

A NAKED LUNCH WITH THE MODERNISTS
Painting as Practice

By

Aaron C Carter

BFA Victorian Collage of the Arts – The University of Melbourne
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This thesis project intersects between both formal and creative writing styles that explore the potential of the written language to generate and promote material practice. Contextualizing contemporary painting both art historically and opening it up to broader range of influences such as memory systems and creative writing, all help to support my notion of painting as an open thinking model that acts as an oblique reply to both the everyday and art history.

The thesis traces the reductive Modernist agenda with a particular focus on Australian art history, Dadaist diagrams and Modernist painting from 1958 to 1965; as an enquiry into the semiotics of gesture and the narrative potential of mark making. Working towards Post Modernism and how this has opened up the creative possibilities of painting now outside a critical and stylistic agenda. Through intersecting existing historical practices with more contemporary painters, I aim to suggest that painting is a practice that frequently looks to the past for answers, which subsequently leads my enquiry into various modes of appropriation

Key notions through out the text are painting as a diagram and network, with Cezanne's technique of 'Passage shape,' which I argue has had transitive effect throughout the course of modern art up to more contemporary practices such as Jutta Koether, who enacts the behavioral passage between objects in a range of multidisciplinary crossovers. This leads the enquiry into the transitive potential of animating these passage spaces with the semiotics of gesture and mark making.

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Cezanne's Object

Paul Cezanne used something he called the “passage” technique,¹ which functioned like a bridge moving from borders of one form to another. This notion of transition was related more to form as an emerging phenomenon—the borders or edges of each form, irregular and abstract. The method allowed him to come closer to representing how he felt looking at the world rather than conveying exactly what he saw. His arduous bid to capture what was latently termed the “phenomenon of perception”² would herald the advent of abstract painting.

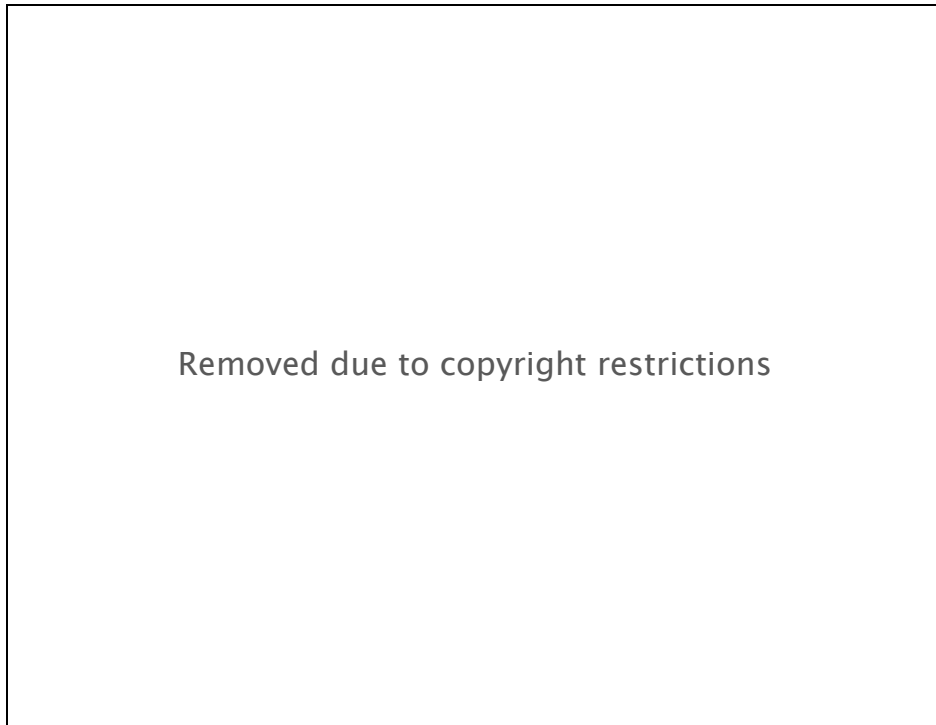
The objects he perceived in his paintings were not seen as isolated from each other, but retained their own weight within a divisible, harmonious whole. This ‘whole’, as he himself confessed, was conceived with great difficulty. Thatched together in countless layers of doubt and belief,³ these images gave rise to the legacy of Modern Art wherein the fundamental opposition between figurative and abstract languages shaped the entire movement. Constant in this complex history, is the relaying between the notions of doubt and belief, both of which, I feel are exactly what constitutes a good painting.

¹ Lewis, Mary Tompkins *Critical Readings in Impressionism and Post- Impressionism: An Anthology*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007, p 290.

² Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenon of Perception*, New York: Routledge Classics, 2002, p 40.

³ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Cezanne's Doubt*, <http://faculty.uml.edu/rinnis/cezannedoubt.pdf>

I would like to use this as an analogy for exploring the potential in the passage shapes one can source from looking between the paintings of the last hundred or so years. All of these histories lead unresolved into the next so, I believe and it is important to stake out the creative possibilities in these spaces; as a strategy that doesn't resort to postmodernism's direct irony, cynicism, or pathos, one that promotes a more nuanced confluence of history and finds optimism in the cracks of modernism's so-called demise.



*Fig. 1 – Paul Cézanne, The Garden at Les Lauves,
Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, 1906*

Painting as Praxis

Today's art practices are determinately ambiguous. It was characteristic of artist positions during the twentieth century to challenge what came before. In most instances, the 'other' was disputed in a fundamental opposition between figurative and abstract languages: new modernist agendas played out against apparent traditionalists in direct verbal and formal conflicts. Representation was challenged in its ties to an academy, traditionalism and conservatism, the resulting rise of abstraction heralded as a key achievement of modern culture—a trademark of progress.

Making a painting is a way in which we attempt to make sense of the world, not to put out strict pictorial answers—its inherent ambiguity and expression is its value. In my own practice, allusions to the traditions of Modernist abstraction, the landscape, figuration, the romantic, and the Postmodern all figure in, and it is perhaps best to think of the assemblage of these seemingly disparate parts into a painting, not as the creation of an image but a diagram. For a diagram is defined as a plan, sketch, drawing, or outline designed to demonstrate and explain how something works in order to clarify the relationship between the parts of a whole.

This is why the notion of Cezanne's passage between forms still holds its relevance, for it demonstrates not only the formal keys of breaking down perception into a manageable set of cones, cylinders and spheres, but suggests an importance in the study of the behavioral passage between objects. Painting then becomes a study on how objects behave or are put to use in a network, as following Cezanne the painting

itself became an object—one that takes on its own network of distribution.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives one definition of ‘transitive’ as “expressing an action which passes over to an object.” —objects in networks are defined by their circulation from place to place and their subsequent translation into new contexts. This term holds a key importance for contemporary art practice, which in the age of free appropriation artists network a diverse set of references and strategies. Juxtaposition however, is easy and I see painting’s ability to nuance these meeting points through expression (gesture) and the handmade image as a crucial argument for its inherent value in relation to the image and its proliferation in our increasingly dematerialized experience of the world. It is in the process of seeing how things meet that meaning is attained.

Painting today does not belong to a single local network, a single scene or a landscape. There are pictures within pictures, paintings as performance, paintings as sculpture and social networks. Painting gestures can have a transitive effect. They can reconcile distances through appropriation: a flat modernist plane can be reanimated in confluence with a representational fragment. Formal and stylistic networks are no longer linearly developed but come together in new and unexpected ways. To focus on the passage shape and how objects behave, like a painting from one day to the next, can promote intuitive painting structures, which can harmonize differences and translate whatever the subject with a temperament, an expression.

Throughout this paper, moments of ‘gestural writing’ will punctuate the more formal text, these will be indicated by a different font and italics. I see these moments as a written temperament that comes closer to the intuitive actions that are played out in the studio. So in this sense, the creative writing acts as a type of passage shape between the formal thesis and material practice. The freeform nature of these writing shapes, align the written closer to the studio and diaristic impetus of painting between abstraction and narration—a middle ground that I see as the most productive.

Australia was an Island

A back step squinting revealed the dominant touché of shapes within a chain of colors and segments acted from a position ex-brush attachment. Cinnabar green light. Aureolin. Juane brilliant. Hydrangea blue. Umber in the shadows. Fields. Buff tango—phthalo mixes buff. Instant cerulean—the eyes rest. Plants aloof. The danced horizon and paint got deciduous. Latter day rowing back lap early spring cumulonimbus top ranking select all rectangles dashingly animated the passage shape between two eucalypts with some dirt smears in the sky.

Australia had a unique development throughout the trajectory of Modernist Painting. During the 1930s and 1940s, Australia was a highly conservative, backwards, rural-driven economy with an art world that lacked any particular identity in relation to other art centers throughout the world. It was during the period of the Second World War that artists such as Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker and Arthur Boyd began conceiving a

unique take on Modernist painting happening throughout the rest of the world. In a positive turn, the Second World War prevented these artists from going overseas; whilst at the same time it increased their awareness of Europe and importantly this brought them together in an atmosphere of tension and heightened sensitivity. According to Boyd, “the destruction in Europe gave them the feeling that they had the chance to be original.”⁴ Their work explored mythologies of the landscape and anxieties about the war, expressed through the agitated, crudely finished surfaces, which were also a direct attack on conservative social realism.

The landscape has played a central role in Australia’s painting history and the connection between landscape of indigenous Australians and painting is fundamental. The materials employed by indigenous Australian artists such as pigments, gum binders, grass bushes and bark armatures literally made from the landscape. Although painting on canvas is a relatively recent phenomenon for Indigenous Australians, after 40 years since western materials were introduced to the Western Desert region it is still one of the longest continual movements in art, belittling the short-lived movements of Cubism and Fauvism.

The facility and ability of painters such as Rover Thomas and Emily Kngwarreye who started painting very late in life and produced extraordinary amounts of quality work is possible due to a long history of body, sand and cave painting, which can be traced back 40,000 years. This passing of knowledge has gone on for thousands of years. But in the book on Rover Thomas, *I Want to Paint* it is argued that the dreaming is an ongoing process and negotiation with the land: “the dreaming is a continuous process, not a process at an end but one linking past to

⁴ Hammond, Victoria. *Angry Penguins: Realist Painting in Melbourne in the 1940's* Canberra: Australia National Gallery, 1989, p 39.

present and involving living people in continuance”.⁵ Rover Thomas was a stockman for most of his life and many of his paintings describe the various stock routes and his experiences as a stockman: “the landscape is drawn from the artists knowledge of the landscape and his conceptualization of topography”.⁶

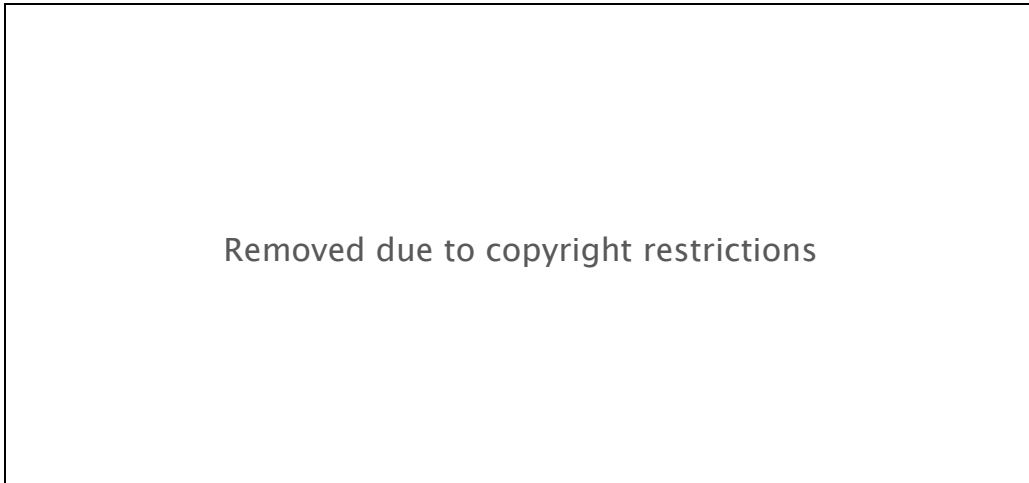


Fig 2 – Rover Thomas, *Wungurr – Rainbow Serpent, I Want to Paint, 1989*

Fig 3 – Rover Thomas, *Wungurr – Rainbow Serpent (diagram) I Want to Paint, 1989*

Many contemporary Australian painters are extending on this distinct Modernist trajectory by confounding interests in the Australian cultural landscape in unique confluences of representational and abstract painting. Melbourne artists such as Will Mackinnon, Fergus Binns and Trevelyan Clay have all picked up this legacy. Contrary to Nolan, these contemporary painters work more closely associated with the sensitive colonial history in Australia, by making a direct references to Aboriginal Australian painting. Fergus Binns and his show *Missing Bushwalkers on Found Landscapes* (2008), as the title suggests the artist inserts iconic

⁵ Carrigan, Belinda, *Rover Thomas: I want to paint*. Melbourne: Heytesbury 2003, p 24.

⁶ Carrigan, Belinda, *Rover Thomas: I want to paint.*, op. cit, p 29.

imagery “and cultural signs to create potent images that cross examine various aspects of Australian society.”⁷ Binns is able to use imagery from multiple sources to examine Australia’s cultural landscape with humor and irony. His style incorporates divergent influences, including the painting as readymade. For example, a seemingly innocuous amateurish painted landscape upon closer inspection houses detainees, caged in the deep shadow created by the bright light of an open but stark Woomera-like scene.

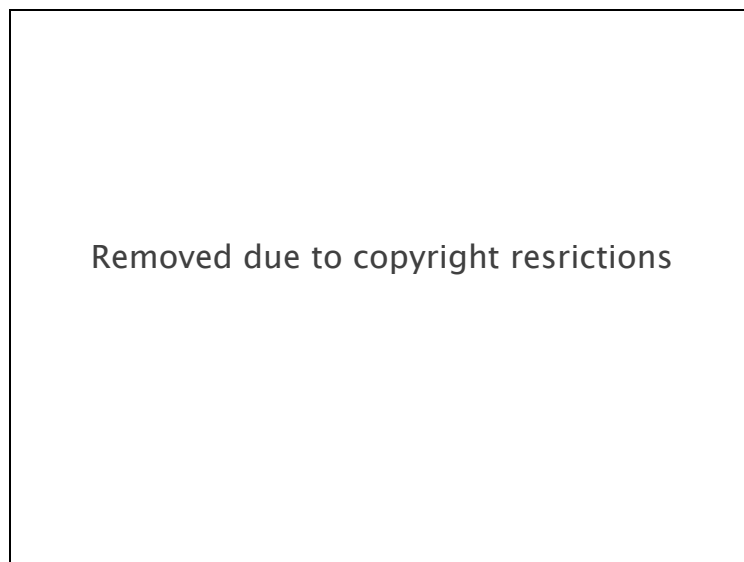


Fig 4 – Fergus Binns, Missing Bushwalkers, Uplands Gallery, 2008

It is a painting that accommodates Australia’s contradictions; its apparent youthful openness where space and possibility are abound, but where there lies an undercurrent of racism and intolerance. This is conveyed with Binns characteristic faux-naïf light touch, which can convey multiple layers of meaning, history and place using landscape as his vehicle.

⁷ Rawlands, Jarrod. *Fergus Binns – Missing Bushwalkers on Found Landscapes Exhibition Catalogue* Melbourne: Uplands Gallery, 2008, p 03.

Landscape Moves

Cezanne recycled the cylinder, the cone and the sphere as he reconstituted landfill where not a single point of the vista was put to waste, even the blank canvas was well put to use. John Glover's early colonial landscapes depict gums and eucalypts like elms and oaks underwater. Paintings wooden hews and musings on European shelter were not quite welcome here. Cezanne anticipated the turf wars and art actually has real issues but that's the also the point—the plume of aesthetics under duress. Punctuation and grammatical errors set into the circular sentences of history. Fashion on, talk, talk, sense, sense and nonsense—which is exactly the point for it's now a sentence. The brush was the hair of some animal and thus is the nature of the awkward stick—a dance between the head, the shoulders, elbows, left wrist and feet, all in conjunction to the selected energies that brush out from the legs of the painting, yourself.

Cezanne's engagement with *Mont Saint Victoire* involved an intensive process in which he was able to “distill those observations through the process of painting them over and over again”⁸. The apparently humble landscape becomes a vehicle for quiet contemplative transcendence. My approach to translation of the Australian cultural landscape to the context of Vancouver began with considerations of distance, and digital media's effect on our experience of the landscape. The research which followed was not through Australian landscape painting books, but Google Images, Museum Victoria e-archives and real

⁸ Morton, *Everyman Courbet and the Modern Landscape*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications 2006. 35, p 31.

estate websites. The resulting pictorial field in these first paintings were like a flat screen and had the presence of a monitor, both in scale and the box-like format—figurative moments isolated on blank fields.



Fig 5 - Aaron Carter, *Untitled*, 2012

Mitchell Schwarzer explains our contemporary experience of the moving landscape: “The landscapes of Modernity and Postmodernity are perceived less and less on terms of their own terms, in concentrated on-site viewing, and more and more through vehicular and camera movement...people sit down and the landscape moves.”⁹

This early sketch made in the program attempted to network a broad set of influences; traditional western landscape painting, indigenous Australian painting, and early Modernist abstraction. Allusions to the synthetic Cubist picture plane that integrates gestures comparable to both indigenous Australian dot painting and digital pixels.

⁹ Nelson, Robert S. and Olin, Margaret Olin *Monuments And Memory, Made and Unmade* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p 85.



Fig 6 - Aaron Carter , Untitled 2, 2012

When we unplug from dematerialized space we re-enter, and reconfigure into an older kind of vision. I see painting as a means to slow down the image in its age of proliferation but also to speak of its effects. Artists who choose to paint now are in many ways striving to recover the analogue from the digital, to replace nihilism with painterly effect.

The work produced during this period reconciled many different modes of illusion and abstraction and posed many structural problems, which led me to acquire a broader understanding of Modernist painting. This enquiry began with an interest in early modernist paintings of rooms with the intent on subverting these with my existing interests in the landscape; all with the intent to break down binary oppositions such as interior and exterior space. Architecture as an analogy for abstraction began as a way to subvert my own interests in the landscape and open it up to a broader set of influences.

Modernist Rooms and the Method of Loci

To place signs within a remembered architectural system could be a model for narrating abstract painting systems and help develop an intuitive painting system where iteration and diverse networking can co-entangle. My paintings of last year attempted to set a lineal framework to reconfigure with my own network of signs. The selection of paintings were planned out as a set of rooms within a suite. For example, an Edouard Vuillard impressionist room used as compositional framework to play off my recollection of Australian landscape. The patterning of Vuillard's formed allusions to larger spaces and indigenous Australian painting. These deluxe rooms formed a reference point held a metaphorical link to my own lineage from eighteenth century rooms set in a colonial landscape.

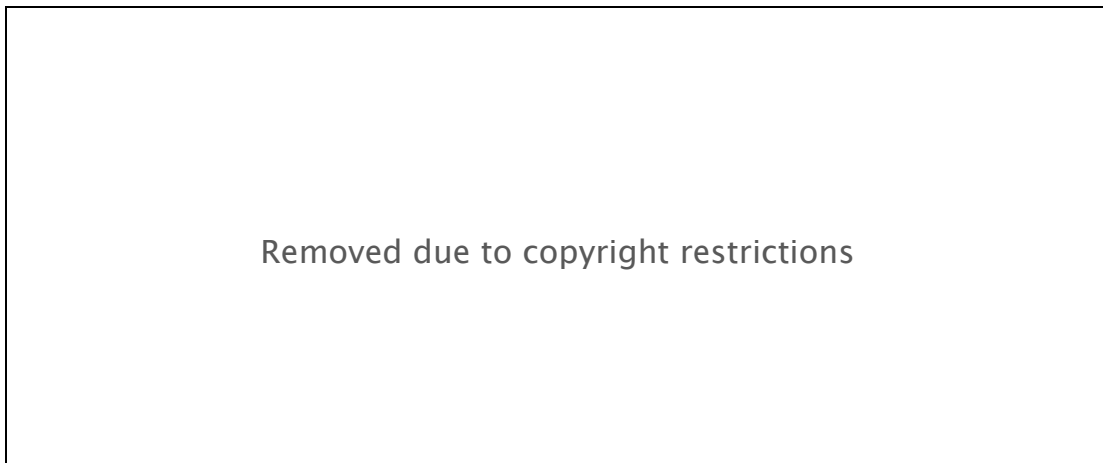


Fig 7 – Emily Kame *Wildflower* (detail) 1992

Fig 8 – Edouard Vuillard *Interieur a la Table a
Ouvrage*, 1893

A series of paintings could be read as a navigable coding system, where signs are delineated within a sequence of rooms or 'paintings'. Individual works are like rooms in a suite, connected but with alternative functions.

These memory rooms of Modernism have been articulated through a concealed pine grid, seamed plaster sheets, scuffed monochrome walls and removed ornate cornices. Unlike Cubist rooms these spaces are more concerned with their doorways, the broader intuitive structure, repeated motifs and common rooms. The Postmodernist room houses unconventional furniture; much of it is broken, half built, although color fills in for any lack of function. Housing gestures can talk of collecting, additive psychic exits and erasure and if the projected illusion is played out in the measured space we reside, it can happen through a conversation as a lineal chain of signifiers that is easier to follow.

The *Method of Loci* is a system developed by the early memory theorists; the chosen elements to be remembered are mentally associated with specific physical location. Memorialized spatial relationships establish, order and recollect memorial content. Similar to the indigenous Australian mapping of place and ‘the dreaming’, it is a topographical system. In the western conception, you might imagine walking through the house, choosing as loci various tables, chairs and windows, then the material to be remembered is inserted in the appropriate order into the various loci—the attempted function of memory attaches itself to furniture.

This methodology provides the potential framework for building a series of paintings, one that promotes a return to a recurring structural device that it still open to new influences. It suggests the importance of iteration and modulation with an existing structure. This system can work intrinsically within the paintings, but I also see the relevance of this memorial structure in considering the viewers behavioral shape in the gallery. Therefore the way a series of works is laid out in a space is

crucial. The viewer navigates and pieces together parts (memorial loci) within a divisible whole could potentially mirror the painter's structure. It also promotes a painting series to be more site-specific. The *Method of Loci* relies on a placement of memory on functional objects, within a remembered space and I see an analogy of this with painting or sculptures on custom plinths or shelves within the gallery.



Fig 9 - Aaron Carter, *Untitled 03*, 2012

The attempted function of memory within a linear structure can relate to how we read a sentence. My most recent work is taking language as a starting point, so rather than basing work on a set of collages or drawings I begin a painting with a sentence that calls for a visual rendition, one that promotes an immediate searching of the brush—a weaving of painterly and literary languages. The reliance on direct source material in earlier paintings was a long enduring process of

selection, juxtaposition, drawing, transfer and then painting that ended up looking nothing like the plan. To rely on memory rather than a seeking out of visual cues promotes a more nuanced meeting of narration and abstraction. It is a way to begin a painting at the very least, for as soon as you add one thing in a painting you generally have to change another.

Dadaist Diagrams and Painting Networks

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A cubist system of reconciling differences within a picture plane doesn't seem to fit for postmodern painting. Instead, to think of painting as diagrammatic system could promote it as more productive model of networking—beyond an 'implosive' cubist system, which was the predominate model for my paintings from 2012. "Cubism's effect is implosive: objects collapse under their own mounting semiotic obscurity".¹⁰ David Joselit here suggests the Cubist system promotes a type of "interior compositional noise" angling in on only a circumscribed set of elements. In his article '*Dada Diagrams*'¹¹ Joselit positions the Dada diagrams as a significantly undervalued development in early Modernism and as an important precursor to the more 'explosive' networks seen in contemporary practices. He outlines the importance of works such as Duchamp's *Unhappy Readymade* and Francis Picabia's *Dada diagrams*.

¹⁰ Joselit, David. *The Dada Seminars V.1(Dada Diagrams) Washington: The National Gallery of Art, 2005, p 231.*

¹¹ Joselit, David. *The Dada Seminars V.1(Dada Diagrams) op. cit, p 222.*

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Fig 10 – Francis Picabia *Diagram Poem*
Poèmes et dessins
de la fille née sans mère, 1918

Fig 11 – Marcel Duchamp *Unhappy Readymade*
from *Boite-en-Valise* 1931–1941 (box), 1938
(collotype), Philadelphia Museum of art

In these works, image, text and readymades circulate within a single plane of signification and act as important precursors to transitive practices such as Jutta Koethers, whose multidisciplinary approach to painting renders transitive links between seemingly diverse networks like a painting by Poussin, performance, writing and music. Koethers painting practice is one I will explore later in terms of networks of appropriation and transitive gestures.

Postmodern painting beyond a reductive agenda, does pick up on cues from the Cubist system in its breaking of the picture plane, however beyond the collapse of private interiors, a contemporary practice is open to exterior motives, conversations via appropriation, digital

contaminations and more complex networks that are rendered somewhat easier with Modernist tools. A Dada diagram, as Joselit proposes is a transitive framework for painting, a closer dialectic between the text, image, poetics and abstraction:

“The diagrammatic emphasizes pure relationality between things rather than directly assaulting their objectivity. Diagrammatic visuality produces an interstitial space– a space of the cut like the joins between pictures in a montage, or the infra-thin boundary between a readymade and its recordings.”¹²

Joselit inserts here a crucial term phased by Duchamp as the “infra-thin.” Duchamp describes the infra-thin boundary as a type of active passage shape between two things. He describes it as “the possible, implying the becoming—the passage from one to the other takes place in the infra-thin.”¹³ When asked to define the term Duchamp replied that the notion is impossible to define, “one can only give examples of it”:

“Fire without smoke, the warmth of a seat which has just been left, reflection from a mirror or glass, watered silk, iridescents, the people who go through (subway gates) at the very last moment, velvet trousers their whistling sound is an Infa-thin separation signaled”.¹⁴

Through these examples Duchamp suggests that meaning of the term is found in the behavioral shape between things, for its presence

¹² Joselit, David. *The Dada Seminars V.1(Dada Diagrams) op. cit, p 234.*

¹³ Cabanne, Pierre. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett New York: 1971, p 61.

¹⁴. Marcel Duchamp, Notes, arranged and translated by Paul Matisse, Boston: G K Hall Publishing 1983, p 45.

even describes the difference between identical things such as ready-mades. Like Cezanne's passage shapes, infra-thin boundaries are not objectively defined but are productive shapes rendered by the behavior passage between forms.

Text warps. Faucet de-funked between the eyes and the gestural feathering of pigment suspended in liquid soon to be illusion. Undulation induration oh flatness you. Go-between, circle, or go just because of the way the morning looked. Clean the house, we mess the house. Many chairs. Paint out the propensity towards abstraction and textual definition. Too much form, no passage—don't look for form, only passage.

Networks of appropriation

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Contrary to artists in other creative disciplines, painters both rely on and unavoidably work from a rich and somewhat intimidating history. To enact a simple brush stroke can embody complex semiotic associations and histories. This history has always valued individual innovation, progress and for most of it, the notion of creative genius. Alongside this has always been an acknowledged practice of appropriation, the rehashing and advancement of what came before. The Old Masters went into galleries and copied previous masters techniques for example. Painters learn about painting by emulating other subjects and techniques, sometimes directly referencing these as homage. It is a craft, which found its explicit value in flatness and post-flatness I would say its value is in the expressionist lodging of gesture.

Painting's 'value' at the height of Modernism was held to be its flatness. As the American critic Michael Fried framed it, the trajectory of modernist painting was one of "the gradual withdrawal of painting from the task of representing reality—or reality from the power of painting to represent it—in favor of an increasing preoccupation with the problems intrinsic to the medium itself".¹⁵ Modernism proceeded to reflect evermore deeply on itself in what was essentially a reductive agenda. In painting's case, critics such as Clement Greenberg through his pivotal text *Modernist Painting* declared paintings' value was "defined by the essence of its medium"¹⁶—its flatness. Greenberg and Fried were a critical backbone as major proponents of the movement and in the progressive narrowing of its formal imperative, painting moved towards an end point—the autonomous work of art. The challenge of literalism posed hard realities of flat surfaces, typical in the work of Kenneth Noland and Frank Stella. With the turn to postmodernism in the 1980s, any notion of artist avant-gardes were basically over and, this re-opened the field of possibilities for painting. This was partly due to the increasing gap between advanced criticism and contemporary painting.

Painters and critics began looking back to its history for answers. Michael Fried directed his interests back to 18th Century painting in his book *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*.¹⁷ (1980), and in doing so relatively abandoned his impassioned defense of Modernist painting. Ironically, it was Frank Stella, one of the original proponents of the movement, who began to outline some new strategies. His book *Working Space*¹⁸ (1980) investigates ways to work

¹⁵ Fried, Michael *Art and Objecthood* London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

¹⁶ Greenberg, Clement. *Modernist Painting* www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html.

¹⁷ Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980.

¹⁸ Stella, Frank. *Working Space* London: Harvard University Press, 1980.

out from this flattened end point—by looking back to pre-modernist pictorial space. Stella here uses the crisis of representational art in the sixteenth-century with particular focus on the theatrical space of Caravaggio to illuminate the crisis of abstraction in the 1970s:

“The necessity of creating pictorial space that is capable of dissolving its own perimeter and surface plane is the burden that modern painting was born with. No one helped lighten this burden more than Caravaggio.”¹⁹

This is another key example of how artists look back to the past for answers. Stella worked himself out of the reductive, Modernist corner while retaining the abandonment of representation by looking at highly composed gestures in Caravaggio’s paintings. Stella highlights an introduction to the termed genius of Caravaggio citing a catalogue entry that brings to attention the image of “bending limbs which alone constitute the architecture of the work”²⁰ He argues that Caravaggio’s ‘bending of limbs’ act as a illusionistic solution for the problematic relationship of painting and architecture at the beginning of the sixteenth century. And for my own argument Caravaggio’s figurative orchestration of gesture was the proponent for constructing a pictorial space that in accordance to the chassis of the frame—frees the subject’s gestures from the bounds of architecture.

David Hockney provided another enquiry into the innovation of Caravaggio in his 2006 book, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters*²¹ where he supports his own interests in

¹⁹ Stella, Frank. *Working Space*, op. cit, p 10.

²⁰ Stella, Frank. *Working Space*, op. cit, p 10.

²¹ Hockney, David. *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the lost techniques of the Old Masters* London: Thames and Hudson, 2006.

the advancement of digital media, “vision machines”²² and their potential to reinvigorate contemporary modes of representational painting. The book provides a fascinating enquiry into how Caravaggio and many of the worlds most revered artists used various optical devices such as the camera obscura to in effect trace the scenes onto their canvas—making a clear argument that painters have used various optical devices for hundreds of years. In looking at the diagram of the camera obscura below, I like to think of Australian landscape painting as an upside down antipode of the European tradition.

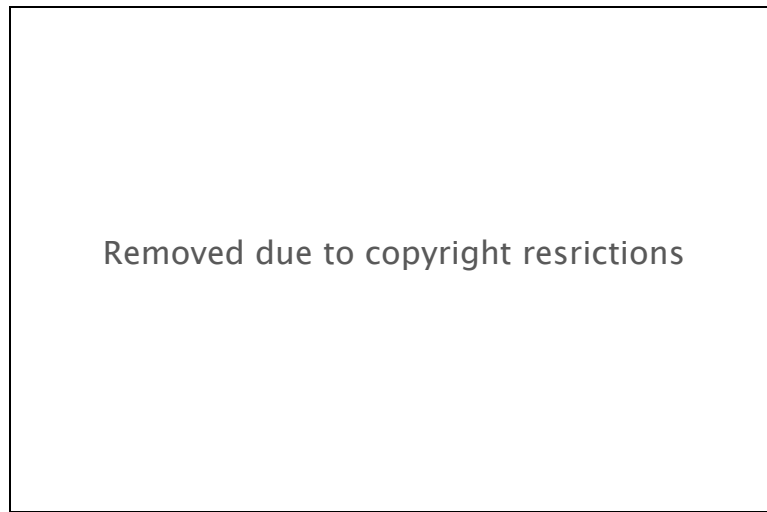


Fig 12 – Athanasius Kirschir, *Large Portable Camera Obscura*, Gernsheim Collection, 1646

My own view is that more recent optical devices such as the digital projector, a commonly used tool for many contemporary painters, problematically restrains painted gestures and it is painting’s role to differ from the projected image and purposely individualize it in the age of its proliferation. In relation to the digitized image painting can pick up

²² Virilio, Paul *The Vision Machine* London: British Film Institute, 1994.

on the notion of networking that the internet provides and can use gesture as a means to reconstitute and tie disparate sources together.

Parts are conversed and practiced towards abstraction and through this process most of the signs loose out to the seduction of paint as surface. Smudged in the foreground, its easily transparent (suddenly profuse Lexus bombastic receding) grapes are spoken about. Light lux as it permeates the passing foliage—a rolls Joyce in the afternoon. Framed thick paint lends itself to a sculpting of the flicks of white that look like light. Illusion heavy meddle. Airborne drips that land in other zones are nodes that map the latter shape of the gesture. Hoisting. Look out, notice some yellow, barnacles stop you their etc. Now smooth boating we remember to see lux again as ultra blue text.

Nicolas Bourriard in his book *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, explains that postproduction artists reedit “historical or ideological narratives, inserting the elements that compose them into alternative scenarios,” the artist can now can pick and choose from where and whenever, reconstructing his or her reality through whatever means. Jan Verwoert importantly expands this notion of freeform appropriation in his recent article *Apropos Appropriation: Why Stealing Images Today Feels Different*, tracing the momentum of appropriation from the 1980s to today. Verwoert argues that appropriation has now advanced to be a primary methodology for contemporary artists and the previously defined practice of appropriation as working with “hollowed out dead signs” or “speech in a dead language” as defined by Frederic Jameson and Craig Owens respectively, should instead be approached as living signs actively negotiated in the practice of making.

“Appropriation can no longer be analysis alone, quite simply because the effects of staging an object of appropriation can no longer be contained to in a moment of mere contemplation. When you call up a specter, it will not content itself with being inspected, it will require active negotiations to accommodate the ghost and direct its actions or at least keep them in check”²³

Importantly, Verwoert here highlights the ‘performativity’ in the process, which can relate back to gesture. The concept, image or object exhumed in the moment of appropriation relates to something of an evocation of past spirit and these signs are to be actively negotiated allowing gesture to act as a transitive bridge. Verwoert also attempts to normalize the practice of appropriation, and to make allusion to appropriation as a type of social practice. Importantly he proposes a methodology that attempts to resist much of contemporary art’s reliance on direct pastiche and irony, as especially demonstrated in the early 1980s. In highlighting the performativity of the process he opens it up to more expressive possibilities and therefore demonstrates how the semiotics of gesture could play an important role in the performance of appropriation.

²³ Jan Verwoert. *Apropos Appropriation: Why stealing images today feels different* ART & RESEARCH A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods Volume 1. No.2 Summer 2007, p 02.

Reductive Networking

Many contemporary painting practices rely on a strategic cropping, which can relate to the mediated image, its proliferation and the subsequent loss of narrative. To re-enact and layer over the art historical creates a complex passage shape that has a lot of painting in between.

Sometimes it is good to ignore this particular shape. Zoom in, crop out on whatever suits for the current assemblage. The practice of characterizing allows for more eloquent ambiguous forms, which are more open to subjective interpretation for it's all smoke and mirrors—meaning is a special effect.

The first optical devices were forms of visual prostheses; lenses and astronomical telescopes from the renaissance onwards profoundly altered the way we experience and record space. This ability to see further and produce documents of alternative spaces began the displacement of the viewer's point of view. Paul Virillio in his book *The Vision Machine* describes how the telescope is the concentrated motif of this effect:

“The telescope, the epitome of the visual prosthesis, projected an image of a world beyond our reach and thus another way of moving about in the world, the logistics of perception inaugurating an unknown conveyance of sight that produced a telescoping of near and far, a phenomenon obliterating our experience of distances and dimensions”.²⁴

²⁴ Virilio, Paul *The Vision Machine* London: British Film Institute, 1994, p 04.

The motif of the telescope is perhaps an appropriate model the production of the contemporary painted image. It is a monocular form of vision that produces a two-dimensional image. A binocular adds a perception of depth. Cubism is a good example of binocular vision. Objects are refracted from the distance of appropriation focusing on the subject; it abbreviates, narrows and concentrates the scene. The device has a reductive effect on the object; the broader narrative is cropped. Telescopic vision is capable of discerning distant objects; the silhouette of a curtain could be appropriated from the noise of an early cubist painting—a shape from the past that could solve a contemporary painting's compositional problem.

The telescope, as a way of seeing, abbreviates objects as nodes within an expanded network. A 'node' could be a section within an early Modernist painting, or a thumbnail image in Google. When these nodes converge with others from alternative networks, non-linear pathways and sight lines are created within a new network. The selected nodes do not just define a point but relay their potential meaning onto another node within the new system and therefore multiple readings become possible. If this selection of arbitrary forms is acquired through Dadaist methods of chance or through the readymade, the painting or network can potentially extend beyond a matter of taste and personal selection. This building of a collection of arbitrary forms that converge onto each other for meaning, suggests a potentiality liberating painting system that is productive in the new paintings—more harmonious, without a central motif.

A 'finished' painting becomes a commodified object and enters networks of distribution. Painting that renders the passage *shape*, renders the desire lines and the failed stability of the commodified object. To focus on the aesthetics of the passage shape can be a way of

rendering the metaphysical residue between the commodity of forms. By revealing out behavioral patterns, painting can act as a way to subvert these networks, question the fetishisation and reliance on the commodified object.

*We meaning edible to doubt the scent of the sold image and so on...
Architrave waves glass to a northerly wind as yellow purls and blue-sky
bends. Hue and Chelsea can't seem to sleep for they sip coco cola logo—it
logos. Coral knew the see grass narcotic was a palpable wilt for it is
nothing quite like smoking a tailored cigarette from the wrong end—and
they say sometimes when you burn the filter a little; you realize exactly
what you've been doing. Finding truce between the past and present
binaries, enter nuance. Or green bonus. Rapid cart of tin elapse. Rapid
cart of tin elapse. Wow a wattle! Ultra old modern—isms with red
peasants and ultra deep blue text.*



Fig 13 - *Untitled 4*, Aaron Carter, 2012

At a certain point the practice of ‘cropping in’, should happen intrinsically within the works in the studio—boundaries need to be set to give a series as sense of coherence. For example the largest painting completed last term ‘*Untitled04*’ is a complex soft grid composition that comprises an array of shapes as windows that suggest paintings within paintings. The diversity of this network was reconciled through a subtle tonal pallet. An alternative reductive method could have involved a conglomeration of these parts into a dominant motif by tracing a complex perimeter around the different parts. Another method could be cropping in on a single motif and reproducing this on another canvas. The method of cropping and enlarging can be seen in a more recent painting that is suggestive of a landscape but spatially ambiguous. Directly translating this small panel onto a canvas ten times the size would force me to resolve these arbitrary gestures into dominant shapes that could subsequently become more figurative or more reliant of color relationships.

To practice modulations with an emphasis on reiterating moments within existing paintings restricts the propensity to endlessly network and promotes the work to become more self-reflexive. The practice of painting itself then becomes the means to generate new ideas. The well-rehearsed phrase by Picasso comes to mind, “I do not seek. I find”.²⁵ Picasso suggests the productive middle ground between seeking and not seeking, is finding, to work with what is already given. To set restrictions on what enters the studio is an important discretion and can in effect bring the body of work closer to a stylistic consistency.

²⁵ Graham Sutherland, *A Trend in English Draughtsmanship*, London: Signature III, 1936, p. 10.

Line makes shape – Shape makes color

Drawing detritus the color creeks. La dingle. Black Banffers. Quilt cobalt. Motion to change a sunset blushing alas, a small wooded valley—the small residents announce unwelcome purple swoop. Flanking a periphery of defined formations to create flattened silhouettes of signs that dance between delineated planes of color. Maybe space. Holiday space. Doesn't matter, so much space. Besides multi tones, the reductive passage between red, blue and yellow could be everything and as painting color crux fatigues these colors sleep.

To resist the romantic impulse and place emphasis on local networks—the everyday and the readymade has become an important shift in practice. In looking at painting prior to Cezanne, I became interested in subverting the earlier painting genres with Modernist strategies. Like cropping in on an Antoine Watteau scene of bucolic and idyllic charm, reconditioning it with alternative pictorial or figurative narratives. In another instance I looked at plein air Impressionism, but the walking outside was done on the computer and the pointillism had more to do with digital pixels than local light. Idyllic pastoral scenes were subverted with unexceptional Modernist planes and multiple windows.

The problems associated with Impressionisms loss of structure and objective weight can be reconciled by constraining pointillist gestures within set planes that are sympathetic to the four sides of the frame. The translation of light or gradated planes can still remain, but the pictorial zones are not bound to concerns of illusion or depth. They are more

considerate to the chassis of frame and the condition of flatness. As Matisse explains in *Notes of a Painter*:

“The four sides of the frame are amongst the most important parts in a painting...the arabesque is effective only when constrained by the four sides of a picture. With this support, it has strength.”²⁶

Matisse was the leading proponent in liberating impressionist gesture to a full expression of color and as Yve-Alain Bois explains in *Matisse and Arch-Drawing*, the delineation of pictorial zones through drawing and the subsequent flatness played the fundamental role in this discovery: “the founding principles of Matisse’s art proceed from the fact that color relations, which determine expression, are above all relations surface quantities.”²⁷ Matisse developed his system by focusing on the crucial ratios of pictorial space, intersecting line work to determine what Bois calls his “quantity – quality equation”²⁸ Drawing played a fundamental role in the construction of his pictorial space, and proportion has a key role in the expression of color. In more simple terms he explains that “One square centimeter of any blue, that is not as blue as a square meter of the same blue”²⁹ so in other words the proportion of things becomes the most important consideration. With this in mind it seems important to relate the ‘Matisse System’ and its advancement of colors expression through proportion back to the notion of the passage shape. Bois explains that Matisse aimed to “use drawing to indicate the expression of objects in relation to one another [...] to use

²⁶ Bois, Yve Alain. *Painting as Model* London: The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990, p 24.

²⁷ Bois, Yve Alain. *Painting as Model, op cit, p 36.*

²⁸ Bois, Yve Alain. *Painting as Model, op cit, p 25.*

²⁹ Bois, Yve Alain. *Painting as Model, op cit, p 28.*

color for its luminous intensity, in its various combinations and not for defining objects".³⁰ For Matisse, no subject was of principle importance—the subject and its background have the same value, only pattern is important. Therefore, the colors in the picture are interchangeable, insofar that the aim is for a broad compositional expression, not a concentrated subject.

Intersections of line make shapes, a passage shape creates a diagram, coloring the diagram attempts to harmonize the network into a painting. Drawing creates the space that gives color its expression. To color a drawn silhouette, it helps if it is initially characterized with strict outlines. The added color finds expressive potential in its modulation of scale in relationship to others in the composition, or broader network of the exhibition. The way designate this modulation in scale is through line, and once the space is mapped a willingness to interchange colors, while leaving a remnant of the under painting narrates a liberated process.

Structure – Rhythm – Iteration

.....

Invention can be tiresome and as Nicolas Bourriard points out, the contemporary artist is not obliged to create something new in terms of raw material. Rather, they can work as an editor or DJ who mixes pieces from old art works and puts them into new contexts, which in turn brings new meanings. But rather than the abrupt and jarring ironic Bourriard mix tape, perhaps a more appropriate musical analogy for painting is Dub

³⁰ Bois, Yve Alain. *Painting as Model*, op. cit, p. 19.

music. The dub genre grew out of reggae music during the late 1960s also at the time when painting was somewhat growing out of itself and back into the real world though figures such as Raoul De Keyser. The genre consists predominantly of instrumental remixes of existing recordings produced by removing the vocals from an existing music piece emphasizing the drum and bass parts—shape. The stripped down track is achieved by reshaping the existing recording through techniques such as echo, reverb and delay—with an emphasis on the passage between forms. Similarly, these key notions of cropping in on figurative cues or historical fragments, with subsequent echoing, delay, iteration of abstract instrumentals relates very closely to the strategies of contemporary painting I'm interested in.

Transitive Gesture as Mimesis

Maurice Merleau-Ponty begins his essay entitled *Cezanne's Doubt*, with the following: "It took him one hundred working sessions for a still life, one hundred- fifty sittings for a portrait. What we call his work, was for him, an attempt, an approach at painting,"³¹. His difficult gestures had a transitive effect and they have echoed throughout the course of modern painting up until this day.

The practice of mimesis is a process of becoming; as Lisa Robertson suggests, "to experience change, we submit ourselves to the effective potential of surface. This is the pharmakon:³² an indiscrete

³¹ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Cezanne's Doubt*, www.faculty.uml.edu/rinnis/cezannedoubt.pdf, p 01.

³² Robertson's reference to the 'pharmakon,' is a Jaques Derrida term with Platonic origins, for Derrida the term describes to problem of binary oppositions. This has great potential to

threshold where our bodies exchange information with an environment³³” Robertson lightly alludes to painting, suggesting that to commit to a surface in exchange with an environment is a practice of mimesis, a becoming, a practice of bridging the passage shape between self and other.

Paintings recurring seat could be that anything you repeat tends to influence your future paintings. Days are warm colors that smudge into cooler colors—interlacing as collective of momentary parts that smudge into one another. Can color be apart? We partly just because of the way that our see now warps these lapping holy stilts. The bay exists. It’s lippery illusion. Turner no footnotes, we latter silhouette the out skirting rocky crags, unbuildable. Sunset verges on the Kitsch. Our subject coagulates into this no this new noon never actually knots passage shape—viewing shape then becomes an expression, or in-between space that has become more productive.

Cezanne questioned the excess of nature; it needed structure and parts of himself. His paintings proposed the abandonment of a binary between architecture and nature. Human shapes were passaged into every form—the paintings modulate change and difference through a consistent set of tools, as shapes. The transitive experience for us is not only to the Mount Sainte, but to the human condition and its need to structure, to find patterns and to harmonize differences.

support the notion of the ‘passage shape’ and potentially cross with Duchamp’s ‘Infrathin-boundaries’— although this will have to be developed in another text

³³ Robertson, Lisa. *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* Oregon: Clear Cut Press, 2003, p 123.

Flatness can be gradated through the speed or waning pigment on the quarter loaded brush. Subject and meaning is abbreviated and characterized interrelationships of color, tone, texture, scale that expand it otherwise. The set of works become a system that reads in terms of rhythm, temperament or moods within the collective picture as a lodging of your mentality onto the surface that sometimes sells. Workshop the ego erosion, wear team gloves and glasses. Accepting the elegant logos as we progress. Working with weird leisure and the small house by the sea. Breaching of author continents, the beach fatigue. Art no center; a palm off for fairly traded oil painting, sea iridescent effect and fake watches.

A Hidden Reserve

Achim Hochdorfer in his article *A Hidden Reserve* outlines the potential behind some of the forgotten avenues of painting, with a particular focus on gestural painting from 1958 to 1965. He explains the period has been relatively overlooked in part because of paintings pitched battle with Minimalism and Conceptualism, but also because the brush stroke became a questionable device, following abstract expressionisms' rapid commercialization and its growing status; subsequently the gesture was "deflated, parodied, vulgarized, sexualized", through traits of Pollock and de Kooning. All these factors became a growing concern for artists at the time and as a result the gestural mark became marginalized and was largely suppressed until neo-expressionisms resurgence of gestural painting in the 1980s, which in its postmodern guise, also came with parody, cynical exaggeration, empty pathos, and overblown commercial success, and as a result gesture drifted out of favor once again.

The practices which continued during these periods sought to explore what he calls “the semiotization of the painterly mark”,³⁴ artists such as Joan Mitchell, Cy Twombly and Jasper Johns developed complex associations with the gestural mark—not merely as a vehicle for transcendence, the proponent of Abstract Expressionism. In contrast, these artists believed in the broader narrative potential of mark making; the artist’s gesture as a trace of subjecthood, embellishing complex associations with the self and the world. “Twombly for example would act out its many conflicting implications: expressionist outbursts, erasure, the mark as cliché”³⁵ making reference to the immediacy of street art and mythic tradition. The semiotization of the mark; Hochdorfer suggests was led on by figures such as poet Frank O’Hara, who was closely associated with the New York School. Writing in between notions of ‘feeling’ and cultural constructions of reality, he sought to understand how the subjective might survive in the age of simulation.

Jutta Koether is another contemporary painter who reconstitutes these founding ideas in the semiotic power of gesture. Her practice intersects a range of gestural devices that explore the transitive potential of foregrounding gesture in terms of absorption and transparency, reference and performance. Her gestures are web-like arrangements that layer and network from the past through appropriation, as a type of painting theatre. Rather than playing out painting as technical progress, she values ‘bad painting.’ Her frequent appropriation of canonical painters such as Poussin, Cezanne or Van Gogh tread a fine line between respect and parody her practice of appropriation is one that looks for conceptual or formal strategies in the past that are comparable with her

³⁴ Hochdorfer, Achim. *A Hidden Reserve: Painting from 1958 to 1965 Art Forum International Magazine* February 2009, p 03.

³⁵ Hochdorfer, Achim. *A Hidden Reserve. Op. cit, p 03.*

own, not one that picks up on these painters to talk of end games. Isabelle Graw explains in her article *Classics of Modernism: Jutta Koether's Treatment of Canonical Painters*:

“Koether claims the right to operate at the same level with these painters by deriving something from their methods that was useful to her. The point is thus, neither to doubt the historical significance of purportedly given achievements, nor to become paralyzed in reverence before mythical names in history. Yet every confrontation with role models is also motivated by identification. One looks for situations and comparable with one's own.”³⁶

Koether acknowledges the space between herself and these male canonical painters is not a perfect bridge. She treats these paintings as spaces to enter on her own terms—as awkward theatrical stages:

“Koether develops a gesture that is deeply ambivalent: equally composed of self-assertion and interpretation, her stokes are depleted of expressive urgency by marking the elapses time between Poussin's 1651 and her 2009”.³⁷

³⁶ Graw, Isabelle, *Classics of Modernism: Jutta Koether's Treatment of Canonical Painters* 'Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art' London: MIT Press, 2011 p. 187

³⁷ Joselit, David. *Painting Beside Itself* October, no. 130 (Fall 2009) p 219.



Removed due to copyright restrictions

Fig 14 – Jutta Koether *Hot Rod (After Poussin)* Bortolami Gallery, New York, 2012

Her practice demonstrates that we can find optimism in the contradictions of modernism for they allow new points of departure and creative discovery. The semiotics of gesture can speak of painting's liberation from historical quotation and from the flattened out end point of Modernism towards the current moment where anything goes. Painting now is indeed 'plural' —now outside of any central critical framework, a narrow formal or conceptual imperative. Koethers practice demonstrates how contemporary painting can openly meet these diverse histories and reconstitute them through a liberated gesture.

Affect Shapes: Medium Specificity and Viewing Shape

The passage shape in Cezanne's all over pictures attempted to equalize figure ground relationships and these relationships were intrinsic to the painting itself. In a multidisciplinary approach to painting, this shape can be traced beyond the painting object to its surrounding network, the gallery for example. The network between the painting and the sculptural object is an important articulation in my practice.



Fig 16 – Aaron Carter, *Setting up for the Concourse Show*, 2012

My shelf work in the *Concourse Gallery* exhibition attempted to challenge the notion of an autonomous art work in that the reading of each work depended on a visual consolidation with another; a tentative descriptive orange line in a painting is further narrativized into the matching color of a ceramic object. In many respects I have attempted to understand the history of painting and my stance within it from a multidisciplinary perspective. While I now spend most of the time in the

studio painting, previously work involved digital collages, drawing, found objects, assemblages, ceramics and installations that all paid homage to forms mark making and the practice of painting.

In looking back at my work of the last year two main strategies have emerged. In the earlier work difference in medium and style was reconciled through a consistency in scale and the handmade nature, then leveled out through objective gravitas; the shelf. Now more recently in my later series later series I have shifted scale scaled significantly, a grid like structure and subtle shift in tone is used as a way to play off and reconcile differences in shape and line. In reflection, these techniques were too measured, and these problems associated with scale and 'the grid' have generally led my interest into more liberated notions of gesture. The shelf installation in the *Concourse Gallery* was an attempt to reconcile the landscape into allusions of interior space and the intimacy of the handmade object. There, paintings and objects were condensed into a single viewing platform. The shelf as a device helped the individual works to complete the reading of one another. Untouched space alluded to the space in which a rendered moment in another could be inserted, therefore the exhibit constructs a narrative that is not read as indexical to a single image but played out by the viewer in a multiplicity of ways. The problem with the shelf work was that the potential of this was not used fully as the pieces were arranged lineally.



Fig 17 – Aaron Carter, 'Untitled' Concourse Gallery, Emily Carr University of Art + Design, 2012

While I'm no longer solely interested in complex installations, the progression from this has been to upscale the work and to consider the viewing shape as an important part of the work. The spaces between larger paintings on the wall and floor based sculptures create a more open network and also to give each work an anonymity so they can be read on their own accord. To acknowledge the space between a set of paintings or sculptures is an important consideration.

Many of my previous installations did not consider the importance of the viewer's behavioral shape. The gallery should direct an awkward walk that becomes an active shape—it's how we begin to decipher the work. Jutta Koether actively negotiates this passage shape. In her recent show *The Fifth Season* at *Bortolami*, New York, a relatively traditional hang of paintings links to the actual 'ground' of the gallery which is

entirely paved in a brown gravel. Scrawls that look like sound waves rendered in hot pink, magenta and muted browns are all heightened in relation to the floor of the gallery. The paintings here are rendered with multiple networks: corner motifs that suggest compositional markers in a viewfinder, gestures attach to given forms and figuration but extend beyond, echoing the scrunching gravel under the viewer. The viewer becomes conscious of their own movement and of others in the space. An awareness of the transitive link between their own ground—the paintings, and the viewing networks are recorded in both instances.

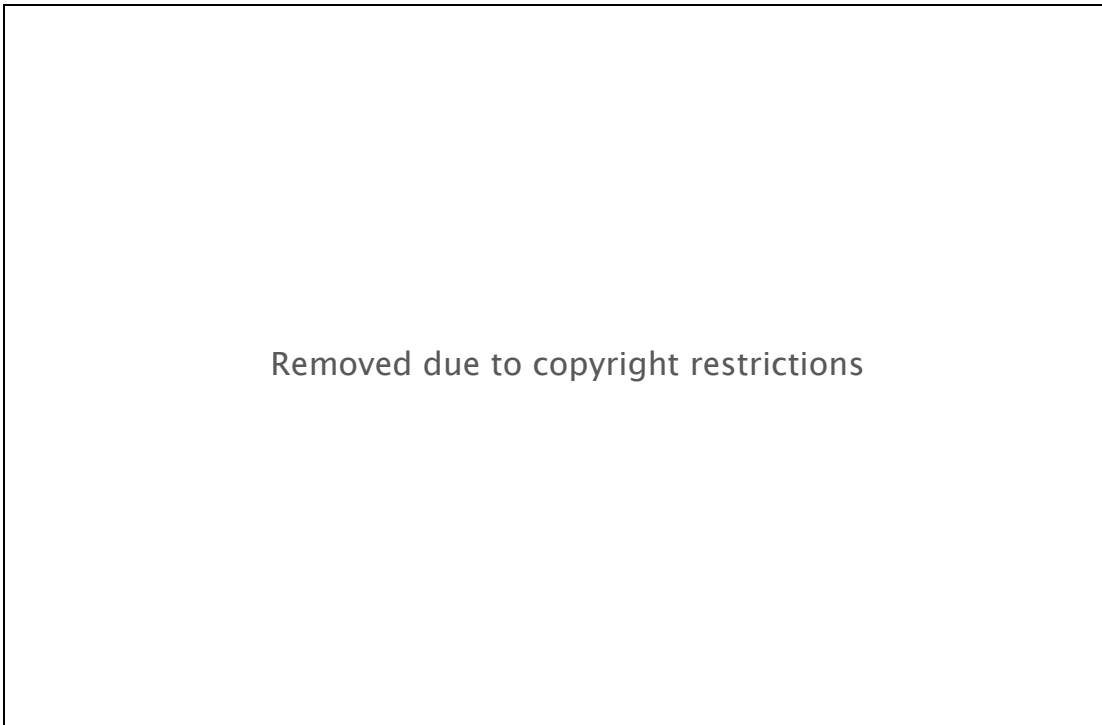


Fig 15 – Jutta Koether, *The Fifth Season* (Installation shot) Bortolami Gallery New York, 2012

Transitive Gesture as Networking

To reconcile differences and tie it all together with painting gesture seems a good way to reconcile the associated paradoxes of the Postmodern condition. David Joselit points out that Koether instead of trying to visualize a diverse set of networks, *actualizes* the behavior of objects within a network. Her conflict-laden practice is constituted through exchange and interaction with other activities is a very good example of how painting continues to reinvent itself with reference to the past in a reflexive relation to other media and a diverse set of influences:

“She works in equal measures as musician, theorist, performer, and writer, proposing to play out painting against a ground, in order to visualize paintings possible connections to the other, and open up its impossible ones...so painting becomes a flyer, theatrical prop, site of historical debris, musical/painting score, a door, a feeling enhancer, a word game...or just a support for thoughts and feelings and body weight”.³⁸

In this regard, Koether is not interested in contributing to the endlessly circulating discourse about ‘the end of painting’ but pursues “to make its fault lines and boundaries of its historical polemic productive,” or, “kissing the canvas” as she likes to call it. Koether’s networks are played out intrinsically within her paintings, between herself and Poussin, as well as in the performative stage of the gallery. In her exhibition *Lux Interior* at *Reena Spaulings* Gallery she presented a central painting mounted on a floating wall in the center of the gallery, which

³⁸ Hochdorfer, Achim. *A Hidden Reserve*, op cit. p 06.

itself became a type of stage. The theatre of painting is echoed in the space itself. Frank Stella's notion of the Caravaggio's echoed pictorial space comes to mind.

“Caravaggio's advantage comes from his ability to create the sensation of real space within and outside the action of the painting, powerfully reinforcing his masterful illusionism”.³⁹

So at this point, we've done a full but by no means perfect circle: Jutta Koether performs a painting in a New York gallery, the canvas as a “theatre prop, musical score, a door, a feeling enhancer, a word game,” herself, the audience, remnants of Nicolas Poussin, all network in what is the ever present, ever changing practice of painting. It is as if through some giant invisible camera obscura, a sequence of mirrors refracts the light back onto exactly what Caravaggio was trying to do, to purport painting as a type of theatre, drawing the viewer in and refracting them out, making the viewer conscious of the viewing space.

Koether is a perfect example of a contemporary painter who proposes affirmative action between all the passages I have mentioned. Her practice is one that constitutes a strong sense of will, of action between the passage shapes of studio and gallery, herself and her influences, viewer and participant, surface and ground, painting and life. Her affirmative actions don't pretend to be beautiful, rather they are loaded with a gestural urgency to bring things together.

³⁹ Stella, Frank. *Working Space* London: Harvard University Press, 1986, p 11.

Contemporary painting reevaluates the medium's long history and the inner contradictions of Modernism—the spaces between doubt and belief. Painting now has become a memory system, working through history as an open stylistic and thinking model—a network whose parts are actively exhumed and continually made 'present' through liberated gestures.

Painting as Practice

The concept of no concept can start the new day—avoid melancholy—choose morning color. Best to go in and work with what's already there; painting becomes a diaristic practice that adheres to its own intuitive structure within the studio. Treat the canvas like a notebook on the world, because finding pictorial answers is an abstract process; change one thing you always have to change another. When it kind of holds, let it go and start another. If using plans, allows for an open agenda like walking in with a specific phase, that calls for a visual rendition—a folding of the languages.

Fold the thesis and practise, practise, practise. Painting is something that fits into your life; it gets on your jeans, it makes windows out of your walls. It speaks of something beautiful passage shaped with something that contradicts that, which speaks of the real world. The past is for reference not for residence and a lineage is not necessarily what you thought. Play some of the potential behind an overlooked history to demonstrate that there are still positions to take that go

beyond end games, but I'd say we're well beyond the end game now. Optimistic impurity is good. The dusty Australian vernacular landscape is composed of high tensile fencing, weird animals that transcend these boundaries and well cultivated plains that echo with affirmative statements such as 'she'll be right' and 'have a go.' Language and knowledge can become intuitive gestures, which can animate existing flat plains into painterly stories.

So if instinct precedes intellect and art is reductive, it needs to be a place where instinct is acted out before too much thinking muddles the picture, all acted out in conjunction with the selected energies that brush out from the legs of the painting—your daily self. Be open to the daily modulations and remember that repetition becomes harmony and iteration is a nuanced understanding. The practice of helping and holding onto an internal logic develops after parts of self and the real world begin to dissipate in the picture and then that picture generates another and so on. Real experiences refracts into the real time craft of material practice. Words, attitudes and situations transfigure into the visual impulses and as they materialize, they become their own object that echoes new shapes, or in other words a thing imbued with an irrepressible awkward postmodern magic.

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