone who wished to do so.

To make these constructable objects, I photocopied each side of the three smallest cubes and arranged them so that each formed a unique, flattened layout, complete with tabs for adhesion. Though this was a less serious exercise for me, it brought in an additional technology through which glitch and visual pollution could be invited: the photocopier. The three flat forms (fig. 55) were a means of exploring the flat-to-three-dimensional-to-flat-again form; however, it was ultimately the medium of photography which revealed the usefulness of this exercise.

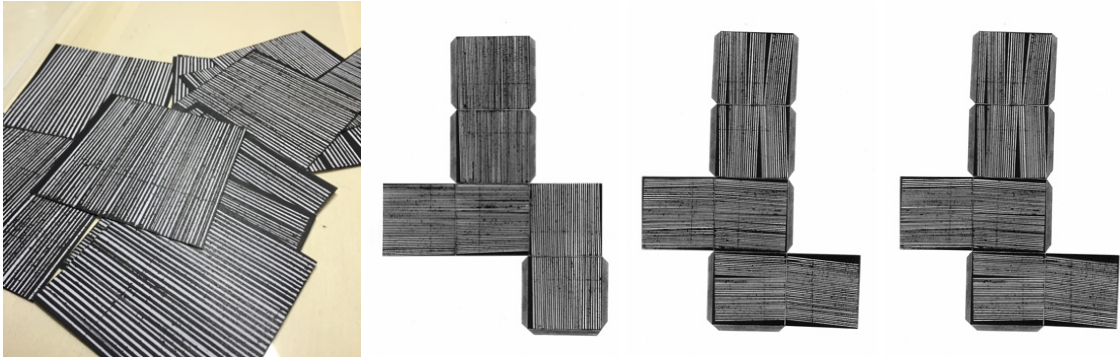


Figure 55. Paper cubes.

I began to document the forms which arose from endlessly recombining these objects. Taking a two-dimensional picture plane, wrapping it around a three-dimensional form, and then capturing a flattened rendering of the arrangement resulted in some very ambiguous images (fig. 56). I was reminded of the words of Ellsworth Kelly; “Photography is about seeing in three dimensions and trying to bring it into two dimensions in a way that recalls the third.” Through this exercise, the set of cubes became tools, with the photographs—initially intended as documentation—becoming an important outcome of the exercise.

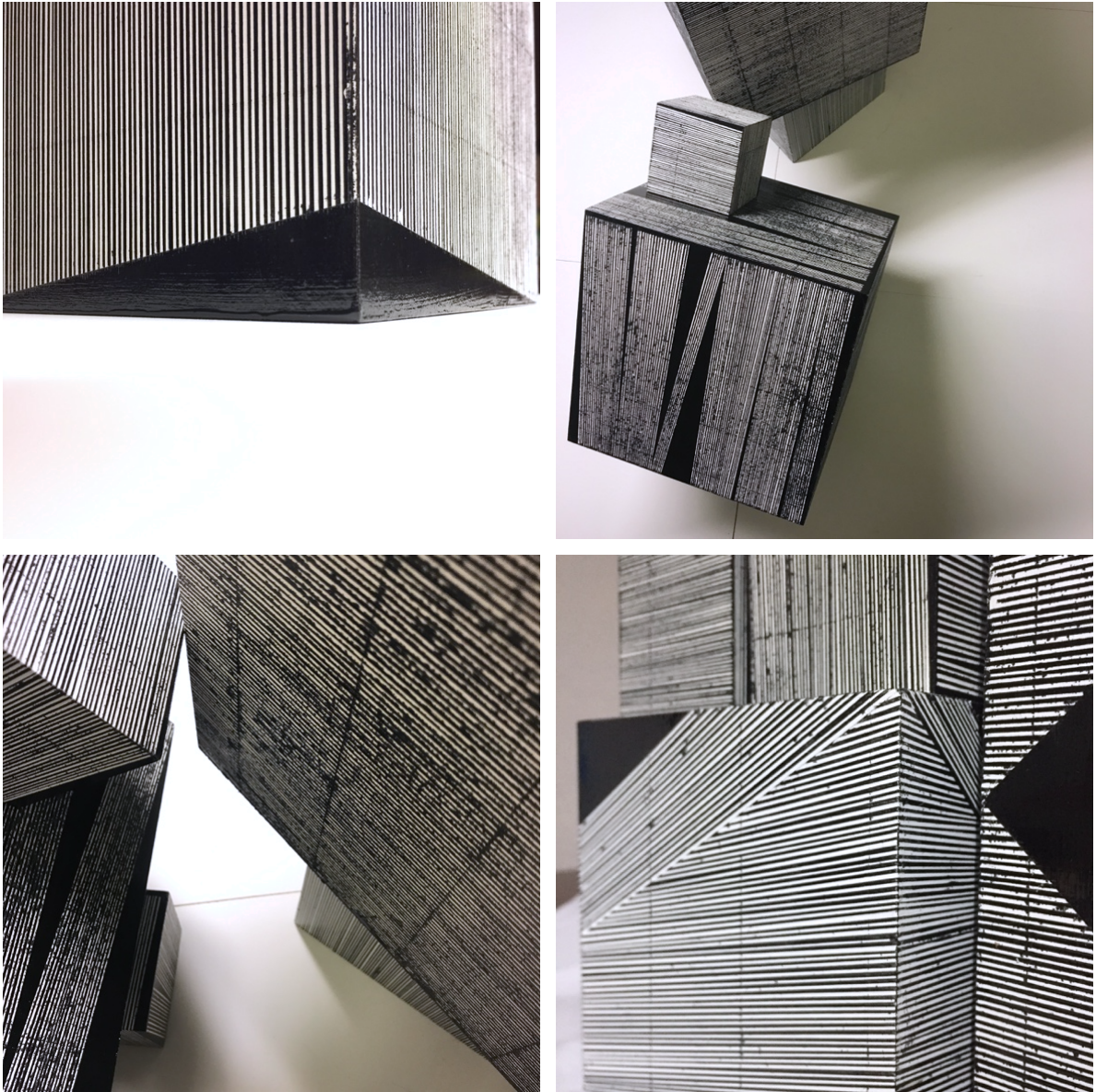


Figure 56. Ambiguous cube arrangements.



Figure 57. Architectural forms.

The stackable cubes and resulting images demonstrate the curious slippage which occurs between three-dimensional objects rendered in a two-dimensional form. Individually and in clusters, the various arrangements take on the feel of architecture, often appearing to be far larger than they are in real life (fig. 57). Further, by creating an object with three dimensions and then reducing it to a flattened image, I created a feedback loop which alludes to but denies a spatial element, heightening ambiguity and visual intrigue. This tends to create a tension between the surface materiality of the picture plane and a perception of an illusory third dimension. The images below (fig. 58) of a single cube illustrate this effect. The short depth of field tells me that the object is receding, but the flat image, and the black edges appearing on one plane, send a mixed visual message.

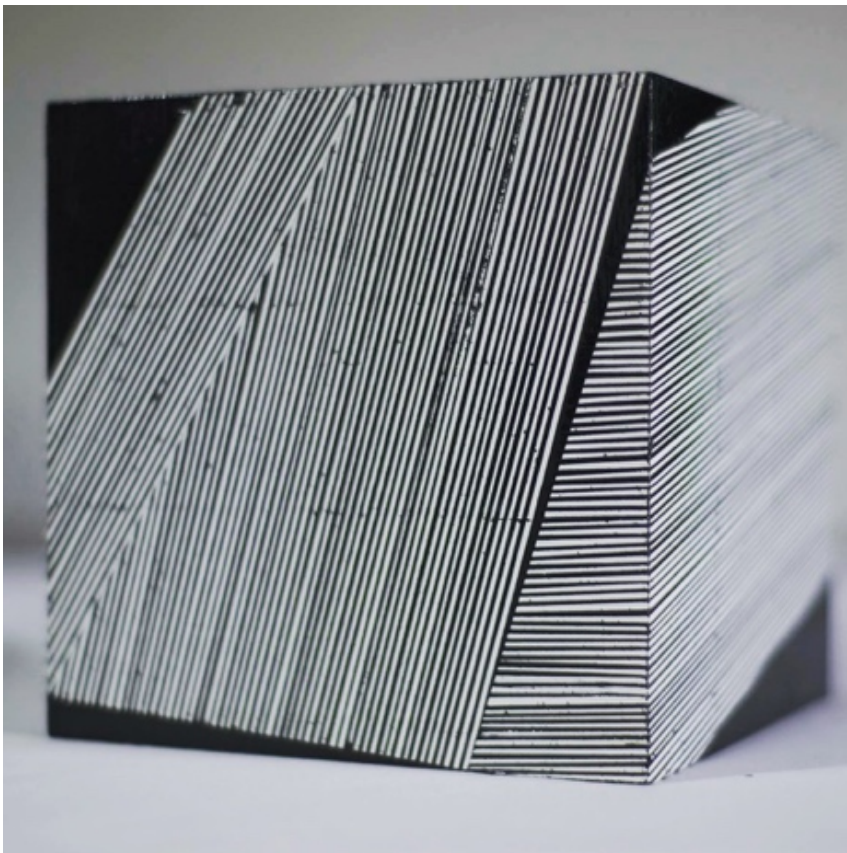
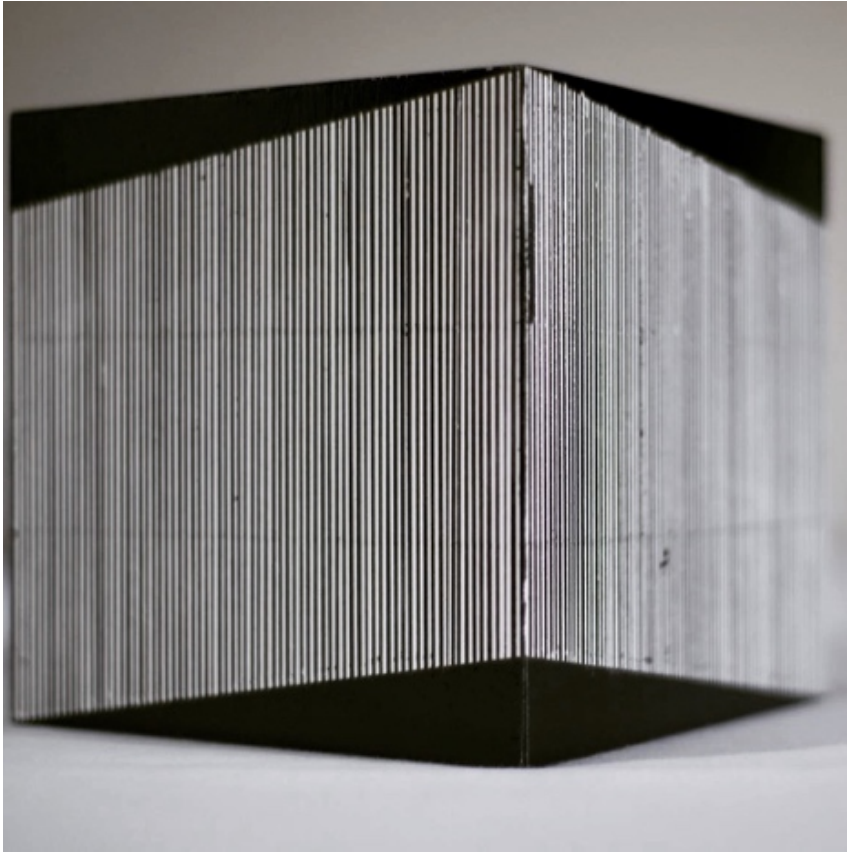


Figure 58. Tension between flat and three-dimensional forms.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have addressed the perceived dead end of glitch, and developed new methodologies to expand this form of disruption into the broader category of malfunction. By considering my studio research, I found that changes could be made to my methodology without breaking the rules which govern it. That is, I could make changes to the process without changing the elements within it. I expanded the handling of materials, allowing an increased chance that errors, misalignments, and other forms of corruption would be revealed in the final work. I introduced the inherently stable circular format, with its single unbroken edge, to give myself a solid form to break apart visually. I then experimented with cubes, to address fracture in three dimensions. In this latter experiment, I discovered that the feedback into two-dimensional imagery, in the form of photography, was the most fruitful and intriguing outcome.

It became evident through these various streams of studio practice that exploiting visual ambiguities within the work could be a method of expanding the balancing act of glitch. In glitch, the malfunction is always partial. We can see the corruption, but also the overarching structure of what it is that has been corrupted. In the studio, I was able to identify these visual paradoxes as three separate but intertwined sets of ambiguities. First, that which exists between fragmentation, discontinuity, incompleteness; and their opposites, solidity, continuity, and completeness. This was particularly heightened in the circular works, where the chosen form had an implied solidity, undermined by the fractured forms it contained.

From here, the second contradiction which arose was that between the implication of movement, and the presentation of a static form; in particular, the implied simultaneous coalescing and disintegration of the forms, captured in a static artwork, and the implication that a non-representational painting can capture movement. Finally, I was intrigued by the simultaneity of the implication of pictorial space and non-objective flatness, or put another way, between pure perception and the material object. I was particularly curious about the way contradictions can arise, collapsing a three-dimensional form back down to a flat form, by seemingly representing an impossible space. Ultimately, I found that the cubes—via play, in the form of assembling and dismantling various structures—became a useful tool in creating endless possibilities from a limited number of objects.

It was ultimately the images resulting from this play, however, which revealed the most. The photographs of the cubes illuminated how the suggestion of depth, when presented in a flattened form, could create an optical ambiguity. This destabilisation of the composition, along with the careful consideration of colour, form, and materiality, could then be employed to create a precarious balance. This discovery became the refined goal of my studio practice, allowing me to expand upon glitch both visually and thematically.

By absorbing the documentation of the cubes into my studio practice, and expanding fracture to include two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional forms, I was introducing a new medium in the form of digital photography. I wondered how this format might be further employed to develop visual disruption. In the next chapter, I take this expansion a step further, looking at fracture in the real world via the practice of urban photography. I conduct a case study of Ellsworth Kelly and non-composition, and begin to focus on the striped signage of the urban landscape. I conclude Chapter 3 with discussion of a body of paintings which are the result of these investigations.

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter, I will investigate urban photography and the ubiquitous but often overlooked real-world fractures which surround us. I will examine the relationship of photography to non-objective painting, and the ways the found glitch can be deployed to generate unexpected compositional effects. I will conduct an analysis of artist Ellsworth Kelly, whose lesser-known photographic practice is inextricably linked with his paintings through the concepts of non-composition and defamiliarisation. Examining my ongoing photographic output will lead to a focus on traffic and warning signs, which in turn will trigger an investigation of the stripe in the context of art-making. I will explore the work of three artists who employ this motif to different ends: Daniel Buren, Jesús Rafael Soto and Agnes Martin.

In Chapter 2, I employed circular and cubic forms to evoke a sense of solidity and completeness, which I then contradicted through expanded methods of compositional fracture. It was, however, the act of documenting the cubes which led to an unexpected development, whereby the two-dimensional rendering of three-dimensional forms produced puzzling, visually incoherent images. I interpreted this ambiguity as one of several which echo the uncertainty of glitch. Glitch—the half-crashed file, transmission of a signal polluted by noise—is a balancing act. It is the simultaneous presentation of two opposing forces: that which is intended, entangled with the symptoms of its own corruption.

These ambiguities exist as a series of interlinked tensions which arise due to contradictory visual outcomes. These are: the simultaneous presentation of fragmentation and its opposite, solidity; implications of movement in a static form, including coalescence and disintegration; and the coexistence of pictorial space and non-objective flatness. This chapter charts my expanding investigation into visual ambiguity, by conducting an analysis of these same effects which arise in my parallel abstract photographic practice. I then draw together these investigations in the form of a new body of work, which sees the introduction of a new shape, careful reintroduction of colour, and a thematic focus on signs and signals in the urban environment.

The overarching goal in these new paintings is to construct images employing visual cues which indicate, like glitch, two states simultaneously, but also ambivalently *neither* one thing *nor* another. In focusing on the visual aspects of a composition which render it illegible, another conundrum presented itself. How was it possible to expand upon these ambiguities whilst also maintaining the uncontrived nature of the work, allowing the image to unfold, as it were, without interference? In

other words, what methodologies could I employ to generate composition whilst avoiding decisions and maintaining the same chance-based framework as glitch?

PHOTOGRAPHY

Though my focus is on non-objective painting where nothing is re-presented, I reflected that visual ambiguities can occur in photography, specifically the genre which goes by various names including *abstract photography*, and more poetically, *ambient abstraction*. This genre presents the formal qualities of a subject such as line, shape, colour, whilst tending to eschew aspects of the subject's appearance which rend it recognisable. At the start of my PhD journey, I began taking photographs as an extension of mindfulness practice, as opposed to art practice. The camera is one of the functions of my mobile phone; it is quick and easy to use, and unlike painting, involves no labour. Spontaneous and unedited, often taken without breaking my stride, the images are a record of observations made during my daily journeys (fig. 59).

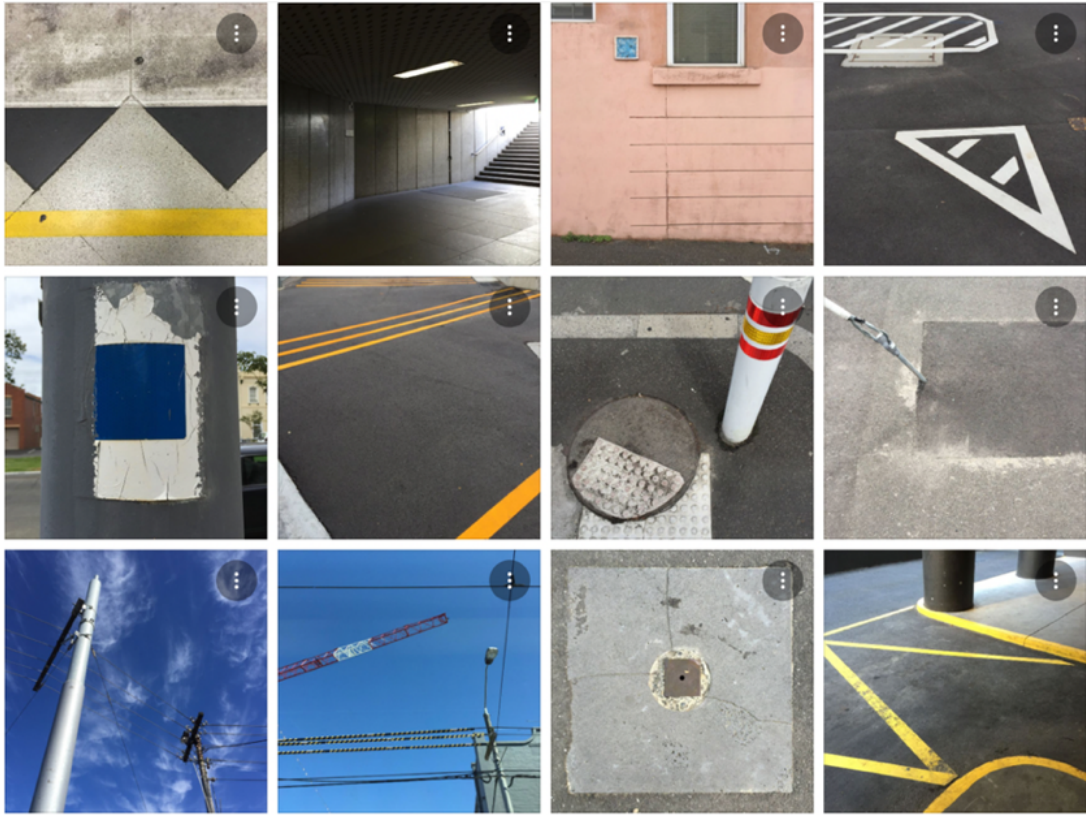


Figure 59. Screenshot from Facebook Album View.

Waiting on train platforms, peering from tram windows, walking between connections, I took pleasure in observing the detail in my surroundings. I had noticed that several of my peers on social media were documenting similar subject matter and I came to enjoy the subtle humour and camaraderie encouraged by finding common elements in urban life, though those lives might be geographically and linguistically disparate (fig. 60). I documented aspects of the urban environment which caught my eye, in particular telephone, power, train and tram lines, road markings, traffic signs, shadows, fences, and scaffolding from construction and demolition sites. This subject matter is inexhaustible and ever-changing.

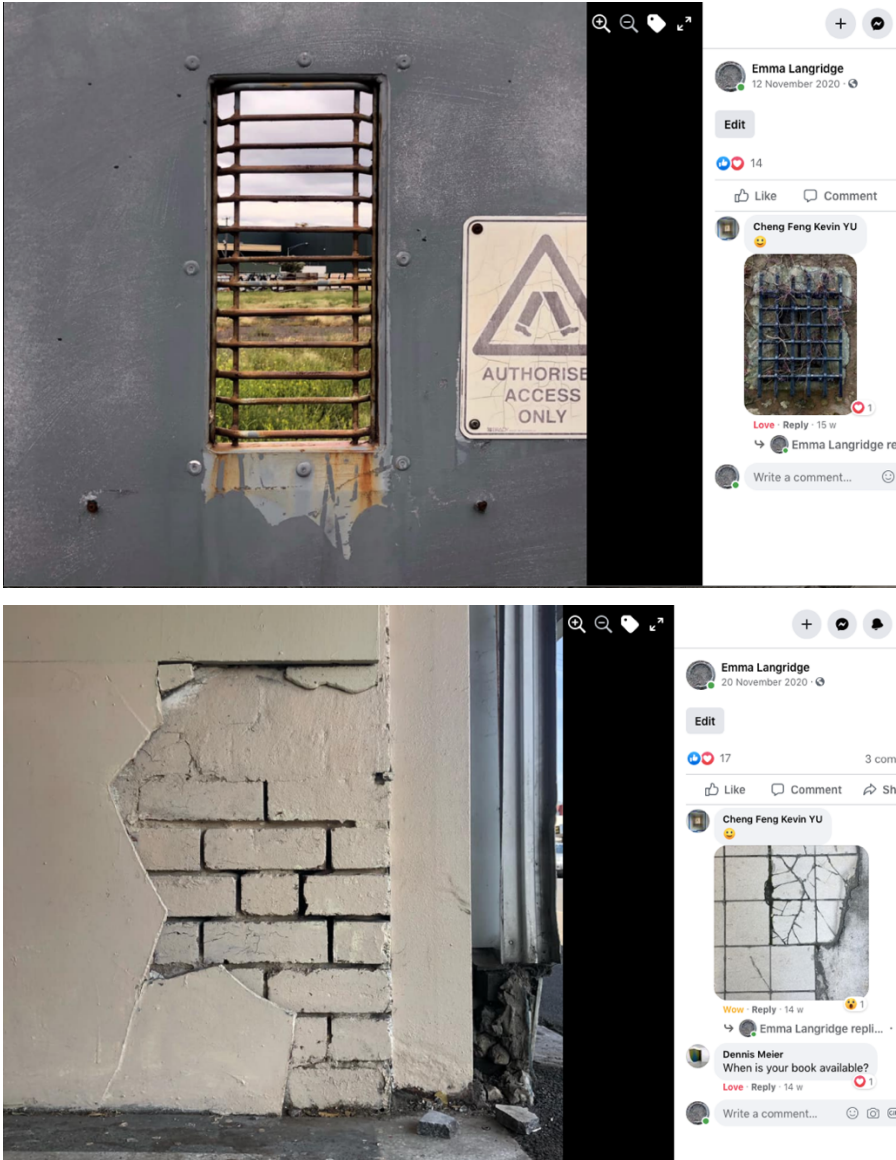


Figure 60. Screenshots of my Facebook posts showing a conversation between myself and Taiwanese artist, Yu Cheng-feng (Kevin Yu). Like the card game *Snap*, the dialogue is purely visual.

Over time I came to recognise that the types of event recorded in the photographic medium were analogous to experimentation occurring in my studio research. Increasingly, the body of photographs came to include images of detritus, things bent and broken, and structures falling into disrepair and in a state of flux. My interest in the compositional fracture occurring in the photographs had the effect of diminishing the negative connotations of the subject matter, which would typically be associated with urban blight. Further, the photographic work gradually became aligned with my ongoing interest in themes of decay and entropy.

BLIGHT, BREAKDOWN AS SUBJECT

Of course, I am not alone in this obsession. Across the arts, breakdown and malfunction have been subjects for centuries, and can be framed as a subset of the fascination with the past. In the West, this interest flows from Ancient Rome, with the monuments (and stories, myths, fairy tales) remaining as residue of previous human achievement.⁵⁷ Architectural ruin and decay became more prominent as subject matter during the Renaissance and in the 18th century when archaeological excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum increased the West's obsession with the classical past.⁵⁸

In its extreme form, this led to the German notion of *ruinenwert* (ruin value), promoted by Albert Speer in the first half of the 20th century. Buildings and monuments were designed specifically so that, in the event of future collapse, the ruins would emulate the vestiges of past empires.⁵⁹ More recently, the photographic genre known somewhat pejoratively as *ruin porn* is a direct descendant of this tendency.⁶⁰ Common subjects are abandoned buildings and post-industrial cityscapes, most notably of Detroit, alongside abandoned theme parks and places deserted after major catastrophes (figs. 61–63).

⁵⁷ Rhiannon Evans, Bob Carr, Richards Hobbs, "Rome, city and empire," presented by the National Museum of Australia 5 December 2018, broadcast January 31st 2019 on *Big Ideas* with Paul Barclay, ABC Radio National, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/our-fascination-with-ancient-rome/10713548>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, (New York, The Overlook Press, 2003), 322.

⁶⁰ Brian Dillon, "Ruin Porn: what's behind our fascination with decay?," broadcast December 5th 2015 on *Blueprint* with Michael Williams, ABC Radio National, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/blueprintforliving/ruin-porn:-what%E2%80%99s-behind-our-fascination-with-decay/6997458>.



Figure 61. Shaun Thoms (aka @violent_crumble), Japanese ruins (location undisclosed).



Figure 62. Edward Burtynsky, *Shipbreaking 9ab*, 2000, diptych, Chittagong, Bangladesh.



Figure 63. David Maisel, *The Fall, Vicalvaro 3*, 2013, archival pigment print, 122 x 122 cm, developments on the outskirts of Madrid where construction halted after the economic collapse of 2008.

An arts practice focusing on urban decay can be framed as a method of creating awareness for societal disfunction. Auto-destructive artist Gustav Metzger, for example, spoke directly about the intertwined issues of “atmospheric pollution, creative vandalism, destruction in protest, planned obsolescence, popular media, urban sprawl / overcrowding, war...” in his work.⁶¹ Metzger, who

⁶¹ Andrew Wilson, “Gustave Metzger’s Auto-Destructive / Auto-Creative Art: An Art Manifesto, 1959-1969,” *Third Text*, Vol. 22, Issue 2 (March, 2008): 192.

undertook art from the position of the political radical, was vehemently opposed to the commodification of art, organised power, and capitalist systems.⁶²

Metzger's 1961 work *Acid Action Painting* was recreated in 2006 by an assistant under instruction from the artist (fig. 64). Employing three materials—nylon, hydrochloric acid and metal—the instructions are set out in advance:

Technique. 3 nylon canvases coloured white black red are arranged behind each other, in this order. Acid is painted, flung and sprayed onto the nylon which corrodes at point of contact within 15 seconds.⁶³

As in the practice of Sol Lewitt, there is a clear division between the initial plan, the execution of the set protocols, and the resulting form. Metzger allows the process to unfold and for chance to operate within a controlled system.



Figure 64. Gustave Metzger's assistant working on *Acid action painting*, 2006 iteration, nylon, hydrochloric acid, metal, 213 x 377 x 183 cm.

⁶² Gustav Metzger, Abstract of DIAS opening remarks, *Studio International*, issue 174 (December 1966): 238.

⁶³ Gustav Metzger, quoted in "Obituary: Gustav Metzger died on March 1st," *The Economist*, (March 18, 2017), <https://www.economist.com/obituary/2017/03/18/obituary-gustav-metzger-died-on-march-1st>.

There is a correlation between the breakdown of information and transmission in digital and analogue media, and photography which focuses on decay. Further, the found examples of urban decay via photography align it with the three core intentions of glitch art, as proposed by Caleb Kelly: first, the everyday and overlooked fracture found in the world; second, reframing background as foreground; and finally, forming something new from something old.⁶⁴ This echoes the Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi*, which tends nowadays to be conflated with the word *rustic*, and as such, has become clichéd when applied to surface effects—for example, the flaking of paint on a worn bench. In its truest sense, if the deliberately obscure combination of terms can be pinned down at all, *wabi-sabi* refers to an ineffable sadness at the transient nature of beauty, the inevitability of decay, ambiguity, and contradiction.⁶⁵ It requires that one accept rather than fight against entropy and the cyclical nature of life. As all matter is going to break down, why not accept and appreciate it?

Like glitch, it is the corruption and the noise, the deviation from the expected which becomes central in destructive art practice. Beside this accord between the visible decrepitude of urban spaces and the corruption of transmission via glitch, the practice of photography provided me a different method with which to observe the various ambiguities I was pursuing in painting. The simultaneous presentation of contrary impulses—fragmentation and solidity, pictorial space and non-objective flatness, movement in a static form—are all present in the photographs I took during this time. Despite being representations of objects in the real world, these elements can also be seen in a formal sense.

ELLSWORTH KELLY AND NON-COMPOSITION

My next line of studio enquiry was to investigate the function of the photographs in relation to the paintings. Rather than employing observation of real-world phenomena and then representing it in an abstracted form, my strictly controlled methodology generates its own forms. As such, the photographs operate not as source material, but as more of an echo-chamber, illuminating and amplifying aspects of the paintings, such as their fractured linework and distorted forms. This brings to

⁶⁴ Kelly, *Cracked Media*, 285–321.

⁶⁵ For a better understanding, the books of architect and aesthetic theorist Leonard Koren are a good summation of this arcane terminology, which he proposes is diametrically opposed to Modernism. See Leonard Koren, *Wabi-Sabi For Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press,) 1994.

mind the painter Ellsworth Kelly, who took photographs, but was reluctant to exhibit them, as to do so would be to risk the viewer making assumptions about the source of his primary practice. Instead, his photos “enact a reversal”—he found things in the world which are “Kelly-like.”⁶⁶



Figure 65. (left) Ellsworth Kelly, *Window*, 1949, oil on canvas / wood, 128 x 49 cm and (right) Google Streetview of Museum of Modern Art, Paris, showing the windows.

Art historian Yve-Alain Bois explains that Kelly used direct observation, augmented by drawing and photography, as a method of non-composition, whereby the artist was able to “invent various ways of avoiding inventing.”⁶⁷ To this end, the artist’s strategies are identified as: the transfer; chance; the grid; the monochrome panel as a unit; and later, the silhouette. Each of these approaches assisted Kelly in making paintings “without having to involve his subjective taste or agency, without having to

⁶⁶ Yve-Alain Bois, “Ellsworth Kelly’s dream of Anonymity”, YouTube, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT8fR5OZ2Uc&ab_channel=InstituteForAdvancedStudy, accessed 11.11.2020.

⁶⁷ Yve-Alain Bois, “Ellsworth Kelly’s Dream of Impersonality,” <https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2013/bois-ellsworth-kelly>

decide where to place things and in which order, on his canvas.”⁶⁸ The transfer, for example, requires that an observed form such as a window, a leaf, or the negative space between these objects, be reduced to an elemental composition, which in turn becomes the basis of a painting (fig. 65).

To distil the initial subject down to this essential structure, Kelly employed techniques involving viewpoint, cropping, the alignment of forms within the painting to the edge of the support, and the shaping of the support itself. His paintings are the product of “the struggle to free form from depiction and materiality” by “emptying the shape of representational content.”⁶⁹ As such, though Kelly employs compositions encountered already-made in the world, they defy being categorised as either figurative and formalist. The photographs are, like drawing, a tool used to identify compositions which have occurred without being contrived.

SPATIAL JOLTS

In my own photographs, certain categories of images began to accrue. This helped me to identify specific methodologies which are useful in heightening visual ambiguity and fracture in purely formal painting compositions. Each of these approaches presented the photographed subject so that it is defamiliarised and defied identification. Further, the various groupings allowed me to isolate specific examples of misalignments, fractures, and breaks, which also arose in the paintings. Initially, for example, I became aware of the ability of a static image to ambiguously imply both separation and reformation, in particular the way multiple surfaces presented on a single contiguous plane could create a visual disjunction. This is evident in many of my urban photographs where discontinuous and often damaged surfaces are articulated through changes in gauge, direction, and quality of stripe (fig. 66). Some of these discontinuities are folds, some are crumples, where others involve two or more surfaces side by side.

⁶⁸ Bois, “Dream of Impersonality.”

⁶⁹ Ellsworth Kelly, *Fragmentation and the single form: June 15–September 4* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1990), unpaginated.



Figure 66. Nine views of the urban environment.

In an online discussion, a colleague referred to this effect as the presentation of “spatial jolts—where two or more spatial registers inhabit the same surface.”⁷⁰ By this he meant that neither spatial register is dominant, which put me in mind of the following observations by artist and naturalist Abbot H. Thayer: “As all painters know, two or more patterns on one thing tend to pass for so many separate things.”⁷¹ Thayer identifies that it is hard to “represent the patterns on any decorated object so true in

⁷⁰ Steven Baris, private conversation, circa 2017.

⁷¹ Roy R. Behrens, *Ship Shape, a Dazzle Camouflage Sourcebook: An Anthology of Writings about Ship Camouflage during World War One* (Dysart, IA: Bobolink Books, 2012), 39–40.

degree of light and darkness as to not ‘cut to pieces’ the object itself, and destroy its reality.”⁷² This is particularly true of striped and otherwise patterned subjects; however I found that disjointedness and disjuncture of any surface can render it unfamiliar. As with Ellsworth Kelly’s paintings, viewpoint, cropping, the alignment of forms within the painting to the edge of the support—each heighten visual intrigue, making the image difficult to read.



Figure 67. Four views of the urban environment.

⁷² Behrens, *Ship Shape*, 40. Thayer's statements were made in regard to camouflage in the natural world, which he was trying to utilise as a wartime tool, during WW1. This led me to research dazzle camouflage of World War 1, which will be discussed more fully in the final chapter.

In particular, I found that by taking the photograph straight on or straight down, cropping out visual clues such as the sky and the horizon, an everyday urban scene might be presented as something unfamiliar (fig. 67). In a painting, this is equivalent to removing that which might be perceived as background. In the case of my paintings, the voids or unstriped sections are often read as background, so that omitting these can remove the “space” from the composition. The painting below, for example (fig. 68), is comprised of a single rectangular panel. Despite the suggestion of a horizon line at the midpoint, interpretation as fore- and background is confounded by filling the entire surface with striations. Further, the form is split into two distinct squares through the use of two gauges of stripe, neither of which reads as being in front or behind the other.

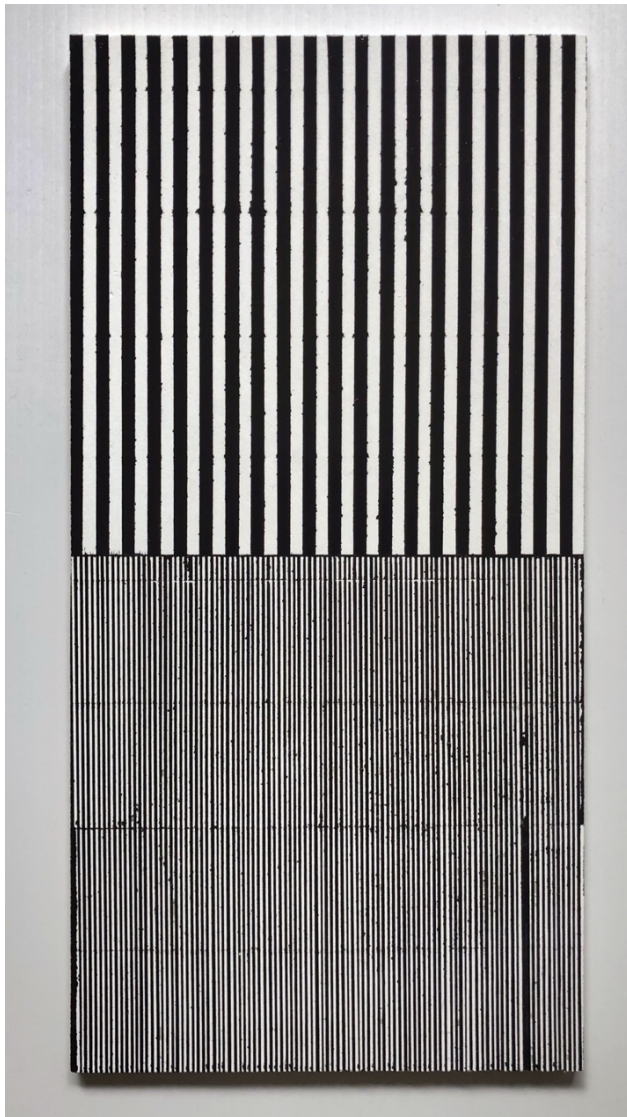


Figure 68. Untitled, 2016, enamel / acrylic on wood, 40 x 20cm.

STRIPES



Figure 69. Application of the stripe motif in the urban environment.

It is stating the obvious to say that I am drawn to the stripe. A consequence of investigating the parallel practice of photography, however, was to increase my fascination with the motif, via traffic and warning signs, road markings, zebra crossings and the like (fig. 69). I prefer the vertical stripe for its tendency to be visually disruptive, over the calmer horizontal. Signage tends to employ vertical, diagonal, and chevron stripes to draw the eye. This motif is an efficient method for multiplying the critical visual areas between two colour planes, for—in the words of Bridget Riley—stripes are “mostly ‘edges.’”⁷³ Further, stripes imply contiguity—we see a break, fold or fracture because the stripes become misaligned, drawing attention to aberration by defying our expectations, playing on the human mind’s tendency to recognise and anticipate pattern.

In my own practice, line is an indication of surface and contour, implying a uniformity, denoting an equal value along its length, like that used in cartography and meteorology. It creates movement, direction, or flow, like woodgrain. I use stripes to demarcate an area and distinguish continuity from rupture. I am not alone in this fascination. Despite—or perhaps because of—its simplicity, the repeated stripe motif has concerned (and still concerns) many artists. The variety and quality of stripe is diverse: Sol Lewitt’s hazy fields of graphite; Bridget Riley’s striking parallels; Frank Stella’s thick bands broken by fine zones of pinstripe; and Michel Parmentier’s monochrome horizontals (fig. 70). These are examples which traverse the full spectrum from thinness to thickness and transparency to opacity. In each instance, the purpose and outcome of the stripe is varied, as illustrated by the following brief examples.

⁷³ Bridget Riley in conversation with Mel Gooding, “The Experience of Painting,” in *The Eye’s Mind: Bridget Riley Collected writings 1965–1999*, ed Robert Kudielka (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 13.



Figure 70. (top left) Bridget Riley, *Fall*, 1963, polyvinyl acetate paint on hardboard, 141 × 140 cm; (top right) Sol Lewitt, *Black With White Lines, Vertical, Not Touching*, 1970, lithograph, composition and sheet, 43 x 59.5 cm; (lower left) Frank Stella, title not known, *Black Series*, 1967, lithograph on paper, 38 × 56 cm; (lower right) Michel Parmentier, February 15, 1984, 1984, lacquer painting on free canvas, 279 x 244 cm.

Jesús Rafael Soto uses stripes to locate his work between materiality and immateriality, focusing on movement, penetrable space, and optical effects, all of which are inextricably linked to the viewer's vantage point. His most recognisable technique was to create a regular but entirely handwrought vertical stripe, running from the top to the bottom of the painting surface. This was executed from a standing position, balanced on a stool, by drawing the paint-pen down in a single stroke, until he was crouched at floor level. The striated field might be positioned in the horizontal or vertical in the final work, more often than not overlaid with a second composition constructed from wire. Soto left space between these two layers, making the position of the viewer integral to the experience of the artwork (fig. 71). The effect is to destabilise the space and create optical and spatial ambiguity, through the interaction and combination of multiple layers of material, whose various rasters interact

to form *moirés*. The layering heightens the changes observed when the viewer moves around the artwork, so that the movement of the observer becomes an important aspect of the work.⁷⁴



Figure 71. Jesús Rafael Soto, *Homage to Yves Klein*, 1961, painted wire, metal sheet, and synthetic polymer paint on wood, 55 × 95.6 × 4 cm.

An entirely different use of the stripe motif is that of Agnes Martin (fig. 72). Though not an aim of her paintings and drawings, the notion of perfection as an underlying concern is consistent.

I hope I have made it clear that the work is *about* perfection as we are aware of it in our minds but that the paintings are very far from being perfect—completely removed in fact—even as we ourselves are.⁷⁵

It is through attempted repetition of a uniform motif that the imperfections and aberrations are made central. This might involve the drawing of a grid on paper, where minor deviations and variations in the line occur through the qualities of the material employed and the repeated action of the body

⁷⁴ Ángel Hurtado. "Soto: A New Vision of the Art," November 24, 2014, Youtube video, 43:06, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LCN9eFblzA&t=1147s&ab_channel=JoseDavidAvilaArevalo.

⁷⁵ Agnes Martin and Dieter Schwarz, *Agnes Martin* (Ostfildern: Edition Cantz [u.a.], 1991), 15.

rendering the form. Martin maps the territory between the ideal form conceived in the mind, and the physical rendering, which is necessarily flawed.

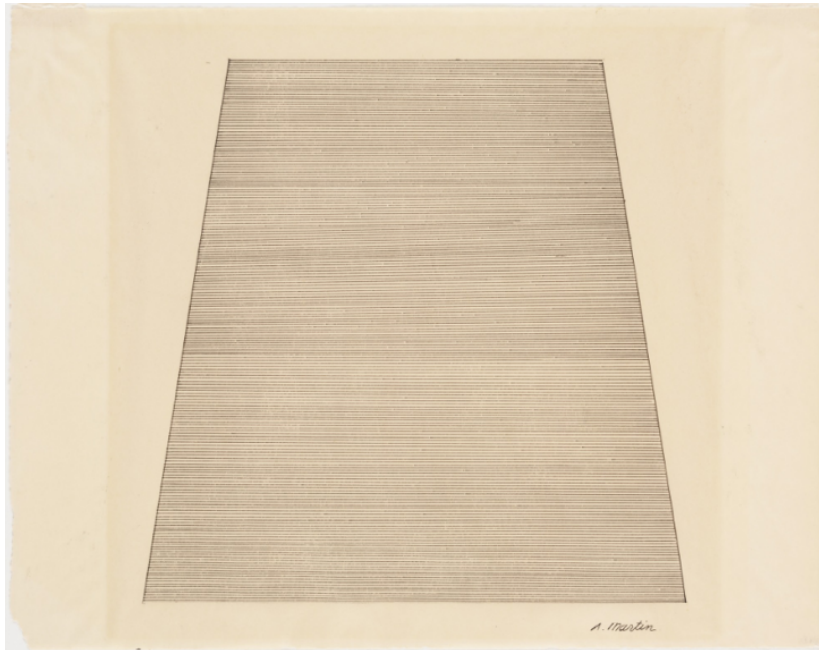


Figure 72. (upper) Agnes Martin, *Mountain*, 1964, ink and pencil on paper, 24 x 30.2 cm, and (lower) Agnes Martin, *The Tree*, oil and pencil on canvas, 182.8 x 182.8 cm.

Daniel Buren employs a stripe of 8.7cm wide (with a tolerance of +/-0.3cm). This is derived from the awning fabric which he used as canvas for several years, in response to economic constraints. These readymade stripes were later replicated in paint to the same width, when he abandoned his studio in a move towards site-specific work (fig. 73). The placement of his stripes becomes a method for articulating architectural forms and spatial properties, “reveal[ing] ... the characteristics of [their] host space.”⁷⁶ Despite the boldness of this motif, drawing the eye to aspects of a space has the curious effect of drawing attention to the spaces between, to the absence between forms.



Figure 73. Daniel Buren, *Within and Beyond the Frame* (exhibition view), 1973, fabric, paint, steel cables, dimensions variable, John Weber Gallery, New York.

Though stripes are the common denominator, each artist employs the device differently, varying the quality of the lines, thereby varying the outcome. Despite specific motivations in limiting the visual repertoire to the stripe or line, the motif itself has a broad range of associations, as discussed in the Introduction. This historical baggage has been supplanted by the ubiquitous use of the stripe in traffic and warning systems, and this had for some time been infiltrating my photographs (fig. 74).

⁷⁶ Guy Lelong and David Radzinowicz, *Daniel Buren* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), 40.

SIGNS

To be effective, traffic and warning signs must both attract attention and inform the viewer in the one instant. To convey a clear message as quickly as possible, the design must be easily recognised and recalled, so that we attend to its message without necessarily being conscious of it. We interpret these signs even when broken or distorted, or when the various injunctions are confused in their combination. This is achieved by employing visually disruptive motifs such as the stripe, and striking colour binaries; for example, black and white, or yellow and black. There is also a tendency for designers to employ simplicity and symmetry, so that warnings might appear identical from all angles of approach.⁷⁷



Figure 74. Striped signs designed to stand apart from the visual field.

Hazard signs in particular hold an important role, warning us about dangerous materials, places, and situations. Hence, their design is carefully considered (fig. 75). The ubiquitous use of the stripe motif for this purpose means that ironically, multiple warnings might in fact cause confusion. As such, the biohazard symbol, developed by the Dow Chemical Company over fifty years ago (fig. 76) eschews

⁷⁷ Paul Frame, *Radiation Warning Symbol (Trefoil)*, <https://www.orau.org/ptp/articlesstories/radwarnsymbstory.htm>, accessed 15.06.2018.

stripes to set it apart from other warning symbols. In the words of environmental-health engineer Charles Baldwin who contributed to its development, the aim was to create something “*memorable but meaningless, so we could educate people as to what it means.*”⁷⁸



Figure 75. Hazard signs at a paint factory.



Figure 76. Biohazard symbol.

⁷⁸ Charles Baldwin, *Harvard Biosafety*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110716160837/http://www.hms.harvard.edu/orsp/coms/BiosafetyResources/History-of-Biohazard-Symbol.htm>, accessed 15.06.2018.

OTHER LINES



Figure 77. Reflections.

The stripes I was photographing were not only in the form of sign graphics, but also power lines, directional road markings, and crosswalks. A new category of image was introduced on a rainy day, when walking with my head down to keep the rain from my eyes, I noticed that isolated portions of the power lines above me were being reflected under my feet as I stepped over puddles. This amalgamation and confusion of two (or more) scenes creates dislocation of the objects within the frame. These images compress multiple aspects of a scene into a single plane, so that an image might include a combination of a surface, a surface covered in water, the water's surface, and the reflection

of another surface in the puddle (fig. 77). Shadows cast across paving and other elements of the urban environment create similarly ambiguous compositions (fig. 78).



Figure 78. Combinations of painted lines, wires, and shadows.

This compression of different layers into the one photographic plane echoes the way different parts of a painted composition combine on the surface of the support to form one entangled layer. By this, I mean that though the striations, splits, score-marks, and other elements are combined in the one painting, they tend to suggest different strata. The combinatorial effect can be employed to

misrepresent or obscure the surface of the support by mixing visual signals, as in the work of Jesús Rafael Soto.

FRAMES AND RELATION TO THE EDGE

I developed a further body of photographs which exploited the curious flattening effect of the camera's "one-eye viewpoint." Entitled *Access*, this album consists of photographs taken through the holes in gates, where the locking mechanism is accessed. In my hometown of Melbourne, these are found along the countless rear-access laneways, which run parallel to the grid of streets (fig. 79).



Figure 79. Laneways of Melbourne.

In each image, the gate is presented straight on, so that it simulates a single point perspective. This viewpoint transforms the surface of the gate into a frame, within which a vignette of the scene beyond is visible (fig. 80). This scene is partial, because it is truncated by the gate-frame. Because the fore and background is compressed into the one plane, I found that this has the effect of both implying and negating pictorial depth, conjuring a disconcerting uncertainty between pictorial space and non-objective flatness. In many of the resulting images, the scale of objects in the fore and background adds to this visual dissonance, so that the various scenes are not instantly recognisable, but instead require sustained viewing in order to identify and decrypt.

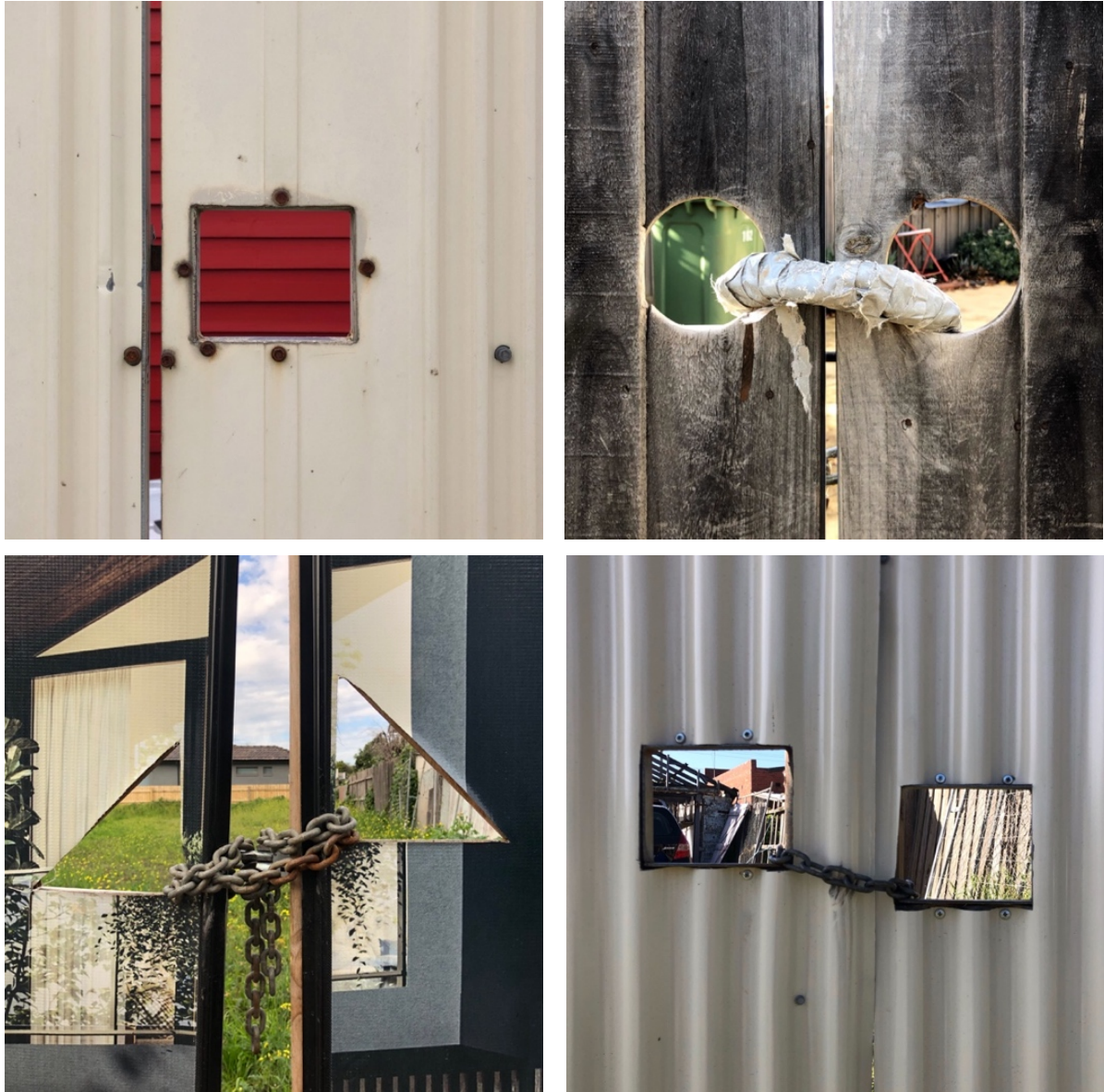


Figure 80. Access album.

Ellsworth Kelly spoke of “the way a frame—a window, an aperture—changes what you see.” This frame could be within the photograph, such as in the *Access* images, but could equally be the edge of the photograph itself (fig. 81). In fact, Kelly considered the boundary of the photograph, drawing, or painting as being equal in importance to the lines within a composition. That is, there is interaction between elements of a composition and the corners and edges of the page itself.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁹ Bernstein, *Multipanel Paintings*, 13–14.

incongruencies which arise by positioning elements of the scene represented in particular relation to the image's edge, also occurred when documenting the cube series (fig. 82).



Figure 81. Aligning elements of the image with the frame to defamiliarise the subject.



Figure 82. Aligning planes and edges of the subject with edges of photograph.

The more I reflected on this ever-increasing body of photographs, the more I recognised aspects of painting composition which I had been employing without conscious consideration. Isolating and identifying these aspects in the photographs allowed me to explore them, and to apply them more consciously in the paintings. In considering the way elements of the composition correspond to the painting's edge, I created the painting *Selvage*, which employs a frame-within-a-frame, where the central and outer portions have equal emphasis (fig. 83). I also considered how fractures, incoherence,

and disjointedness could be heightened by enhancing breaks between portions of the surface. This might be achieved by increasing the various increments and angle of lines, amongst other techniques.

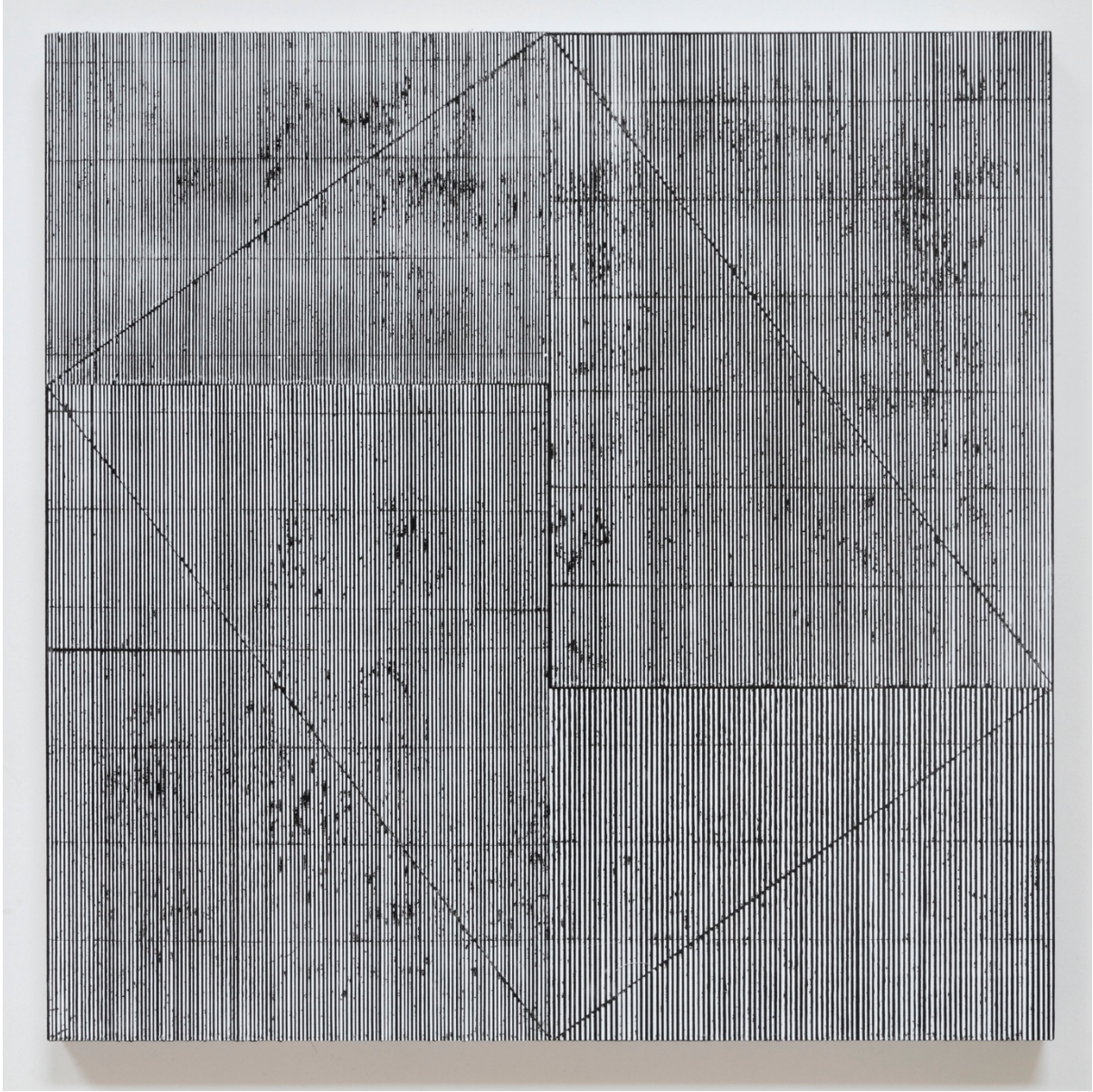


Figure 83. *Selvage*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, 50 x 50 cm.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

During this exploration of non-composition through my own photographic practice, I initially focused on the selection and framing of the subject itself. However, it became apparent that I was overlooking a crucial aspect of the composition which was drawn out *by* the photographs, but not *of them*. I refer to the seemingly mundane way in which these urban compositions are formed in the first place. My local area, where most of my walking takes place, is one of constant flux. One source of change is the modulation of light and shadow, depending on time of day and year, and the atmospheric conditions. However, it was the continual cycle of modifications to the urban environment which fascinated me. The street where I live, for example, was recently excavated entirely, revealing remnants of an old quarry, before the repair and replacement of drains, pavements, bluestone gutters, and road surface over the course of four months (fig. 84).



Figure 84. Traces of work conducted on my street during the first half of 2021.

Surrounded by these endless urban alterations, I observed that, rather than being concerned with aesthetic outcomes, these tasks are driven by practical considerations. Each project is conducted in a series of steps, by a number of labourers, each of whom performs their single task in isolation. This might require the identification and isolation of the area to be repaired using spray paint and signage; the excavation of a surface; the replacement of infrastructure; or the patching of a surface. Beyond the requirement of functionality, this way of working is without consideration for the particulars of the outcome. That is, because the work is driven by utility, the process gives rise to uncontrived forms and

compositions. As shown in the selection of images below (fig. 85), working in this way allows for curious combinations of form, line, colour, and texture to arise.



Figure 85. Found compositions resulting from the way road workers conduct a sequence of actions, often days or weeks apart, by individuals each charged with a single task.

By walking through the same area on a daily basis, I was able to observe the sequential flow of work, as well as the endlessly changing compositions and their “final” outcome. Crucially, I felt that aspects of this methodology could be employed in my painting practice to reduce contrivance of the composition. This could be achieved by treating the steps in the process as a series of disconnected tasks, each performed in isolation without considering the outcome. My own methodology already

involved a clearly delineated sequence of tasks; however I determined that these could be separated still further.

THE *NEW SIGNAL* EXHIBITION

From this research, which took the form of collating and analysing an ever-increasing cache of photographs, I set out to create a body of paintings which articulated and extended the various research outcomes up to this point. This took the form of an exhibition entitled *New Signal*, held at the end of 2016. Like striped surfaces in the urban environment, the primary objective was to present the work so that each painting drew the eye, setting it apart from its surroundings, to create an overwhelming optical effect. Despite traffic signs being a catalyst for the work, these warning and direction markers provided colour and shape but not content.

In creating this exhibition, I restricted myself to three paintings, allowing enough space for each to be viewed in isolation. The most conspicuous of the new methods was the careful reintroduction of colour which, along with the choice of shaped supports, was intended to allude to traffic signs. Despite these visual cues, I attempted to simultaneously and contrarily dissolve and distort their significance, so that this relationship was not too literal. In particular, I aimed to echo aspects of warning-sign design; that is, to form an image which is “memorable but meaningless.”⁸⁰ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I determined to emulate the methodology of a labourer on the street to create uncontrived compositions. Each of these tactics was derived directly from the investigations preceding it, and each represents a step towards the ambiguity of opposite effects in the expansion of glitch.

⁸⁰ Baldwin, *Harvard Biosafety*.

LEFT



Figure 86. Keep Left signs.

I created the first painting without having yet summoned the courage to use the new colour binaries. My initial thought, in fact, was to focus *only* on the signs which used black and white, of which there were many. In this case, I wanted to emulate the ubiquitous signs which designate the direction of traffic flow, most notably the Keep Left sign (fig. 86). The compositional simplicity and approximate proportions of this sign type are echoed in my painting, with a nod to the left-pointing arrow, formed from vertically positioned chevron stripes (fig. 87). The black triangular form to the right stands out in

contrast with the striations and with the wall behind, switching between object and void in the mind's eye.



Figure 87. *Left*, 2016, enamel / acrylic on wood, 40 x 90 cm.

This simplicity, however, is undone upon a closer inspection. In creating this work, I considered the methodology of Jesús Rafael Soto, specifically his creation of two or more sets of lines on separate planes so that their disparate qualities interact. In Soto's case, this takes the form of a plane composed entirely of regular stripes, overlaid with fine wire forms, which combine visually. In my case, the first layer is formed by striations which—at first glance—point to the left, in a recognisable chevron motif. In actuality, the lines were created with millimetre thickness at the top and bottom, but are cinched along the horizontal midpoint by adhering to a $1/32^{\text{nd}}$ of an inch increment. This leads to the angle of the arrow being blunted as it moves to the left. The second layer is comprised of score marks, of which there are eight. These are evenly spaced in defiance of the striations, so that paint-bleed glitches are formed where the two sets of lines move out of sync. In addition, instances of human error and paint-bleed during the process lead to aberrations disturbing the visual field.

Upon completion, I initially felt that the work was too “safe,” too similar to the work from the first years of research, in particular in the use of black and white, the central bifurcation, and simple form. After sustained viewing, however, I began to recognise that my own tendency to read left to right is confounded by the leftward movement of forms. The mismatched chevrons create a subtle distortion which is visually confounding. In particular, this appears in the curious way that the picture plane

seems to compress to the left, when focus is placed on the score marks. Or perhaps the forms push down into the pictorial space? Despite my initial assessment, I believe that this painting requires a more sustained observation to recognise the complexities and ambiguities of the composition.

EXCEPT



Figure 88. Red and white signs.

For the second work in this exhibition, I decided to introduce a new colour binary—red and white—in deference to the informational signs which are often used to display parking information, and also as an addendum to larger instructions (fig. 88). A black-and-white sign might tell us there is no right turn, but the smaller sign attached lets us know the exceptions to the rule. In conjunction with this colour change, I introduced a new shape: the obround.⁸¹ This was selected for its evocation of the traffic sign—a rectangle with corners bevelled and a portrait aspect—without being too literal.

To echo these modest information-signs, I used a small support of approximately the same size, and it was due to this modest scale that I kept the composition as simple as possible. As such, I did not add strikethroughs or other elements, with the central bifurcation, based on the split composition of the

⁸¹ An obround is a shape consisting of two semicircles connected by parallel lines tangent to their endpoints, also known by various descriptive terms: stadium, capsule, sausage body or discorectangle. American artist Richard Artschwager used the form extensively, referring to it onomatopoeically as a “Blp.”

sign, being the only exception (fig. 89). The taped sections were removed and reapplied several times, which led to a secondary split, parallel to and lower than the first, where the tape began to separate. Apertures open along the edges where the tape has been shifted, confounding the implication of an expansive plane and instead creating a self-contained form.



Figure 89. *Except*, 2016, enamel / acrylic on wood, 31.4 x 20.6 cm.

I enhanced the top-heaviness of the composition by employing wide stripes in the upper half and fine stripes in the lower. These striations veer a little—just enough to heighten the fractured aesthetic. Like *Left*, I found that there is something uncomfortable about this form. I believe that this is partly the result of filling a partially curved form with straight lines, whilst having those same lines sit ever so slightly off the vertical. At any rate, the combination of all these factors leads to a disconcerting imbalance which feels upside down no matter which way it is oriented.

SIGNAL II



Figure 90. Yellow and black signs.

The final painting exhibited has subsequently become the most significant to my research. For the first time since the outset of the research period, I eschewed white altogether and instead paired the black with street-marking yellow. This combination is lifted directly from particularly eye-catching warning signage which uses this same colour binary (fig. 90). I paired this combination with a large circular support, using the inherent stability of the round form to anchor in place a composition which is pushed further than ever towards instability and disintegration.

This composition was my first attempt at emulating the way a street labourer might work. I made sure to perform each task in isolation from those which preceded and followed it in the sequence. This meant that I had to work without forethought of how each step might impact the next and without overlapping one task with the next. I began by splitting the masking tape into an irregular grid, before removing the entire tape layer at once, rather than in portions, as is my usual method. This was

particularly risky given the haphazard way I keep the tape flat and untangled, when it is not attached to the support (fig. 36).

Each fragment was replaced, starting in the centre and moving out to the edges, so that each placement created limitations on the next and gaps between portions began to appear. The striations of each portion were then incised, employing three thicknesses, with the rule being that the increments should not match those of the adjoining areas. Where this was not possible, I randomised the direction of the lines a little, to prevent the planes merging. This meant that the lines change gauge or direction at every meeting of sections, as far as possible, whilst maintaining a semblance of verticality (fig. 91).



Figure 91. *Signal II*, 2016, enamel / acrylic on wood, 80cm diameter.



Figure 92. Ice floe.

The combination of these various methodologies led to an appearance which I liken to an ice floe (fig. 92), where portions of the composition push and pull chaotically at the picture plane. This confusion is heightened by the sway of the lines which tend to contradict the shape of each portion of the distorted grid. The shattering form activates the picture plane in contradictory ways, making the composition difficult to resolve in the mind's eye. Further, and this became crucial, the yellow and black combination seemed to suck the oxygen out of the composition, so that the painting feels claustrophobically full. More than any painting so far, the combination of elements makes for an awkward, asymmetrical, slumped form—an ambiguously coalescing but also fragmenting image wrought in the colours of alarm.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined a broadening of my research to areas I had not anticipated, such as photography and the language of traffic signage. Each of these investigations was undertaken as a means to develop approaches which increase compositional ambiguity, such as the confusion of an illusory pictorial plane within a flat material object, and the simultaneity of coalescing and disintegrating forms in a static image. I see these interlinked outcomes as an extension of the disconcerting partial-collapse of the glitched form, where two opposite states are represented simultaneously. I developed and refined my approaches to painting by researching the non-compositional methodologies of Ellsworth Kelly, the use of stripes in history and the urban environment, and my own photographic practice.

After drawing together so much disparate information, I formed a concise body of work to articulate these concerns. The introduction of colour, of a new shape and in particular, a new approach to the process—each of these has resulted in greater asymmetry, and the presentation of fragmentation, discontinuity, and incompleteness, alongside its opposite, solidity, continuity and completeness. Further, I developed the presentation of an impossible space where aspects of the composition cannot be visually resolved and become incoherent.

Unexpectedly, something new arose in the work at this point. I sensed a new mood creeping into my practice, whereby the multiple ambiguities combine to enhance an unsettling visceral response, one of disquiet and dis-ease. In the final chapter I describe the effects of an unanticipated but necessary break from study. The hiatus gave me a chance to reassess overlooked work, putting me on an unexpected course. I investigate the dazzle camouflage techniques of the First World War, the painting practice of Jack Whitten, and the context of chaotic forces at play in the world. This culminates in a final exhibition, where unease, disquiet, and visual imbalance are encouraged, to consider these aspects of glitch as a microcosm of those in the broader world.

CHAPTER 4

In the final period of my research journey, prompted by an unanticipated hiatus, I conducted a reassessment of several paintings which I had previously overlooked. My focus on logical processes and systematic ways of making had until this point resulted in a particular oversight, that of the mood or atmosphere of the work. Present but unacknowledged, I observed that decisions regarding composition, colour, and form were evoking a general feeling of unease and discomfort in both the viewer and myself *as* viewer.

This exploration represented the final step of expansion over course of research. In Chapter 1, I explored the glitch itself. In Chapter 2, this exploration was increased to include a broader range of fracture. Chapter 3 saw me expanding to acknowledge real-world fracture via photography. This practice ran parallel to painting, and I used it to draw out themes and develop new methodologies to explore compositional discontinuity and the partial collapse epitomised by glitch. In particular, I started to consider the breakdown of the urban environment as a form of expanded glitch, whereby a small break or malfunction is harbinger of complete collapse.⁸²

By expanding my research to include atmosphere, I will shift towards the visceral response, a feeling in the gut, in the body. In this chapter, I will discuss the work of Jack Whitten, an artist for whom the arising of the unexpected within strictly regimented methodologies is crucial. Discussions of the stripe in traffic and warning signs in Chapter 3 are extended in this chapter to include warning systems which rely on evocation of unease and disquiet to convey ominousness. This is followed by an investigation of dazzle camouflage, and in particular, its aim to confound visual coherence. Finally, I will draw these disparate strands together to inform the final body of paintings, shown in the *Repeater* exhibition.

REVISITING

In 2017, life started to encroach on my research. After a field research journey to the United States, issues with my physical health began to increase. I experienced bereavement, family fracture, and subsequently, issues with mental health. Everything seemed to be falling apart at once. I was

⁸² I would relate this tendency to the Broken Windows Theory, whereby signs of malfunction and disorder encourage increasing dilapidation, as defined in 1982 by social scientists James Wilson and George Kelling. See *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/broken-windows-theory>.

compelled to take a break from study, which lasted for the better part of the year. The events of this period took all of my time, energy, and thought, so that upon recommencing my research, I had to look back through the work I had completed to refresh my memory and to reassess the journey leading to this point. Curiously, the feeling that things were falling apart around me was to set the scene, as it were, for my final period of research.

Looking back through completed paintings, most were in series, in black and white, testing out simple compositional propositions. I tended to work sequentially, creating series of works in which a certain uniformity and cohesion was apparent. There were, however, a few standalone works—I had completed them but not been able to *see* them properly, and put them aside, rather than continuing to the serial format. Some of these works looked like they could be hung upside down; others implied truncated, incomplete, or imbalanced compositions. Further, the forms in each implied and confounded pictorial depth, giving the impression that they were under physical pressure or force, and that they were very near the point of collapse. Essentially, they didn't seem to settle. With distance between the making and the seeing of these works, I was able to isolate specific elements of formal dynamics which contributed to this unsettled state.

Of the reassessed works, three stood out (fig. 93). In each, the lined sections shifted and slumped against one another, the resulting zig-zagging discontinuity suggesting that each composition was being crushed from above, or buckling under a weight. Each contained apertures where the plane split, and one work (*Truncation*, fig. 93, lower) appeared incomplete, as though only a portion of the composition was shown. In each instance, the work was commenced without forethought, and this lack of planning resulted in lines running off the edge of the panel. These factors combined to create a tension or visual precariousness, as though the composition had not yet settled.

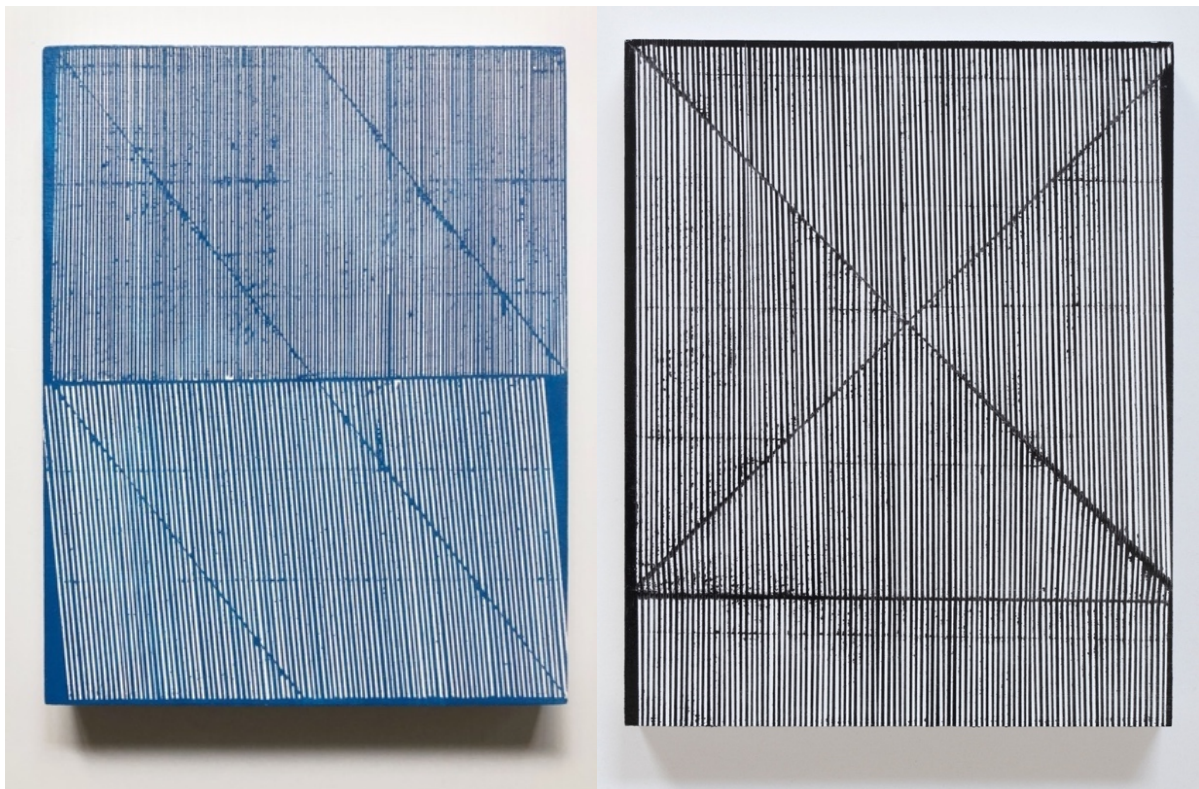
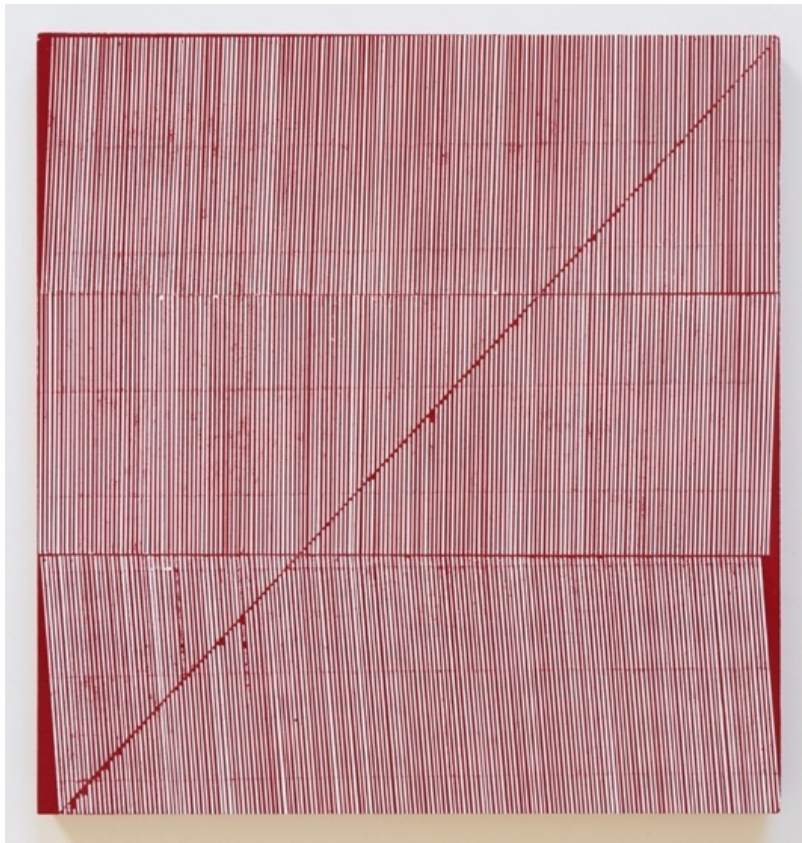


Figure 93. (upper) *Three Parts Red*, 2014, enamel / acrylic on wood, 34.8 x 33 cm;
(lower left) *Blauw*, 2015, enamel / acrylic on wood, 25 x 20 cm;
(lower right) *Truncation*, 2014-15, enamel / acrylic on wood, 25 x 20 cm.

My re-engagement with these works allowed me to locate perceptual illusion (in particular, the implication of pictorial depth), imbalance, truncation, and uneasy composition as methods for enhancing fracture in painting. I was able to see more clearly that the restrictive processes were bringing about changes in the work, and that these breaks, cracks, and scores were expanding into more dramatic ruptures and distorting forces. In particular, the implied movement of forms conveyed a feeling of collapse.

As previously discussed, the focus of the work had shifted towards visual ambiguity. Between pictorial space and flatness, coalescing and disintegrating forms, completeness and incompleteness, solidity and fragmentation, stillness and movement, brokenness and contiguousness—these contradictory states were akin to the balancing act of glitch. The reassessed paintings took longer to reveal themselves to the viewer, demanding more time than easy, resolved, balanced compositions. I understood why they were difficult for me to *see* when first executed, due to the feelings of ambiguity and unresolvedness they prompted. I realised that it was possible to create compositions which defied visual coherence, and that this in-between state was unsettling for viewers, including myself.

Thinking back to the purpose of striped warning signs in creating an instant, clear message, I saw these paintings as having the opposite effect. They seemed to confound the eye and mind. In reflecting on this effect, I was reminded of an image which has circulated online for the past few years (fig. 94). The image is a composite photograph and purports to be a simulation of how a stroke-affected patient might perceive the world when their brain functions have been impaired. According to all accounts, the image provokes confusion, discomfort, even nausea in the viewer. This seems to be a result of taking multiple images, truncating, splicing, and editing them together to form something which seems at first to be recognisable, but which upon sustained viewing, defies a coherent reading. There is something indefinable, hard to pinpoint about this reaction.

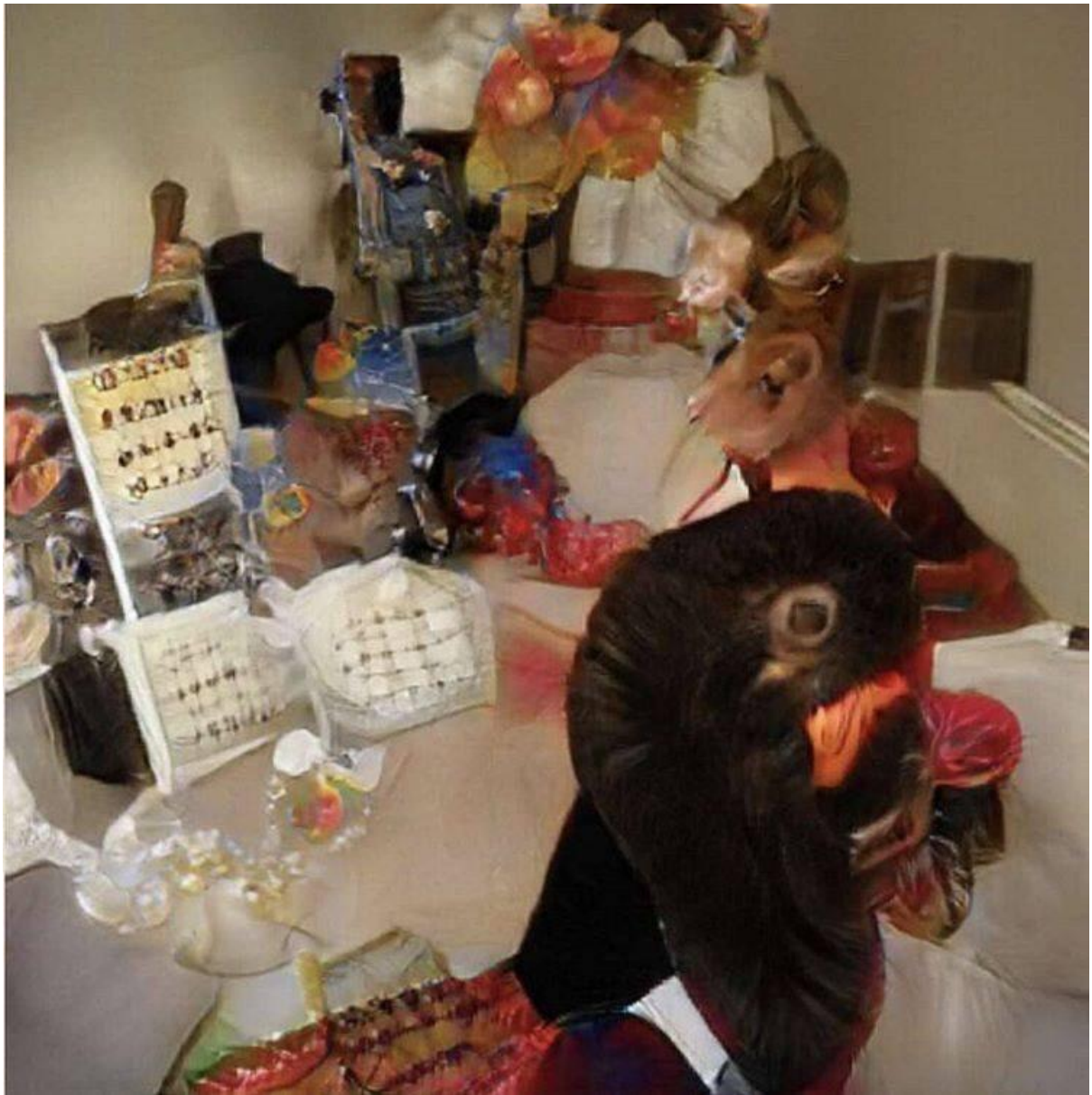


Figure 94. A photograph purporting to simulate aspects of a stroke survivor’s impaired visual comprehension.

SOMETHING MORE ARISING, THE WORK OF JACK WHITTEN

Given that glitch and malfunction reveal process and materials, I began to consider that it could also be used to create tension. Having always eschewed this dimension of my work, focusing instead on the logic of the methodology, the decision to create affect was challenging. My revised objective was to increase what I interpreted as a visceral response, the barely definable nagging, gnawing uncertainty which the paintings were evoking. To expand malfunction into this territory, and to identify methods that enhanced a sense of foreboding, I looked to the work of another artist for whom regimented and repetitive processes gave rise to the ineffable.

I discussed the painter Jack Whitten early in this exegesis, in the context of *making* rather than *painting* paintings (p. 21), and it was in the context of his work that I first considered another connection between creating paintings and mechanical action.⁸³ Specifically, Whitten's work is made using systems which mimic, resemble, or invoke the way a machine might operate *in reference* to the machine. Whitten referenced technology as a form of spiritual exploration, which could invent new symbols, and replace those which he saw as having outlived their relevance.⁸⁴ His various methodologies co-opt the language of technology and apply it to rudimentary materials, drawing from science, mathematics, and topology, and in particular, the mechanics of imaging.

Towards the end of the 1960s, Whitten created the first of a number of tools which he referred to as a *developer* (fig. 95), resembling a cross between an oversized rake and a screen-printing squeegee. The artist would place a canvas on the floor and drag the heavy, wooden apparatus towards himself in a single gesture lasting only three seconds.⁸⁵ By moving the developer across the substrate in one movement, Whitten would remove paint, forming a raster image of fine horizontal lines. This method caused objects placed beneath the canvas, such as cables and rope, to leave their trace on the painting surface (fig. 96).

⁸³ "Now I find myself doing a type of painting where my hand doesn't touch it," Jack Whitten, stated in "Jack Whitten: An Artist's Life," YouTube video, Art21, episode 255, <https://amara.org/en/videos/luiYlzPCHOzW/info/jack-whitten-an-artists-life-art21-extended-play/>.

⁸⁴ Jack Whitten in interview with *Frieze*, "In the Studio: Jack Whitten," Vimeo video, Hauser & Wirth, <https://vimeo.com/235609938>.

⁸⁵ Whitten, "An Artist's Life."



Figure 95. Jack Whitten and his developer.

Art historian Richard Shiff observes that, whilst many of the artists contemporaries were photo-realists, replicating the *appearance* of photographs in painted form, Whitten's work embodies "a process analogous to photographic technology ... [creating] a material object conceived not to refer in the sense of depicting, but to become its own image."⁸⁶ However, where a photograph captures a scene or object by recording reflected and incidental light on light-sensitive materials, Whitten's paintings of this era operate more like the photogram process. The silhouettes and penumbral shadows of objects are revealed by the absence of pigment, as ghostly, half-buried forms.



Figure 96. Jack Whitten, *The Speedchaser*, 1975, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152.5 cm.

⁸⁶ Richard Shiff, "Image That Comes Out of Matter," in *More Dimensions Than You Know, Jack Whitten Paintings 1979–1989* (London: Hauser & Wirth Publishers, 2017), 10.

Whitten subsequently expanded his range of tools, which he employed to mediate the painting process. However, the physical effort of working in this way was unsustainable, and by the 1980s, Whitten had developed a new method.⁸⁷ To create his *tesserae* works, he constructed slabs of acrylic paint, and shattered them into mosaic-like pieces before reassembling them to form the painting surface itself (fig. 97). This slow accrual “could take months, a year, even longer...”⁸⁸ Whitten likened these small tiles to pixels and—though digital photography was far from accessible at this time—he had a keen interest in “radar, cathode-ray scanning, electron microscopy, video, and many similar technologies.”⁸⁹ In interviews, he referred to the acrylic fragments not only as being light-directing surfaces, but also to information-carrying units, bits and bytes.

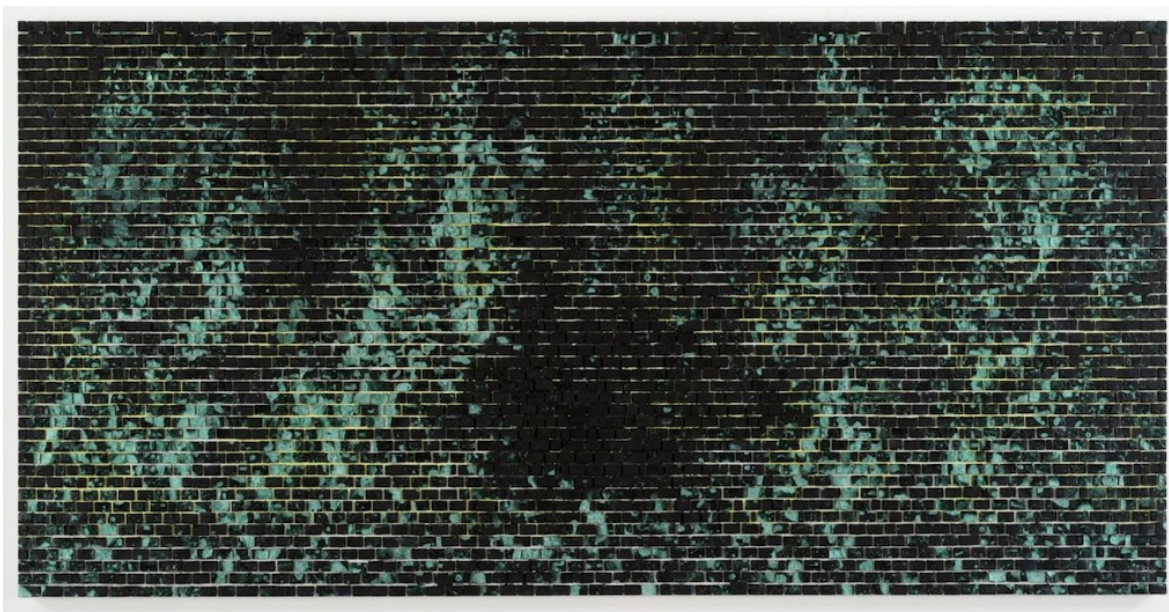


Figure 97. Jack Whitten, *Quantum Wall, II (Missing Matter)*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 243.8 cm.

It is this choice of terminology which I find most revealing. His initial developer technique, in particular, was one which evokes the idea of the analogue photographic process, where a procedure is undertaken, the surface is “exposed” and the image arises. Whitten himself was aware of the elusive aspects of his practice. On December 29th, 1978, he made a diary entry regarding the use of the

⁸⁷ Michael Salcman, “The Evolutionary Soul of Jack Whitten (b.1939): April’s Shark (1974),” *Neurosurgery* Vol. 77, Issue 6 (December 2015): 845, <http://dx.doi.org.virtual.anu.edu.au/10.1227/NEU.0000000000001095>.

⁸⁸ Yevgeniya Traps, “Quantum Wall: an Interview with Jack Whitten,” *The Paris Review* (March 1, 2017), <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/03/01/quantum-wall-an-interview-with-jack-whitten/>.

⁸⁹ Shiff, “Image That Comes Out of Matter,” 16.

developer, where he observed that using it both horizontal and vertical directions provided him with “a complete surface” of cross-hatching:

This is a very important breakthrough for me. It means I have a physical structure in which to exercise complete freedom: a structure for the spirit to manifest itself. I am still not sure of the form but I have the most important thing: content. I think that the form will take care of itself.⁹⁰

Through the use of mediating tools, repetition and immersion in the process, the artist imaged his world. That is, he employed techniques which, like a medical scanning device, might reveal a hidden interior. Schiff observes that, despite referring to codes, pixels, and digital information, Whitten’s work conveys something which is “not a biographical or historical fact, but a set of feelings, a complex of sensations and emotions.”⁹¹ In other words, though his various painting procedures echo photographic techniques, wherein the sign arises through the physical impact of materials and objects interacting, this does not capture the full sense of what emerges in the art object.

I was interested in how Whitten’s regimented and mediated processes could be used to generate outcomes which fall outside purely logical and optical effect. In my own work, I considered that this was achievable via the combination of new methodologies developed to create fracture and visual disjunction. By allowing the process to unfold without interference, so that the compositions are unsettled and imbalanced, I found that the paintings could create a sense of tension, of alertness to a threat. Like Whitten, I could restrict myself to a machine-like, controlled system, whilst at the same time allowing for an ineffable mood to arise. This could be enhanced through the use of colour, composition, and, as I will next discuss, the shape of the support.

⁹⁰ Jack Whitten, *Jack Whitten: Notes From the Woodshed* (London: Hauser & Wirth Publishers, 2018), 136.

⁹¹ Schiff, “Image That Comes Out of Matter,” 12.

OBROUNDS

Based on my own observations and the feedback of artist-peers, I found that it was possible to elicit discomfort simply by employing certain shaped supports. The obround painting *Except*, exhibited during the *New Signal* exhibition, was an example of such a shape (fig. 89). Despite having two parallel edges, the obround is difficult to work with when limited to the straight line as motif. In fact, I found it is easier to throw this shape off-balance than to make the composition sit comfortably. By combining this egg-like form with fractured stripes, an imbalance could be evoked, so that the composition seems to defy stillness and visual resolution, seeming always to be upside-down.

Working through the idea of encouraging a feeling of uncertainty in the viewer, I went on to make a series of these and other similarly shaped paintings (fig. 98). This exercise presented me with new challenges in terms of creating compositions that sit midway between disintegration and coalescence, between flat and warped space. I explored various methods of visual disruption and found that, by changing increments, angles and proportions unexpectedly, the off-kilter affect could be heightened. By confounding pictorial coherence, what is purely optical elicited a visceral response, creating tension and a feeling of precariousness, despite the substrate itself remaining intact. Further, by filling the space entirely with striations, the claustrophobic, top-heavy aspect was heightened, resulting in a compositionally unsettled painting.

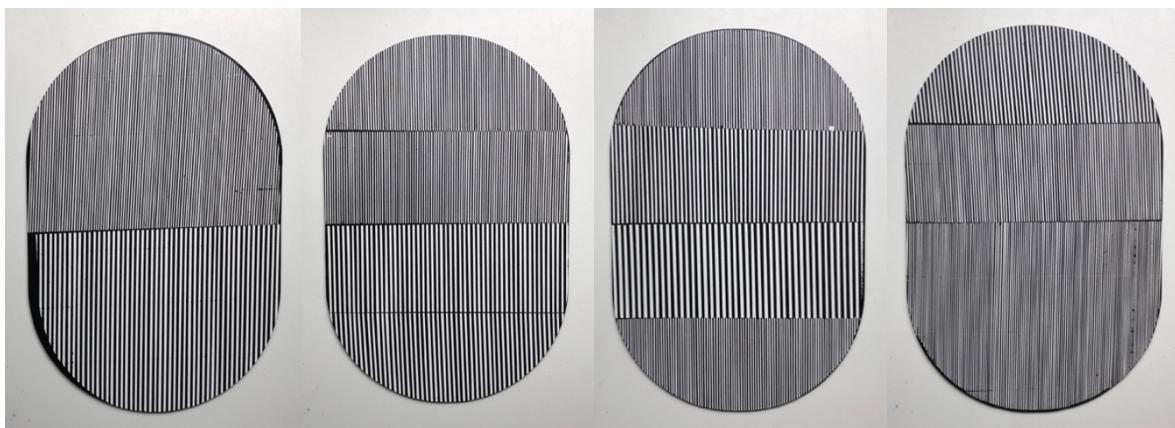


Figure 98. Black and white obrounds, enamel / acrylic on wood, 31.4 x 20.6 cm ea.

DAZZLE CAMOUFLAGE

Looking at ways to confound a coherent reading of a flat surface further, I began researching the camouflage of ships in First World War. Prior to this period, camouflage was employed to blend an object into the background. Often, this involved applying the patterns and colours of a landscape to an object, so that the two merged into the same visual field. Recognising that it was impossible to paint a naval vessel so that it blended with the ever-changing light on the open sea, dazzle camouflage was developed instead. The goal of this naval tactic was not to hide the ship, but instead to disrupt a coherent perception of its surface, decreasing the chance of a torpedo reaching its mark (fig. 99).

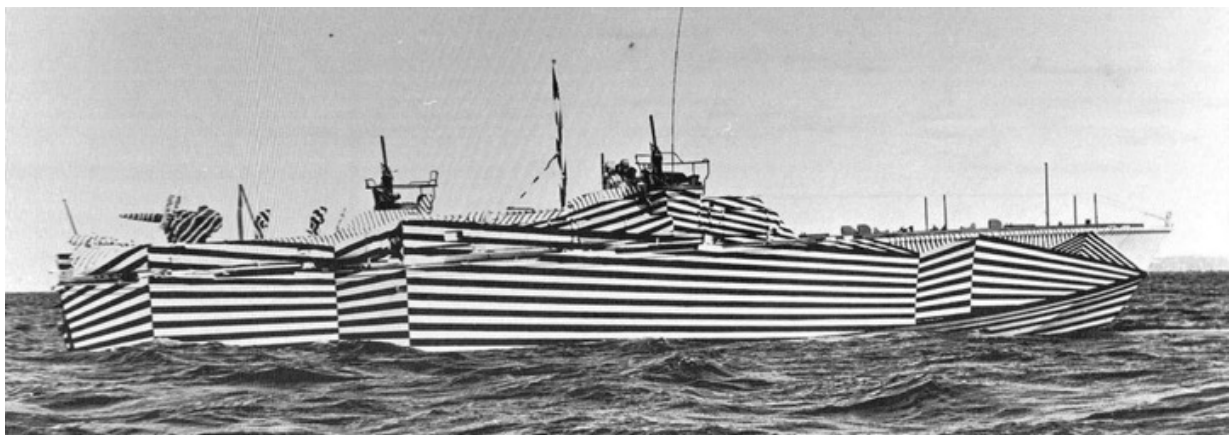


Figure 99. Dazzle camouflage ships.

Dazzle camouflage employed startling, chaotic, striped forms, juxtaposing areas of “violently contrasting colours, black and white predominating, combined in accordance with laws of perspective,” to confound perception of the size, speed, and direction of the target.⁹² As one naval personnel observed, “[t]he lines of a vessel are completely broken up into confusion, and it appears to be going in one direction when it is really going in another” (fig. 99).⁹³ In combat situations reliant on the use of the human eye, this perceptual distortion system was revolutionary, if not entirely successful.⁹⁴

When applied to a surface or object, dazzle camouflage makes us look twice, and forces us to question what we see. By dividing a plane into portions and applying striations of different gauge and direction, a materially coherent object can appear disjointed and fractured. In the case of naval vessels, rending asunder the coherent structure of the boat could create the impression that there were numerous vessels, travelling in several directions. If this technique is transposed to painting, the surface appears distorted, defying unification into one coherent plane.

Like warning stripes in nature, dazzle camouflage is not useful for blending an object into its background but rather, making it stand apart from its surroundings in a striking way (fig. 100). Combining this technique with the colours and motifs of warning signage, the painted area could draw the eye and distinguish it from the wall, demanding the attention of the viewer. Further, the incoherent space and visual contradictions generated by this compositional method created a sense of imbalance. Like the stroke-simulation image (fig. 100), a dazzle-painted surface demands sustained viewing, which is itself repaid with further confusion. If the purpose of warning stripes is to convey clear information instantaneously, dazzle confuses the message.

⁹² Norman Wilkinson, “British Naval Camouflage,” in *Ship Shape*, 47.

⁹³ Raymond Francis Yates, “Camouflage Science Explained,” in *Ship Shape*, 71.

⁹⁴ It has been observed that during an eight-month period in 1918, of 96 American ships sunk, 18 were camouflaged, however this statistic includes several which met their demise by colliding with allied vessels. Behrens, *Ship Shape*, 150.



Figure 100. Warehouse and car painted in dazzle camouflage.

In the next paintings, I deferred making compositional decisions until the work was already underway, as outlined in Chapter 3. I emphasised the solidity of the pictorial plane by employing an overall symmetry in the composition, where the upper and lower half of each painting rotated around a central axis. To counteract this balance, the line thickness is not symmetrically replicated, making the two halves difficult to read as a flat plane. Despite this, I felt that the first work (fig. 101) was still too stable, too simple in terms of the breaks and overarching compositional elements.



Figure 101. *Rive*, 2018, enamel / acrylic on wood, 50 x 40 cm.

In the next work I determined to push the surface closer to a complete disintegration, by multiplying the number of fractures and increasing the handling of materials. Each portion of the divided substrate was incised so that adjoining planes were rendered in different increments. Upon first seeing *Veer* completed, I felt conflicted, as though I had gone too far (fig. 102). In a short time, I had gone from relatively simple, split compositions, to one where multiple interstices divided and corrupted the field of lines at once, like those employed in dazzle camouflage (fig. 103). Further, the use of yellow and black sucked the space from the work and increased feelings of compression,

collapse, and claustrophobia. I had to remind myself that the discomfort I felt was aligned with my new goal, namely, generating visual discord and disruption.



Figure 102. Veer, 2019, enamel / acrylic on wood, 50 x 40 cm.



Figure 103. Experimenting with skewing lines to increasing degrees, enamel / acrylic on wood, 31.4 x 20.6 cm.

I interpreted this disruption as being aligned with glitch. Digital artist and theorist Rosa Menkman describes glitch practices broadly as those which focus on “breaking flow,” which is itself identified as “the rupture of procedures and technique ... a collection of forms and events that oscillate between extremes.”⁹⁵ This break is always a partial corruption, a suggestion that things have gone awry but always ambivalently retaining a vestige of the signal, of what *could or should* be. Glitch is an early symptom of trouble, a sign that something is not right, an omen which warns us that entropy and breakdown are to follow. In the final stretch of my research journey, I refined my focus. If the glitch tells us that a problem has arisen and if this problem indicates a coming threat, the work should act as a warning, a signal that the system is starting to falter.

WARNINGS

My own recent experience with bereavement, family disfunction, and subsequent declines in mental and physical health had begun to instil in me a sense of dread. This mood was amplified by reading the news daily. At the time, bushfires were out of control across vast swathes of the eastern and southern

⁹⁵ Rosa Menkman, “The Glitch Art Genre,” *O Fluxo*, July 2012, <https://www.ofluxo.net/the-glitch-art-genre-by-rosa-menkman/>

regions of Australia, destroying natural habitat and killing native fauna on an unprecedented scale. Melbourne was shrouded in acrid smoke, which prompted public health warnings. News of a mysterious disease, causing pneumonia-like symptoms, serious illness, and death in China, was being reported. Civil unrest was erupting across the United States of America. In lockstep with the increasingly overt fracturing and disrupted flow of my paintings was the intensification of the affective dimension of the work. In particular, it became crucial to me that the surface rendering move beyond mere optical confusion to trigger a feeling in the viewer that something was wrong. This feeling could be aligned with a fight-or-flight response, where a feeling of alarm or alert is evoked.

Around this time, I was reading professor and journalist Alan Weisman's 2007 book *The World Without Us*. This book maps a thought experiment, describing how traces of human civilisation would gradually disappear if humans were to vanish overnight.⁹⁶ A recurring theme throughout the book is the handling and storing of nuclear waste, which, once generated, can be active for over 100,000 years. As such, what is often cast as a logistical challenge for the world today amounts to nothing less than an existential threat, with serious and ongoing ramifications continuing far into the future.

It was via this book that I became aware of several international projects which were established to develop a system of *nuclear semiotics*. This is an interdisciplinary field of research, which aims to convey the message for a period of 10,000 years that nuclear waste is stored nearby and must be avoided. The challenge was to convey a message *without resorting to words or symbols*, as these would be incomprehensible to a future civilisation.

The Human Interference Task Force, established in 1981, was first of these projects. The participants identified three criteria: to create a message which speaks to all who encounter it; to convey that a given location harbours dangerous material; and further, to give an indication of the nature of the danger.⁹⁷ Of the diverse approaches, several stand out, such as the formation of an "Atomic Priesthood." In this scenario, information bearers would personally pass the information on to future generations. Another proposal involved breeding cats which, when exposed to the waste, changed colour. The establishment of a mythology, a set of legends about the animals, was proposed so that people would recognise danger when nearing the location.

⁹⁶ Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us* (London: Random House, 2008).

⁹⁷ Technical report, "Reducing the likelihood of future human activities that could affect geologic high-level waste repositories," United States, <https://doi.org/10.2172/6799619>.

It was, however, landscape artist and architectural theorist, Mike Brill, who identified a more realistic approach. He posited that keeping people away from these sites could be achieved through the evocation of fear and foreboding.⁹⁸ If people felt a sense of ominousness and dread great enough, perhaps they could be compelled to stay away from the danger. The idea of a warning system based not on language, but on a visceral response in which the flight response is triggered, intrigued me.

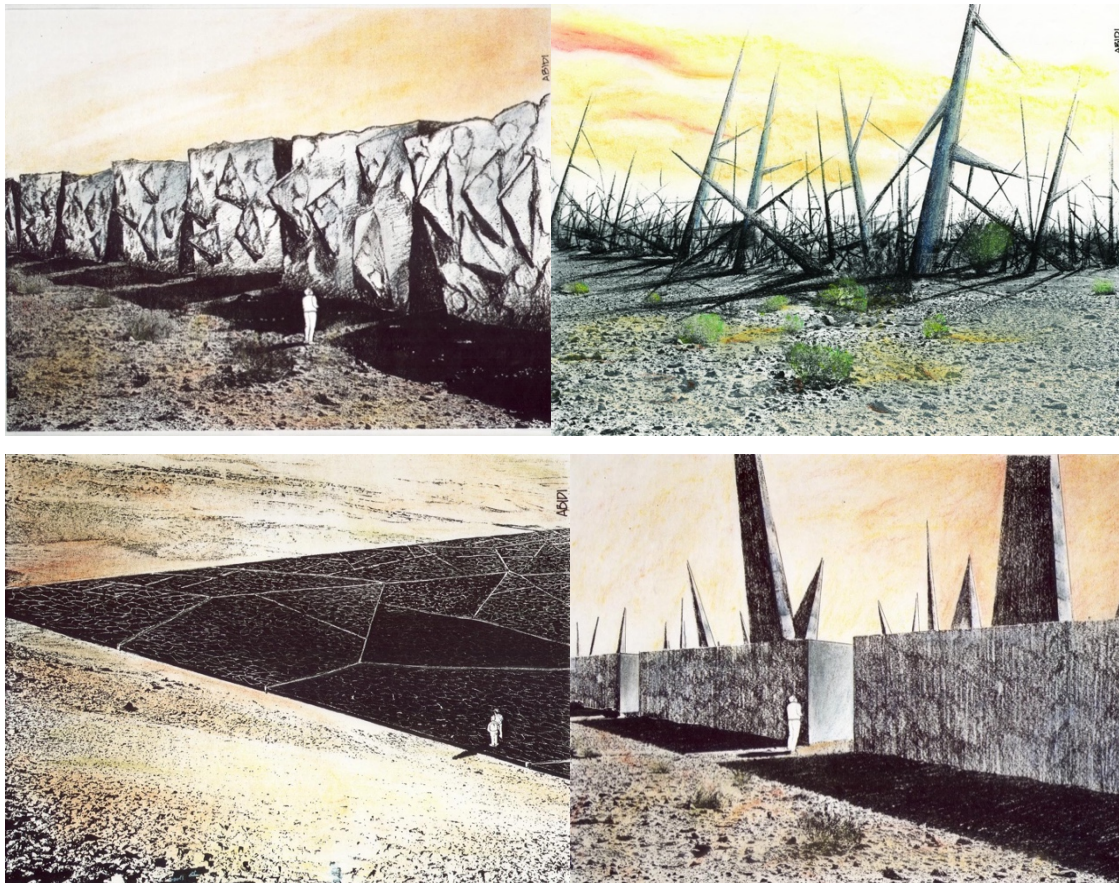


Figure 104. Drawings by Mike Brill for various proposals of nuclear semiotics solutions, (top left) *Forbidding Blocks*, (top right) *Landscape of Thorns*, (lower left) *Black Hole*, (lower right) *Spike Field*.

Brill envisioned huge needles jutting up from the terrain—a landscape of thorns, large spikes, arranged at all angles, menacingly protruding from the ground, as though they have burst through from below (fig. 104). He explored designs for physical markers which conveyed the concepts of

⁹⁸ "Ten Thousand Years," *99% Invisible*, episode 114, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/ten-thousand-years/>.

dangerous emanations, shapes that evoke bodily harm, and the concept of “shunned land.”⁹⁹ Other proposals include huge earthworks in the shape of lightning bolts, or dynamited rock, so as to signal destruction.¹⁰⁰

The two proposals which particularly captured my imagination were the *Black Hole*, consisting of a vast slab of blackened concrete or basalt, which renders the land unusable, and the *Forbidding Blocks*. This involved the construction of an irregular grid upon which are placed massive stone blocks, which in turn form a labyrinthine network of “streets” leading nowhere. The documentary *Into Eternity* presents the difficulty of this task, exploring the various forms which could be designed to repel humans via dis-ease and a sense of foreboding, “to give every possible signal to the future that *something* lurks below.”¹⁰¹ The conveyance of foreboding, warning, alarm, to imbue a *feeling* of warning, were qualities I wanted my works to deploy.

THE *REPEATER* EXHIBITION

In the latter stages of my research journey, the exploration of glitch had expanded to include a range of focused goals. The aim of my final body of work was to increase a particular type of response—a sense of foreboding, a feeling of chaos and of inevitable collapse—so that the paintings become a conveyer of an atmosphere. However, I had to signal impending malfunction without being explicit. I would provoke this feeling entirely via form, colour, and line, and by employing the various strategies developed over the course of this research project.

I had established that a precarious balance must be maintained between various states to heighten visual tension. By being ambivalently *neither* one thing nor another, I could extend glitch, which represents a state halfway between complete and obliterated forms. These oppositional forces included presentation of a pictorial space, while maintaining the flat, formal plane; asymmetry and

⁹⁹ Sandia National Laboratories. *Expert Judgement on Markers to Deter Inadvertent Human Intrusion into the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant* (Sandia National Laboratories report SAND92-1382 / UC-721, p. F-49), point 4.2.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas A. Sebeok, *Pandora's Box: How and Why to Communicate 10,000 Years into the Future*, <https://www.mat.ucsb.edu/~g.legrady/academic/courses/01sp200a/students/enricaLovaglio/pandora/Pandora.html>.

¹⁰¹ “Without Us,” Weisman, 209.

instability within otherwise stable forms; and the simultaneous appearance of coalescence and disintegration. Finally, I challenged myself to do this whilst maintaining the logic of the closed system and parameters for making, without contrivance, without predetermining the outcome.

In late 2019, I exhibited this new body of work under the name *Repeater*.¹⁰² A repeater is a mechanism which both receives and transmits data, reshaping, retiming, resynchronising and amplifying the signal *without altering its content*.¹⁰³ This exhibition represented a drawing together and refining of a range of strategies, including the use of colour. Specifically I began to employ a second yellow, known as chartreuse or yellow-green.¹⁰⁴ By including both this and the original street-marking yellow, I heightened the visual discord *between* paintings (fig. 105).

I employed a circular support in all but two paintings, because I felt that its single edge implied continuity and completeness. This threw the discontinuity and incoherence of each composition into sharper relief. I worked with the boundary of the paintings, changing the colour of the edge to black, which had the effect of increasing visual tension and increasing the fractured explosiveness of the interior (fig. 106). My overarching goal was to depict a discontinuous, buckling surface. The coexistence of multiple ambiguities represents the outcome of my focus on contradictory visual cues which combine to echo the balancing act of glitch.

Finally, to allow the unfolding of compositions which were both chaotic but also uncontrived, I determined to complete each step in the making without considering the overall outcome. This methodology was derived from my observations of urban construction and repair, as outlined in Chapter 3. In mimicking the execution of roadwork and other construction projects, I performed each task as though it was the *only* task. This meant not considering how the various steps in the process might interact with those which followed. I will now discuss the works individually in terms of the methods employed and the relationships they set up with the viewer.

¹⁰² *Repeater*, 27.11.19–14.12.19, Five Walls, Footscray, Victoria.

¹⁰³ Wikipedia entry for *repeater*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repeater>, accessed 20 June, 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Artist David Batchelor posits that this shade has so few names because it is not a pleasant colour, and I would add that it is also hard to define by being not entirely green nor entirely yellow. David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 80.



Figure 105. *Repeater* installation views.

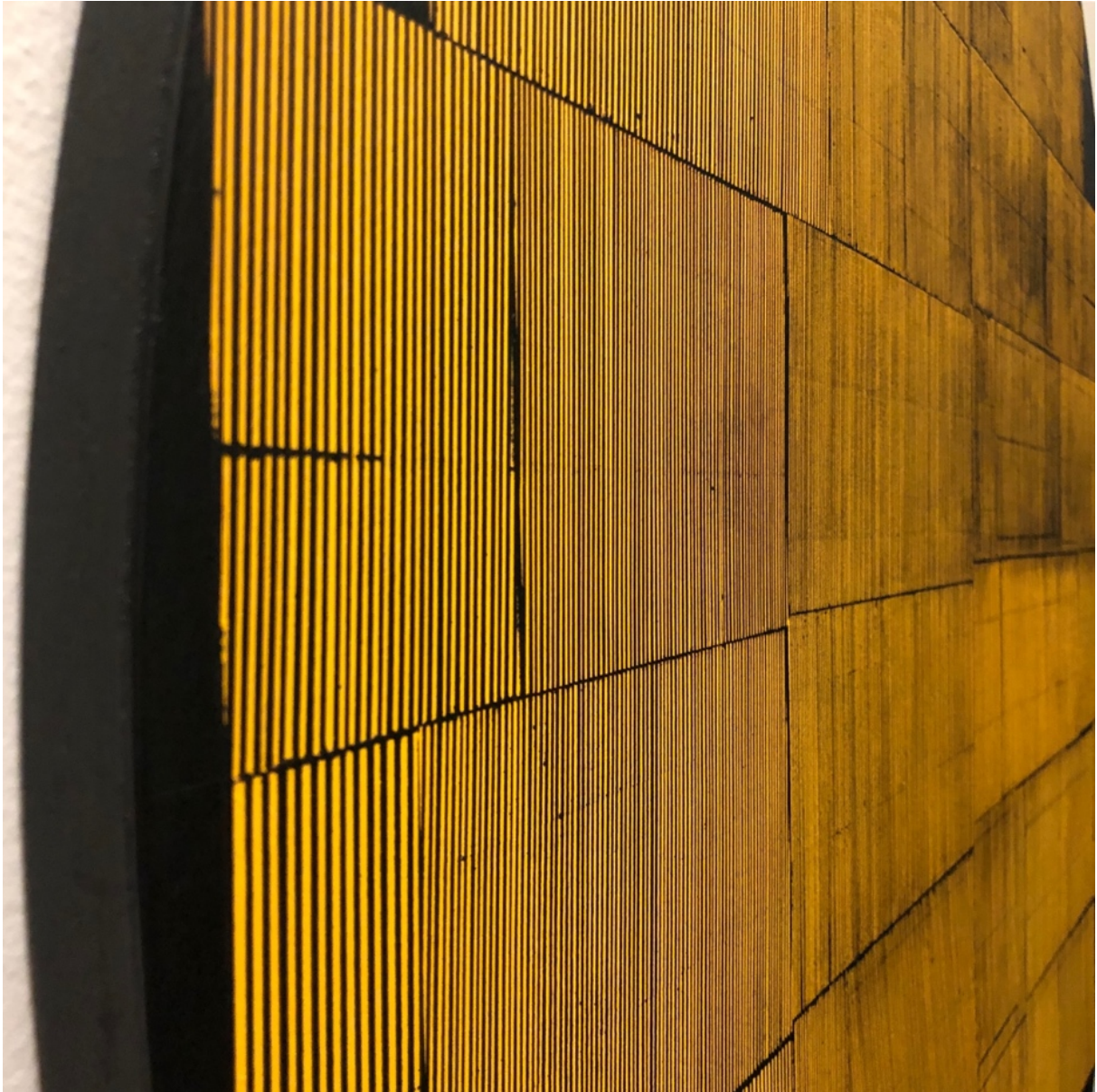


Figure 106. Edge of *Collapse*.



Figure 107. *Cinch*, 2019, enamel / acrylic on wood, 50 x 40 cm.

In *Cinch* (fig. 107) I aimed to heighten a sense of internal compression and claustrophobia, as though an external force was causing the form to collapse inwards. I divided the taped rectangular support into 12 squares, before removing all adhesive and then reapplying it. By employing the regular grid, I exploited the anticipated regularity to emphasise distortion where each square was applied

inaccurately, with increasing fragmentation towards the lower edge. I incised millimetre-wide lines, top to bottom, which adjoined one another, creating a continuum despite the many interruptions. These breaks took the form of small black lines running horizontally where the tape has split apart. Unexpectedly, several viewers of the exhibition were certain that the black void at the bottom-right was actually jutting forward out of the picture plane, until they were almost alongside the work. The small triangle of black creates an ambiguity between pictorial space and non-objective flatness.

Collapse and *Lodestar* were the two largest paintings in this exhibition, each in a tondo format. I reversed several of the steps in the taping process, reapplying the removed tape sections one at a time, and incising each portion in isolation without knowledge of how the next piece might fit. I tried at all times to disregard the overall form, concentrating only on the section in front of me. In *Collapse* (fig. 108), this results in an unexpected vertical bifurcation which draws the eye without providing a focal point. Eschewing a central focus elicits a feeling of discomfort, as though something is missing. I know that my own inability to reconcile this composition in my mind makes a sustained viewing difficult.



Figure 108. *Collapse*, 2019, enamel / acrylic on wood, 80cm diameter.

The seemingly minor decision of painting the edges of this work black makes the yellow sections seem to hover, separated from the surface, as though pulled tight. I was surprised that this adjustment impacted the work to such an extent. The black edge heightens the contrast with the white gallery wall, so that the forms within are set adrift in a black void, which simultaneously constrains the composition. The strip-like rectangular segments are held together, like square pegs in a round hole. Nothing sits easily. My mind wants to shift the portions about to find a balance, to resolve the jostling of forms into some sort of balance.

Working on the second large tondo, *Lodestar*, I revisited the disrupted grid format (fig. 109). The black edge once again heightens the contrast with the wall, so that the whole painting feels more tightly constrained and contained as though, like a drum skin, the composition is pulled tautly across the surface. Initially the taped squares extended beyond the edge of the support; however, I decided to trim each portion to a straight edge, which in turn drew the fragmented form in from the edge of the painting. This creates a sense of claustrophobia and compression. Finally, the fragmentation increases as it nears the edge of the support (fig. 110). The effect is of a haphazard fracturing, as though the disk is crumbling or being broken by physical force as it approaches its own boundary.



Figure 109. *Lodestar*, 2019, enamel / acrylic on wood, 80cm diameter.



Figure 110. *Lodestar* (detail), increasing fracture towards edge.

The next works in this series are in the form of a series of four small tondos, *Beacon I-IV* (fig. 111). The title, modest scale, and introduction of a yellow-green “Hi-Vis” tone are intended to recall in the viewer the image of a warning light, which flashes to draw attention and perhaps convey a message. At this smaller scale, I was able to test out four different methods and degrees of fracture within the bounds of the solid circular form. Each circle was internally disjointed using a different method, including the mismatch of increments, the fragmented placement of tape, divisions into horizontals, and in the fourth work, into squares, which sit uneasily within the curved support.

I found that in skewing the lines, in particular in *Beacon I* where the upper portion is relatively vertical, the feeling is of a weight pushing down from above. In this same painting, I left a black void at the bottom, which has the effect of implying a truncated continuum which extends beyond the painting’s edge. Placing the black portion at the bottom prevents it from receding into background, as the sky beyond a landscape does. Instead, it operates as a weight, heightening the visual imbalance when combined with the implication of incompleteness.



Figure 111. *Beacon I-IV*, 2019, enamel / acrylic on wood, 25cm diameter.

In creating the final painting, I was determined to draw together the most successful approaches in evoking a feeling of warning, of ominousness, and of claustrophobic discomfort. The composition of *Tocsin* is derived from a warning sign found at dangerous level-crossings, denoting a no-man’s-land where cars should not idle (fig. 112). I constructed a diagonally skewed grid before removing all portions of tape at once. The regularity of this form is thrown into disarray and unsettled by placing

the striated square within a rectangular frame. I employed two sets of increments, one imperial and the other metric, which has the effect of altering the yellow-green hue, so that some portions seem to recede while others jut forward. Further, the skewed lines distort the picture plane by creating depth, whilst simultaneously negating coherent pictorial space. The resulting push-and-pull of the composition makes it appear that outside forces are acting upon the surface (Fig 113).

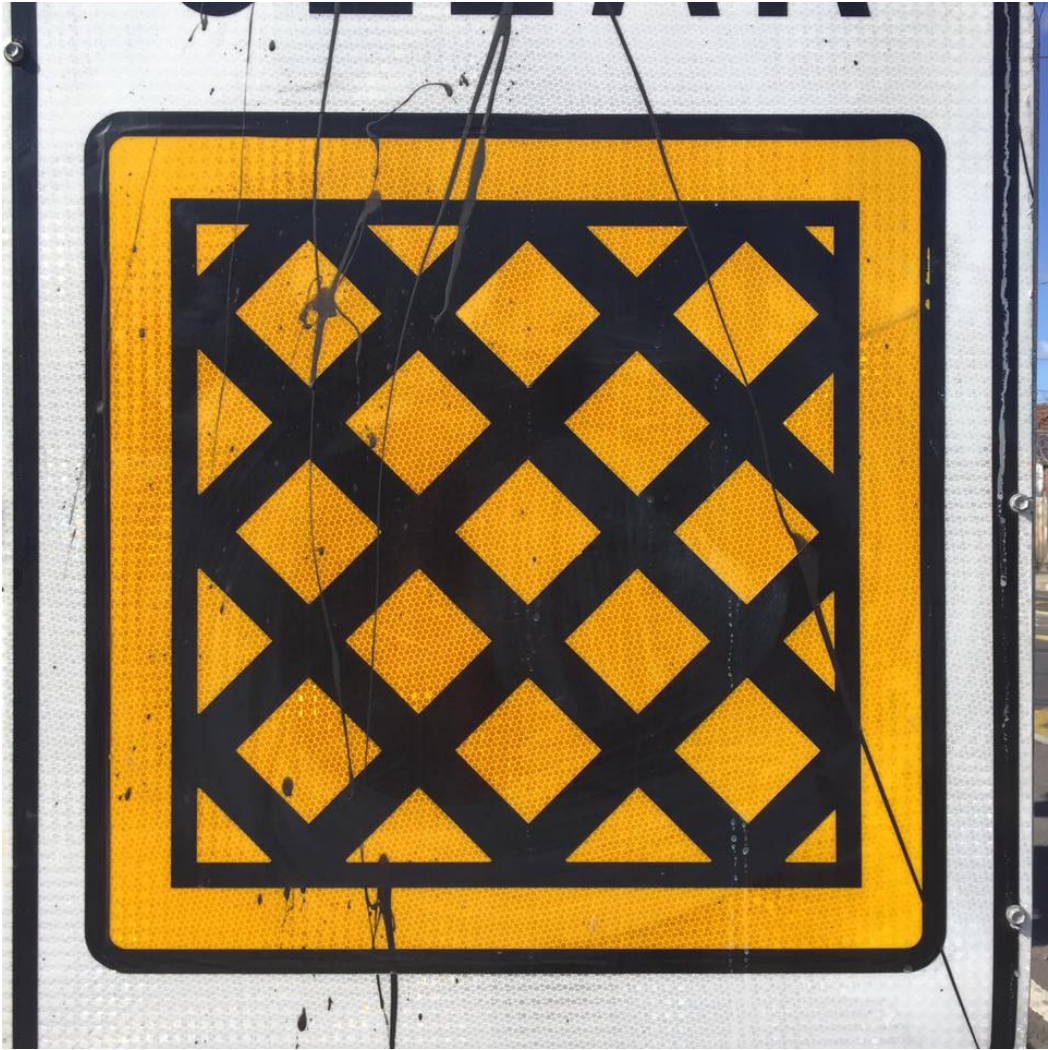


Figure 112. Rail crossing warning sign.

I found that the most effective method, however, was placing a black void at the top, above the square. As with the use of wider striations in the obround series (figs. 89, 98), this creates such a feeling of top-heaviness and imbalance that I was asked several times whether the painting had been hung upside down. This painting was a summation of research outcomes, capturing multiple ambiguities in an echo and expansion of glitch through fracture and distortion. The feeling of

imminent collapse, of claustrophobia and ominousness, results from the combination of fractured form, alarming colour, and unbalanced composition.



Figure 113. *Tocsin*, 2019, enamel / acrylic on wood, 70 x 60 cm. The word is a homophone for *toxin*, but means an alarm-bell or alert system.

CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I have discussed the effects of an unanticipated hiatus on my studio practice. Looking back through previous paintings, I located several which had been previously overlooked and considered what it was that caused this oversight. I found that these few paintings were those which more readily evoked feelings of discomfort, unease, and disquiet. Having ascertained how this affect was achieved—by employing off-kilter and unresolved, truncated compositions—I determined that the mood of the work was aligned with glitch. That is, if glitch is the first sign that something has begun to go awry in a system, it follows that it can also be a conveyer of ominousness, of a warning that the system is breaking down.

I looked to painter Jack Whitten, whose work was consistently built via regimented and highly controlled, tool-mediated processes. Despite this, his paintings are a vehicle for the evocation of mood. That is, an ineffable feeling arises despite the rigorous application of a logical system. I began to distil the aspects of a composition which could heighten this disconcerting feeling in the viewer, working on a series of obrounds, for their propensity to trigger dis-ease.

Finally, I conducted an exploration of the dazzle camouflage of the First World War, where chaotic and striped compositions were employed to confound the eye of would-be attackers. This investigation occurred at the same time as my reading of Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us*, from which I begin to research the various projects intended to warn people of the distant future of the need to avoid areas of danger and contamination. Beholders of these warnings should be compelled to leave the shunned land rather than becoming intrigued. Though my work does not shun or repel, I attempt to confound the expectation of the viewer that they might observe a composition which balances colour and form. I aim to supplant this balance with an element of complexity, instilling in the viewer an experience which blends optical intrigue with a visceral response of discomfort.

These diverse areas of research were then drawn together to create a final body of work. From glitch, to crack, to complete collapse, this group of paintings is comprised of unresolvable, claustrophobic compositions, wrought in jarring colour binaries. In striving for visual awkwardness and intentionally creating claustrophobic compositions, I am exploring the disintegration of composition as the ultimate visual malfunction. The sense of compression and imminent collapse is the result of an amalgamation of my research outcomes, exploring glitch and fracture in the painted form.

It was a matter of days after the *Repeater* exhibition closed that news of the novel coronavirus was reported for the first time, the virus spreading through the Wuhan province of China. The beginnings of a global pandemic, the first in one hundred years, had the effect of compounding themes of breakdown on a global scale. The need to be alert to danger was not limited to Covid-19, but drew attention to the real risk of breakdown in global supply chains, basic social functions, and the economies of all the world's nations.

CONCLUSION

My research evolved from a decades-long preoccupation with regimented modes of painting, where a limited range of materials is employed in the execution of a strictly controlled and repetitive process. Specifically, I wanted to understand the links between this type of art-practice and an acceptance of blemished, irregular outcomes. I took the position early on that the type of aberration to which I refer could be described as glitch. I asked what could be revealed by making a comparison between glitch art, which focuses on digital and analogue time-based media, and process-based painting. Recognising that pursuing glitch risked the repetition of outcomes, I questioned how development could occur within an unchanging, programmatic arts practice.

Glitch sits on a spectrum between perfection and malfunction, where the signal is polluted by noise, but never lost. This is a simultaneous presentation of two opposing states: an intentional, measured transmission, enmeshed with its own corruption. Over the course of my research, I have focused on this ambiguous aspect of glitch, identifying multiple areas where contradictory visual outcomes could be developed. These include the simultaneous presentation of fragmentation and its opposite, solidity; implications of movement in a static form, including coalescence and disintegration; and the coexistence of pictorial space and non-objective flatness. A series of experiments in the studio, where I challenged myself to generate development without changing the essential process, resulted in the incorporation of off-kilter, fragmented, and claustrophobic compositions. The following is a summary of practice-led and theoretical approaches I have undertaken, in order to address my original research questions.

I began by conducting an exploration of my own studio practice, examining motives, processes, and materials to determine the conditions which facilitate the painted glitch, and the particular form in which visual noise is manifested. This was contextualised with a discussion of glitch in its digital and analogue forms. By positing that the same event occurs in non-objective and process-based painting, I discussed labour and the immersive practice as aspects which differentiate an otherwise machine-like, programmatic method of making. By reframing the handwrought mark as glitch, I drew connections with the graphite wall drawings of Sol Lewitt, before embarking upon a drawing project of my own. This was conducted to observe how glitch reveals aspects of the method and materials involved in artmaking, whatever the medium. The repetitive outcomes of this exercise however, raised the suspicion that the process may lead to an aesthetic dead end.

This prompted me to seek methodologies for developing my work, whilst maintaining a generative model of making, and without disrupting the strictly regimented system. This exercise involved looking to the broader spectrum of destructive practices from which glitch is drawn. Through a series of compositional approaches derived from the splitting and fracturing of forms, I increased the handling of materials and therefore the aggregation of corruption in the final work. In an effort to heighten visual ambiguity and to simultaneously imply and undermine stability, I introduced a circular format. This was extended further to include cubes; however it was the documentation of these objects which proved to be unexpectedly fruitful, the photographs presenting numerous, contradictory, and ambiguous states, which I correlate to glitch.

Once I recognised the role of the photographic medium in my research process, my studio practice unexpectedly expanded to acknowledge fracture in the real world, in particular the urban environment. This was augmented by an overview of the non-compositional methods of Ellsworth Kelly, for whom photography played an important role. My photographic practice led to an investigation of traffic and construction signage, the purpose of which is to draw attention whilst delivering a concise message. I then drew these diverse strands together, producing a resolved body of paintings in the form of the *New Signal* exhibition.

In the final period of my research, I began to recognise an overarching trajectory from the study of a logical, enclosed process which generates glitch, to the expanded field of fracture and malfunction in the urban environment, to eventually include all forms of disruption. Recognising the need to evoke a visceral response in the viewer to convey these broader themes, I conducted a case study of painter Jack Whitten, whose mechanised and logical processes nonetheless generate an ineffable mood or atmosphere. I investigated the early 20th century military tactic of dazzle camouflage, which was employed to confound visual coherence by distorting the appearance of a flat surface. Finally, I researched nuclear semiotics, a multidisciplinary endeavour to create a sense of ominousness without resorting to established symbology or language.

This research has led me to expand from glitch, the smallest of defects in a machine or system, to address fracture and malfunction on the largest of scales. Observing that faltering systems present us with the prospect of entropy and of collapse, my refined goal became to inspire a sense of unease and disquiet in the viewer, by evoking a warning. New methodologies included the use of alarming colours

in discordant combinations, as well as top-heavy and claustrophobic compositions. This led to the exhibition *Repeater*, a body of work amalgamating these different approaches.

DENOUEMENT

This research has led me to question my initial assumption that employing a strictly controlled, process-based methodology with a narrow range of materials is to work in a logical, closed system. Initially, I had proposed that the painted glitch was an imperfection which, once accepted, revealed aspects of the method and materials employed, much like the digital or analogue glitch. I did not anticipate that these small faults would ultimately demonstrate that the system of painting is not sealed off from the world, but part of it.

With the benefit of hindsight, I now recognise that dividing my methodology into plan, process, and outcome at the very outset reflected this presupposition, and that developments in the studio would ultimately come to address a vastly expanded territory. Thematically, this expansion came to include my environment, the world at large, and the gradual insinuation of atmosphere or mood. As aspects of the external world began to encroach on my studio practice, the resulting paintings moved from being glitched by the smallest of paint-bleeds, to fractured, to nearing compositional collapse.

Gradually, I have come to align the acceptance of glitched outcomes in painting to a broader trend which confronts and ultimately embraces the aesthetics of fracture and rupture in a variety of artforms. Themes of entropy in cracked media and destructive practice echo the historical precedents of breakdown, malfunction, and decay across the arts. In fact, this has been a compelling subject for centuries. Art practice which explores these themes can be framed as a subset of the ongoing fascination with ruin and the past. From the 19th century photographic practice of depicting rotting fruit and mid-20th century architectural ruin value, through to the current abundance of post-

apocalyptic and speculative fiction in literature and film, blight and destruction have been compelling subject matter for countless years.¹⁰⁵

In the final stages of my research journey, large swathes of the eastern states of Australia were devastated by bushfire. The novel coronavirus began to spread from the Wuhan Province of China to countries around the world, and strict social-distancing measures were introduced in my hometown of Melbourne and across Australia in an attempt slow its spread. My own feelings of disquietude and ominousness were pushed into overdrive as the prospect of a pandemic swiftly became a reality.

The idea that the current day is some sort of *end time* is one which is built into the human psyche. It has been theorised that this springs from our constant placement of ourselves at the centre of the universe, and the vanity of believing that we live in an exceptional time.¹⁰⁶ As such, the human race continually moves from one end-of-the-world theory to another. Reading a ten-year-old edition of *Scientific American* during lockdown, I was bemused to consider that the issues of the time included the Mayan 2012 calendar ending, and the possibility of the Large Hadron Collider creating black holes. Within ten years, these concerns have paled into insignificance.

In the same edition of *Scientific American*, a small article near the back, entitled “The Age of Digital Entanglement,” describes small digital glitches which in the recent past have created a snowballing of errors in realms as diverse as air traffic control and the stock market. These systems are so inextricably entangled into our supply chains, economies, and day-to-day lives that a small error can expose the illusion of stability within which we exist. This is a reminder that it is not necessarily the cataclysmic event that threatens us, but the glitch, the seed of corruption.

Like throwing a proverbial spanner in the works, shutting down entire cities made it all too apparent that the various systems which we have come to rely upon are not self-contained, sealed-off and perfect, but are instead provisional, fragile, and fallible. Malfunction on a grand scale has revealed the

¹⁰⁵ Noah Berlatsky, “If science fiction reflects our innermost fears, how do we see ourselves today?,” *Document*, Oct 18 2017, https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/a-quiet-apocalypse?fbclid=IwAR0fC3oXvjkK0zRqLsX3JIeV0mYNNv_tLNI_svk0Q2l65RjqQa4EyH7TGaU&utm_source=fb&utm_content=ad_notebook.quite_apocalypse.feature&utm_campaign=p-notebook-conversions-prosp-lookalike1%25value-based-AUS&d=n&utm_medium=cpc&extid=0.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Moyer, “Eternal Fascinations With the End,” *Scientific American*, September 2010, Special Edition “The End,” 22.

scaffolding and structure behind things we take for granted, shattering illusions of seamlessness. The infallibility of every kind of system has been called into question. Supply chains, economies, social functions—everything in the human world is exposed as being tenuous. It is in these systems that the glitch resides. It is the smallest of hiccups which signals corruption, leading to a cascading malfunction and collapse. Glitches are a warning.

Glitch serves as a reminder that all things go awry and are inevitably headed towards entropy. In accepting the inexorability of entropy, these intertwined themes address the instability of all things. *Scientific American* editor Michael Moyer observes that “[r]egardless of how we feel about it, flux is the nature of our world, and endings are an inescapable—and often overlooked—part of life.”¹⁰⁷ As such, glitch and fracture can be employed to denote an acceptance that things do not stop, but rather, change.

In the digital arts, Hugh S. Manon and Daniel Temkin state that glitch art can be framed as “the anxiety-provoking, uncanny underside of the *heimlich* comfort we take in the digital—in its cleanliness, familiarity and reliability,”¹⁰⁸ but by “aestheticizing error, one domesticates it, ‘owns’ it, rendering the prospect of a real collapse familiar and somehow less scary.”¹⁰⁹ Rosa Menkman urges us to “... find catharsis in disintegration, ruptures and cracks; manipulate, bend and break any medium towards the point where it becomes something new...”¹¹⁰ These themes and concerns are more often than not discussed within analogue and digital technology, where information, signal and noise are concerned. However, I have demonstrated in my research a clear correlation between established modes of glitch production, and the painted and drawn glitch. This includes modes of production which eschew technology entirely, relying instead on mediation of the human body.

At the outset of my research, I posited my reasons for working with a simple protocol, generating work in a machine-like manner to create unexpected outcomes. The restricted means could become a method to propel production, or an experiment where the result precludes interference. Those means

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Manon and Temkin, “Notes on Glitch,” point 34.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, point 35.

¹¹⁰ Menkman, *The Glitch Moment(um)*, *Network notebooks*, 04, (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011), 11.

could become a meditative act, a marking of time, a fingerprint, proof, or trace. But overarchingly, my method has come to be a mechanism for revealing and accepting the world as it is. Through my PhD research, my art practice has become a highly personal way for me to navigate the world. It has become a barometer for my own experience, whilst providing a mechanism for accommodating myself to the various scales of collapse in which life exists. I have come to understand that my studio practice, and in particular, the exploration of glitch and malfunction, arises from a need to mediate my engagement with overwhelming themes. In this regard, the universal and grand theme of entropy is balanced by its flipside, the personal.

My compulsion to employ uniformity and repetition, only to corrupt and distort this aesthetic, correlates to a confrontation and acceptance of increasingly difficult circumstances. By wrangling disharmonious elements into an uncomfortable whole, I cast regularity and gridded forms into chaos to create structures at the point of mutation or transformation. Through fractured and disrupted aesthetics, broken compositions, discordant colours, and unbalanced forms, my work attempts to convey a sense of the age of entanglement, the dis-ease of living in a world which seems to march inextricably towards collapse and destruction. Perhaps it is wise to see the world as it is truly—interconnected to the point of entanglement. We desensitise, familiarise, and come to live with glitch. We moderate our expectations, we prepare, perhaps we adjust our course. It is the glitch which signals malfunction, revealing the fallible systems upon which we build our lives. But it is also the glitch which shows us the way forward, forcing us to accept the inevitable and leading to new forms.

I have found that glitch and the absorption of error and malfunction into art is both a symptom of and salve to the perpetual, mounting ominousness our times. External forces will always prevail, even when the system seems impervious. Entropy is inevitable, and glitch is simply the first symptom. From my initial investigations through to the final body of work, expanding from glitch to include fracture and collapse, I observe that things will not end, but rather evolve. Always, new forms will arise. As John Cage says, “I welcome whatever happens next.”¹¹¹

¹¹¹ John Cage, *Fluxus and After...* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1993), 48.



Figure 114. Sign of the times: safe queueing and social distance markers.

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