MARK MAKING AND MELANCHOLIA IN PAINTING:

A LANGUAGE FOR VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE MELANCHOLIC

MICHAEL WILLIAM NEWTON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements of Bath Spa University

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Art and Design, Bath Spa University

June 2014

ABSTRACT

Introduction – Research Question

What are the elements (marks) that support a melancholic narrative in painting and in particular how can they be harnessed to heighten the feeling and create an 'authentic' melancholic work from a painting of simple and natural motifs?

I summarise the changes in the meaning of the term melancholia, especially in the last two centuries, and discuss the validity of melancholy painting today. I summarise the key developments to the debate in the 1980s between the artists and the theoretical art critics and hypothesise that paintings that refer to this 'death of painting' are inherently melancholic. I seek out the "language of marks" for expressing melancholy by extrapolating from an examination of 100 paintings but fail in my attempt to quantify them objectively. The assumption that feeling is grounded in the formal properties is tested through detailed examination and subjective analysis of key extant works, concentrating specifically on how colour and expressive mark-making can be used by the artist to enhancing the emotional content. I use examples of extant paintings to show that it is possible to use context as a way of adding to the melancholic content of a contemporary painting.

Practical Study

The practical research takes the form of painted samples, copies of extant contemporary works, explorations of melancholic motifs (metaphors) and finally a body of work testing the integration of the theoretical analysis with the practical work.

Conclusions

In addition to melancholic meaning being grounded in the formal properties of a painting, expressive marks can be appropriated and re-presented but the requirement for them to be authentic is open to conjecture. However, referencing the 'death of painting' can enhance melancholic content without the use of irony or becoming kitsch.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime.[1]

Edgar Allan Poe, 1839

In the powerful opening paragraph of Poe's short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* the narrator comes within view of the melancholy house of the title and with his first glimpse feels an 'insufferable gloom' pervade his spirit. He describes the feeling as 'unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible'. The narrator puzzles over how this combination of 'very simple natural objects' has the power for a 'sorrowful impression' so extreme that he likens it to the 'bitter lapse into the every-day life' that the opium user experiences as the effect of the drug wears off.

It is this conundrum that is at the heart of my research. Just what are the elements that support a melancholic narrative in painting and in particular can they be harnessed to heighten feeling and create an 'authentic' melancholic painting of simple and natural[2] motifs?

In Poe's story Roderick Usher whiles away the hours painting images 'of intolerable awe' that according to the narrator, 'were beyond the compass of merely written words'. Yet a number of critics in the 1980s asserted that painting was retrogressive, no longer believable and venal.[3] Leaving aside the political and social attack on painting as vehicle for bourgeois ideology, the attack on art-theoretical grounds was that painting lacked originality and consequently as a means of expression it was dead.

Like other forms of art media I believe painting still has a capacity to **engage an audience, convey emotion, invoke sentiment** and/or **retain critical validity** by undertaking a self-referential scrutiny of its own rhetorical forms and engaging with new technological developments.

---

[1] Poe, Edgar Allan "The House of Usher" Tales of Mystery and Imagination 2000 Wordsworth Editions, Hertfordshire **148**

[2] For example a simple cup can be seen as a female symbol as in Meret Oppenheimer's furry cup and saucer *Le Dejeuner en Fourrure*, or as a token of victory in sports. But place a simple empty domestic cup on its own and it has connotations of things ending not beginning, of isolation and alienation. If the mood of the later is the artist's aim in a painting what language does he use to emphasise the melancholy aspects to make sure his intentions are communicated.

[3] Having established her art-theoretical premises for artists who employed mechanical media, Rosalind Krauss dismissed most other art as retrograde – the revival of traditional tendencies – or venal - "the production of luxury objects for consumption and investment, often… by multinational corporations"

Krauss, Rosalind co-ed "Introduction" October: The First Decade 1976-1986 1987 Cambridge Mass. MIT Press **xi** cited in Sandler, Irving. "Postmodernist Art Theory" Art of the Postmodern Era 1998 Westview Press, **341**

I need to test this assumption in my research by focussing on how an artist may express melancholia in a painting, whether it needs to be authentically felt and how it is relevant to today's audience. I also examine whether painting can absorb and use its own history to support this endeavour without resorting to kitsch. I have limited my research to figurative painting not because I feel other forms of painting cannot be melancholic but because this is my area of practical interest.

I foreground the research with a synopsis of the changing meaning of the term **Melancholia** from 500 BCE to today's understanding; from disease through being a constitutional aptitude that can be desirable to an outmoded term for clinical depression. There are many historical works of art that are considered melancholic, for example Shakespeare's play *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*; a play also known as the "Melancholy Dane", whose central theme is mourning, but the touchstone in the visual arts is probably Albrecht Dürer's 1514 engraving *Melancholia I*. This depicts a brooding angel with head in hand, a gesture that has since become synonymous with depictions of melancholy.[4] I conclude the section with a discussion of the relevance of melancholic painting today in the context of melancholia being codified as depression and treated through medication. I discuss both the practise and the artefact and use contemporary examples as evidence for my argument that melancholy painting retains relevance not just to the artist but for today's audience.

Before examining the specifics of what might support a melancholic narrative in painting, it is necessary to examine the background to the debate surrounding the **Death of Painting** in the 1980s, the time of the AIDS epidemic. Painters saw a return to painting as a way of reconnecting with a lost sensuous and emotional dimension in art, exemplified by the movement known as Neo-expressionism,[5] whereas the authenticity of trying to express emotion in painting was questioned by critics such as Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster[6] and Douglas Crimp as part of their attack on the viability of painting as art. These theoretical art critics writing for *October* magazine claimed that painting as an art form had lost all critical validity and Douglas Crimp wrote in 1981 that soon "painting will be understood as the 'pure idiocy' that it is".[7] I summarise the key developments leading up to this declaration but note that painting still continues to receive critical acclaim today and hypothesise that paintings that refer to this 'death of painting' are inherently melancholic. I provide a brief

---

[4] A gesture that Erwin Panofski interprets as a figure displaying "artist's melancholia" – an artist inspired by celestial influences and eternal ideas, but suffering from an awareness of his human frailties and intellectual finiteness. For Panofski it is "in a sense a spiritual self-portrait of Albrecht Dürer.
Panofski, Erwin <u>The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer</u> 1955 Princeton UP **171**

[5] Sandler, Irving. "American Neo-expressionism" <u>Art of the Postmodern Era</u> 1998 Westview Press, **224**

[6] "Neo-expressionism is a 'gestuary' of self-aware acts that… asserts the presence of the artist by proxy… by the brushstrokes, by the indexical traces… and is a belated attempt to re-centre the self in art."
Foster, Hal The Expressive Fallacy January 1983 Art in America **80-83 & 137**

[7] Crimp was contemptuous of painting and particularly neoexpressionist painting, arguing that it was the aesthetic counterpart of the political neo-conservativism of the Reagan administration.
Crimp, Douglas <u>The End of Painting</u> 1981 October, Vol. 16, **75**

synopsis of three key movements (American Photo-realism, New Image/Bad Painting, and Neo-expressionism) that were part of the 'return to painting' as contextual background to contemporary paintings I discuss in subsequent sections. The section on neo-expressionism introduces the arguments concerning appropriation, spontaneity, authentic expression and the changing notion of the self in a heavily mediated world.

I started the research by seeking out the "signs" or the "language of marks" used for expressing melancholy in painting with the initial aim of quantifying them objectively. In the chapter **Mark Making** I summarise my own examination and review of 100 potentially melancholic paintings, based wherever possible on first-hand experience (in other words I have seen the actual painting not just a reproduction). I explain my selection criteria and the process / method I went through to try and arrive at a matrix of characteristics (attributes). Although this objective approach did not yield the tabular results I had sought, it did provide the list of painters and paintings that I then explored through more detailed research in subsequent chapters and was crucial in providing focus for the **Practical Study**. The written reviews are presented as Appendix 1 on the attached CD-ROM.

The assumption that the feeling or "thought content" is grounded in the formal properties of the painting is tested through a detailed examination and subjective analysis of a limited sample of key extant works by artists that I have a particular interest in. This chapter, titled **Seeing and Feeling**, expands on two aspects, specifically how colour and expressive mark making can be used by the artist and may be interpreted by the viewer as enhancing the emotional (melancholic) intent of a painting.   Combining my own experiential observations with written texts I explore whether contemporary painters can now quote the tropes of Expressionism to communicate direct sincere emotion not only with painterly painting that may be easily associated with orthodox Expressionism, but also with works that utilise ironic, reproduced or 'inauthentic' marks.

In the final chapter, **Tradition as a Resource** I use examples of extant paintings to show that it is possible to use context as a way of adding to the melancholic content of a contemporary painting. The examples I use emphasise how often art comes from other art but also raise the question whether painting can revoke the 1980s art-theoretical assertion that it could no longer be authentic? I try to distinguish between work that invokes a nostalgic narrative and the sentimental emotions associated with kitsch, and those works where the viewer is not manipulated in this way.

Practical Study: This practical research takes the form of painted samples, copies of extant contemporary works, explorations of melancholic motifs (metaphors) and finally a body of work to

test whether I can successfully apply my findings to my own mark making and add to the melancholic 'aura' of my paintings.

From the list of 100 paintings that I examined in Mark Making for the attributes that I considered contributing to the melancholy sensation felt as a spectator I chose 10 key contemporary painters for further exploration. Working from high quality reproductions in books supplemented by seeing works of the artist first hand to examine technique, I attempted to create copies of paintings I considered displayed the appropriate formal properties. My aim was to unpack why I consider them successful in this respect through praxis, acknowledging that even if successful any emotion would not be authentic. I then tested my hypotheses about these attributes through my own chosen (authentic) melancholy metaphors and incorporated this knowledge into my existing practice to find a language for the representation of melancholia in my own painting. The conclusion to the practical section is an exhibition of a series of my own completed paintings that use as a basis the analysis, ideas and practical study described above.

The notes and images of the practical work undertaken is presented as Appendix 2 on the attached CD-ROM.

1.0 MELANCHOLIA

Melancholy, the subject of our present discourse, is that transitory Melancholy which goes and comes upon every small occasion of sorrow, need, sickness, trouble, fear, grief, passion, or perturbation of the mind, any manner of care, discontent, or thought, which causes anguish, dullness, heaviness and vexation of spirit, any ways opposite to pleasure, mirth, joy, delight, causing forwardness in us, or a dislike. And from these melancholy dispositions no man living is free, no Stoic, none so wise, none so happy, none so patient, so generous, so godly, so divine, that can vindicate himself; so well-composed, but more or less, some time or other, he feels the smart of it.[8]

Robert Burton, 1621

One problem with research associated with melancholia is the vastness of the subject. This ranges from early pathological study of melancholia as a disease, through Platonic associations of melancholia as a personality trait, romantic notions of melancholic moods being central to the symbolist outlook, Freud's revelations of sublimation leading to an understanding of melancholia as a transient mood and the psychoanalytic treatment of depression. Today depression is considered an exclusively biological disease,[9] but my own enquiry stems from the Freudian understanding of the word; specifically from melancholia arising from a sense of loss that triggers a depressive mood, often out of proportion to that loss. Below I summarise the evolution of melancholia to provide a context for both the early and contemporary artworks examined in the course of my research.

The Hippocratic School of medicine (c500 BCE) held that all illness was the result of an imbalance in the body of the four humours: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood. This humorist theory held that the human body was filled with these four basic substances and from Hippocrates onwards scholars developed a set of characters based on these cardinal humours. Those with too much blood were sanguine; too much phlegm phlegmatic; too much yellow bile choleric, and those with an excess of black bile were melancholic.[10] So until the 16th Century classical theory held that melancholia was not a transient mood but a disease, and was hated and feared as the worst human condition. It was said that black gall caused the most deadly of diseases, insanity, and treatment included music, flogging and cauterisation.[11] However, in the *Problemata* Aristotle[12] assumes that

---

[8] My précis of Burton's original text
Burton, Robert The Anatomy of Melancholy 2001 NYRB Classics, New York **Partition 1 Subsection V Page 143**
[9] The definitive volume on depression from a biomedical perspective is the 900 page *Manic-Depressive Illness* by Fredrick Goodwin and Kay Jamieson published in 1990. In his book *The New Black*, Darian Leader voices his concern that treating depression as a disease to be cured solely by mood altering drugs has replaced the "detailed study of the variety of human responses to loss and disappointment".
Leader, Darian The New Black 2008 Hamish Hamilton **15**
[10] Associations with the Melancholy Humour: black gall, dry and cold, autumn (or winter), minor chords, evening, aged over 60.
[11] Kiblanski, Panofski and Saxl "Melancholia Generosa" Saturn & Melancholy 1964 T Nelson **291**

while excesses of black bile result in melancholia and severe mental illness, smaller quantities only induce a melancholic disposition[13] and that this can be a distinctive characteristic of the exceptional personality. In other words Aristotle sees melancholia balanced by genius, something that is perhaps alien to our understanding of the word today.[14] So despite Christian theology considering sadness a sin[15] e.g. Dante's 'wretched melancholic shadows' are confined to the 'city of grief' where their punishment is to have 'no hope of death', melancholia retains an association with Saturn during the Middle Ages. In ancient astronomy Saturn is not only associated with old age, the last and saddest phase of human existence, with its loneliness and helplessness, but also that some born under its influence had the capacity for "deep philosophical reflexion and for prophecy and priesthood".[16]

This idea of a melancholic as someone given to profound contemplation rather than slothful idleness is developed further by the work of Italian philosopher Marsilio Ficino. Ficino not only rehabilitated the "Aristotelian" notion of the gifted melancholic, but expressly tied it in with the Platonic notion of "divine frenzy", thereby laying the intellectual foundations for a new type of man, the "homo literatus" or tortured genius, pitched back and forth between the heights of rapture and the depths of despair. Albrecht Dürer gives a visual interpretation of Ficino's ideas in his 1514 engraving *Melancholia I*. According to Erwin Panofski, the woman in Dürer's engraving displays "artist's melancholia"; a figure being endowed with intellectual power and technical accomplishments of an 'Art', yet despairing under a cloud of black humour.[17]

Representations before Dürer's seminal work illustrated melancholia by showing a woman or a man asleep at their work but Dürer's Melancholia is wide awake; her fixed stare is one of intent though fruitless searching. She is inactive not because she is too lazy to work but because work has become meaningless to her; her energy is not paralysed by sleep, but perplexed by thought.

In his analysis of the engraving Panofski describes the figure as being: lapsed into a state of gloomy inaction, neglectful of attire with her head on her hand, her face overcast by deep shadow and eyes raised in a lowering stare. He concludes that she is in a state of torpid dejection and careless desolation, a creative being brooding in idleness reduced to despair by insurmountable barriers to

---

[12] A collection of writings from 3rd century BC attributed to Aristotle. Aristotle bequeathed his writings to Theophrastus, the philosopher who was the first to write a whole book on melancholy, and the Problemata are probably his work. A full translation and interpretation of The Notion of Melancholy: Problem XXX, I is given in Kiblanski, Panofski and Saxl.
Kiblanski, Panofski and Saxl "Melancholy in Ancient Physiology" Saturn & Melancholy 1964 T Nelson **15-41**
[13] Radden, Jennifer "Brilliance and Melancholy" The Nature of Melancholy 2002 OUP **56**
[14] Kristeva, Julia Black Sun 1989 CUP **7**
[15] In later medieval times the idea of sloth or acedia was added to disproportionate sadness as a symptom of melancholic sickness - something medieval monks were particularly prone to given their detachment from the ordinary world, and which persists today as the deadly sin of Sloth.
Bowring, Jackie A Field Guide to Melancholy 2008 Oldcastle Books **25**
[16] Kiblanski, Panofski and Saxl "Saturn in Ancient Literature" Saturn & Melancholy 1964 T Nelson **148-151**
[17] Panofski, Erwin The Life of Albrecht Dürer 1955 Princeton University Press **164**

higher realm of thought.[18]   Thereafter, the posture and demeanour of Dürer's *Melancholia* became the touchstone for artistic depiction of melancholia. Lucas Cranach uses a similar posture for his four versions of *An Allegory of Melancholy* dated 1528, 1532, 1533, and 1553 and in each case a woman sits staring into space.   A century later the frontispiece for the 1638 edition of Robert Burton's text *The Anatomy of Melancholy* shows figures with their heads on one side, resting on their hands.[19]

In the early 19th Century the idea of melancholia as a disease causing insanity weakened and was gradually abandoned, the content of the syndrome of melancholia was reduced. In 1819, Doctor Jean Etienne Esquirol[20] defined it as a mania and melancholia started to be studied and treated as a psychiatric disorder related to schizophrenia and severe depression. As Mark Hutchinson points out in his review of the 2005/6 exhibition *The Art of Melancholy*[21] the idea began to take hold "that a condition which we would today class as an acute form of depression might, under certain conditions, not merely have a constructive role to play in the life of the mind, but be the main driving force behind creative inspiration", and go on "to have profound implications for the development of every aspect – literature, painting, science, medicine, technology – of intellectual life in the West". Indeed rapid developments take place in all these fields ushering in the "Age of Enlightenment" by the end of the 18th Century. The philosopher Kant described the Enlightenment as the freedom to use one's own intelligence.[22] This period was marked by greater empiricism, scientific rigour, and an increasing questioning of religious orthodoxy[23] as more understanding was gained of the natural world. For some this also brought disillusionment e.g. Goya's fin de siècle depression is perhaps best illustrated by his *Disasters of War* engravings and his painting of Saturn devouring his children. Others had a melancholic yearning to make contact with the "missing God"[24] and expressed it as a form of divine ecstasy. The mid 18th Century also saw the start of the Romantic Movement in literature and the visual arts. Influenced by Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther,*[25] the work of the Romanticists contained many examples of heroic isolation and melancholy of the

---

[18] Panofski, Erwin The Life of Albrecht Dürer 1955 Princeton University Press **168**
[19] Kiblanski, Panofski and Saxl "Saturn in Ancient Literature" Saturn & Melancholy 1964 T Nelson **374**
[20] A pioneering French psychiatrist working at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris, a place that had served as a holding place for prostitutes, a prison for the criminally insane and a hospital for epileptics and the mentally disturbed. He noted that the eyes in melancholy have a particular quality "motionless, and directed either towards the earth or to some distant point, and the look is askance, uneasy and suspicious"
Esquirol, Jean Etienne Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity cited in Bowring, Jackie A Field Guide to Melancholy 2008 Oldcastle Books **56-57**
[21] Hutchinson, Mark The Art of Melancholy published 20 Dec 2005. Last accessed 28 October 2008 http://www.the-tls.co.uk
[22] Kant, Immanuel Essay: What is Enlightenment? 1784 Last Accessed 02 January 2013
http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/KantOnElightenment.htm
[23] In England the religious uncertainties of Henry VIII's Reformation may have contributed to an interest in melancholia in literature. The melancholic is epitomized by Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet, the "Melancholy Dane." A play whose central theme is mourning and charts the course of real and feigned madness, from overwhelming grief to seething rage.
[24] "There is nothing more dismal than a dead God"
 Kristeva, Julia Black Sun 1989 Columbia University Press, New York 8
[25] A semi-autobiographical novel of unrequited love that resulted in the suicide of the protagonist Werther; a young artist of highly sensitive and passionate temperament.

artist. They also placed an emphasis on such emotions as horror, terror, and awe; especially that which is experienced in confronting the sublimity of untamed nature. Certainly for the male artist, the perception of melancholia became reversed, and the hitherto disparaged melancholy became surrounded with the "halo of the sublime".[26]

In the middle of the 19th Century Romanticism was being dismissed by the realists who professed themselves as artists with a social conscience, depicting the 'real issues of the day'. This movement away from the "taste" of the day is perhaps epitomised by Gustav Courbet (1819-77) who would accept nothing as a subject unless he could touch it.[27] As the century progressed, Europe was becoming increasingly industrialised and an entire society left the beloved land and set off for exile in the cities or colonies. This sense of loss of the old values finds artistic expression in the work of the Symbolists, and as a symbol refers to an absent or lost reality, a melancholic constatation is central to the symbolist outlook. A good literary example is Joris Karl Huysmans. In his novel *À Rebours,*[28] published in 1893 he has made his privileged, decadent, protagonist Jean des Esseintes become deeply pessimistic and withdraw from the 'real world' and take refuge amongst his artworks to nurse his depression.

As the 20th Century dawned advances began to be made in the new medical field of psychiatry, and Germany led the field. Emil Kraepelin born in Germany in 1856 is credited as the "father of modern psychiatry"[29] for his work classifying mental diseases including various depressive and melancholic states. Certainly with the onset of the First World War all romantic illusions were swept away. In the convulsions of the modern age that followed Freud made his revelations of sublimation, and imagery of new kinds of loss began to emerge. In his essay *Mourning and Melancholia*[30], Freud explains how melancholia shares characteristics with normal mourning, but acknowledges that "even in descriptive psychiatry, the definition of melancholia is uncertain". His governing insight is that melancholia shares with mourning an origin in the loss of a loved object, but that while the mourner is acutely aware of his loss, the melancholic may be unconscious of the loss. The melancholic does this by internalising the loss and this is coupled with a fall in self-esteem that is absent in normal grief. Crucially Freud identifies that in normal grief the mourner has the ability to

---

[26] The end of the 18th Century Kant associates melancholy with 'beauty' in its generalised sense and his ideas of the sublime which he develops in Critique of Judgement (1790) in which he grapples with melancholy and the notion of solitude. The more an artist's awareness of self is realised through contemplative solitude, the higher the sublimity of thought. This identification of the melancholic with an artistic temperament became so strong that persons with social ambitions were anxious to 'learn how to be melancholic'.
Kant, Immanuel <u>Critique of Judgement</u> (1790) cited in Bowring, Jackie <u>A Field Guide to Melancholy</u> 2008 Oldcastle Books **43-45**
[27] This is perhaps best illustrated by his monumental *Funeral at Ornans* for which he used the people who had attended the funeral as models for the painting. Previously, models had been used as actors in historical narratives, but by using the townspeople actually present at the internment Courbet achieved a realistic depiction that lacked sentimental rhetoric of the Symbolists.
[28] Can be translated as Against Nature or Against the Grain
[29] Radden, Jennifer "Depressive State" <u>The Nature of Melancholy</u> 2002 Oxford University Press 260
[30] Freud, Sigmund "Mourning and Melancholia" Sigmund Freud Volume 11 <u>On Metapsychology</u> 1991 Penguin Books **251-268**

work through his loss and that to interfere with this process would be useless or even harmful but for the melancholic the mourning process is blocked by his internalisation of the loss. The subsequent self-tormenting can vary from a bittersweet pleasure, resulting from the love of the lost object escaping extinction, to sadistic self-hate and a tendency to suicide. Melancholia is a pathological condition, mourning is not. Acknowledging Freud's work with Mourning, Melancholia and the Ego, Melanie Klein developed a theory that a sense of loss is programmed into everyone as a child during the weaning process. She maintained that this early loss resulted in what she called "the depressive position" and that this could be relived and/or reactivated later in life.

In the late 20th Century Melancholia is considered an outmoded category; a poetic term for a mood of self-absorbed sadness. The research emphasis switches to depression as the new diagnostic category. Symptoms are insomnia, poor appetite and low energy and this loss of biological vital tone is ascribed to a chemical problem in the brain.[31] American psychologist Martin Seligman established a link between learned helplessness and depression through experimentally based work i.e. clinical depression results from a belief in one's own powerlessness. Something we associate today with today's "slacker mentality" but at the time (1975) was "recognised to complement explanations of women's greater proneness to depression in terms of gender role".[32] Aaron Beck, a pioneer of Cognitive Behavioural Theory, extends Seligman's connection between an external loss (e.g. of freedom, autonomy, power, the need to achieve) and depression to any sense of loss including hypothetical loss and pseudo loss.[33] Today, modern psychiatry's attempts to codify melancholia as clinical depression adds to the global worries over the increase in mental illness – an escalation that has led to arguments over whether the cure should be pharmaceutical or psychoanalytical.[34]

1.1 Melancholy in Painting Today

Despite the efforts of modern psychiatry to distinguish between normal and abnormal sadness (depression) there is no clear pathological definition of melancholia and its meaning remains a paradox. Although melancholia and depression have been conflated and we no longer class melancholy as a physical disease, many of the ideas from its history persist today. Melancholy remains an enigma, a blurred boundary between mental illness and a temperament of feeling 'blue'. A complex response to loss and longing ranging from a state of abnormal grief, where mourning fails to reach completion to extreme nostalgia where closure is deliberately retarded to prolong the pleasure of pain associated with the loss.

[31] Leader, Darian The New Black 2008 Hamish Hamilton **11**
[32] Radden, Jennifer "A Learned Helplessness" The Nature of Melancholy 2002 Oxford University Press 312
[33] Beck, Aaron "The Paradoxes of Depression" from 1976 paper in Radden, Jennifer "A Cognitivist Analysis of Depression" The Nature of Melancholy 2002 Oxford University Press 320
[34] Bowring, Jackie A Field Guide to Melancholy 2008 Oldcastle Books **28-33**

There is still tension between melancholy's creative potential and a residual fear of its negative connotations of lethargy, stagnation and petrified inertia. While the Romantic era of lyrical melancholy is well behind us, our contemporary age is no stranger to loss. Julia Kristeva writing in 1987 about the Marguerite Duras screenplay for the 1959 French film *Hiroshima mon amour* draws attention to the shattering of identity associated with living the reality of a new suffering world. The film helps speak of the impossibility of speaking about the impossible and Kristeva observes that "the distress that has been triggered and increased by the contemporary world proves to be essential and trans-historical".[35] This would suggest that an Art that embraces melancholy can help us make sense of the suffering of our times and provide a balance to the obsession with happiness in contemporary culture.

Leaving aside for a moment an existential discussion of whether painting is still a viable and credible artistic medium, I want to make a case for painting remaining well suited, not only to this role of making sense of loss but providing a contemporary medium for deep melancholic contemplation in these pluralist times.

1.1.1 Melancholic Painting

Painting can imply the object, the canvas on a stretcher with a painted image on it, or the verb, the process by which an artist makes a painting. In his book "What Painting Is" James Elkins writes that one must not just stress the former and neglect the second and argues for the importance of the act of painting given that painters spend their lives working with paint.[36] This is as true for melancholy painting as it is for any other.

1.1.2 Painting - Practice

I will discuss in Chapter 2 how painting came to be regarded as an outmoded technology and that by the 1980s painters seemed to lack a discourse in the eyes of many critics. Suffice to say at this stage that meaningful painting did continue and because of this supposed "Death of Painting" it could be regarded as an act of mourning, a lament that the tradition of painting was extinct. Consequently persevering with this solitary undertaking despite the diminished critical approval could be regarded in Freudian terms as a blocked mourning and as Melancholic in nature. So the act of painting can be considered a valid means of expressing the painter's love for a medium that is elusive and difficult to master yet was considered obsolete; finding a place in tradition by prolonging an unresolved mourning. For example in Sections 4.3.3 I consider the possibility that the painting practice of Glenn

---

[35] Kristeva, Julia Black Sun 1989 Columbia University Press, New York **258**
[36] Elkins, James <u>What Painting Is</u> 1999 Routledge, London **189**

Brown, by maintaining a dialogue with the history of painting, is a melancholy act. Brown paints from reproductions of other artist's paintings using a trompe l'oeil process that renders the original expressive marks in a flat unemotional way. Alison Gingeras believes his motivation for appropriation is born out of "lovingly fetishizing his sources, whether obscure or iconic art works … further blurring the cultural status of original and copy, traditional methods and avant-garde gestures"[37] but this is also typical of the evasion of closure that is at the heart of melancholy.

Alternatively painting can be a means of articulating and making sense of an inner grief. In Section 4.2 I demonstrate painting's value as a living language and contrast the contemporary use of the large versatile vocabulary of painting by the artist to consider their place in the world with that of earlier painters. I give Philip Guston[38] as an example of a painter searching for a coherent emotional response to his lingering grief, switching from figuration to abstraction and finally in his latter career back to figuration again. This return to figuration is born out of his anxiety about the lack of meaning in abstract painting at the time of America's involvement in the war in Vietnam.[39] He also knows what makes an immortal work of art, but cannot create his own.[40] I believe one can read his return to a figurative idiom as the action of a melancholic, blocked in his mourning, circulating his grief, brooding, unable to let go. According to Darian Leader it isn't that the melancholic has got a problem and then wants to express it, but that wanting to express – or feeling that **expression is blocked** – is actually part of the problem."[41] Julia Kristeva sees an enigmatic paradox whereby the artist consumed by melancholia is relentless in his struggle to articulate; "if loss, bereavement, and absence trigger the work of the imagination and nourish it permanently as much as they threaten it and spoil it… the work of art emerges when the activating sorrow has been repudiated".[42]

Even if the artist is not of a melancholic disposition, the subject is a complex and fascinating enigma associated not only with artistic genius and the creative impetus but with beauty and notions of the sublime. In the Romantic era a melancholy demeanour became such a 'badge of honour' for an artist that it is sometimes hard to determine the artist's true intentions with a melancholic work. The contradiction of why the appearance of sadness should hold aesthetic appeal is still central to its attraction today, but living in the 21st Century we are much more sceptical and aware of the

---

[37] As was the case with first generation "pictures" artists such as Sherrie Levine or Cindy Sherman in the late 1970s. Alison Gingeras in conversation with Rochelle Steiner in "A Careful Concoction of Push and Pull" Issue 15 / Spring 2009 Tate Etc. **42**

[38] See Section 4.3.2

[39] "American abstract art is a lie, a sham, a cover up for a poverty of the spirit. A mask to hide the fear of revealing oneself. A lie to cover up how bad one can be".
Meyer, Musa Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston 1991 Thames & Hudson, London **170**

[40] As Dore Ashton observes "the tragedy of knowing and not knowing how to enact is intimately familiar to Guston, and to most artists of a romantic stamp."
Ashton, Dore Yes, but… a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **54-56**

[41] Leader, Darian The New Black 2008 Hamish Hamilton **187-8**

[42] And consequently when the mood of melancholy is lifted the source of artistic inspiration is also removed.
Kristeva, Julia Black Sun 1989 Columbia University Press, New York **9**

portrayed persona being part of a marketing 'package'. Consequently it is important to question whether it is the need to express and communicate the agony a melancholic feels that seeks an outlet through a non-verbal language e.g. painting, or whether the artists are portraying work of a melancholic nature as part of their style or to support their public persona.

Although authenticity may not be necessary for successful expression, an artist's reliance upon his personal experience and his dependence upon himself as spectator as he paints an image designed to carry meaning or to offer understanding is heavy.[43] In my Practical Study[44] I explore whether painting a melancholy emotion I have experienced will have a bearing on whether or not the marked surface successfully sets up a melancholic painting.

1.1.3 Painting - Artefact

Consequently to consider painting in its traditional form as an expressive trace of the artist's nature is a dangerous premise from which to evaluate the value of melancholy painting today. Although it is not the most innovative, interactive, and physically challenging medium, traditional easel based painting does have a number of strengths that make it ideal for a melancholy subject matter. There is a physicality involved in the painting process that is in one sense an act of creation, of working with a fluid material that sets hard, that has been considered connected with our experience of having flesh, of being mortal in a material world. It is an inherently expressive medium that time for allows for contemplation and reverie in the making, slowing the process down, and consequently is well suited to communicating a sense of melancholy.

Being static and unique (except in reproduction) painting is a poor medium for mass communication compared with new visual technologies, yet the appetite for looking at painting has not died out, quite the opposite. Paradoxically painting has absorbed and been enriched by new technology and conceptual strategies avoiding being remote and irrelevant, yet remaining unique with a sense of integrity and completeness that is otherwise absent in a complex and fragmented society.

A melancholy painting can have a cathartic potential that grants a sense of the logic behind our own suffering denied by the clichéd descriptions of the world presented by inadequate or misleading mediated images. For example in section 4.1.2.3 I discuss the 15 paintings by Gerhard Richter depicting people or scenes from the Baader-Meinhof story in the context of his use of colour. The paintings are based on "video footage, press images, and evidentiary pictures from the police archives which Richter clipped from news magazines, or copies of which were made available to the

---

[43] Wollheim, Richard <u>Painting as an Art</u> 1987 Thames & Hudson, London **45**
[44] See Appenedix 2.1 and 2.4 in particular.

artist by friends"[45] yet allow a different meditative reflection on the subject matter. Richter hoped that by looking at the paintings people would continue to think about the unresolved issues connected with the deaths of several members of the terrorist group in Stammheim prison. The source photographs encourage a fascination at the dead bodies but Richter's paintings are a Monument to the memory of the lives lost their futile efforts at toppling the German power structure and the unresolved circumstances of their death.

Painting creates an illusion, and although every medium does that, painting is usually experienced singly in a gallery environment and has an intimacy and sensual presence that is familiar and well known. Luc Tuymans involves the viewer further by focussing on the objects and buildings that were the silent witnesses to a tragedy rather than trying to depict the actual events. In section 4.1.2.4 I discuss how his use of photographic sources for his paintings is connected to Richter's approach but that his paintings address the trauma of loss rather than attempting any therapeutic resolution of mourning.

Painting has a large versatile vocabulary with deep historical roots that speaks to our collective memory on a personal level and Marlene Dumas[46] exploits this in her diptych *Gelijkenis 1 & 2,* 2002 based on the famous Hans Holbein the Younger painting *"The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb"*. One canvas is a copy of the Holbein drawing a power and melancholic aura from the original whilst the other mimics the pose of the dead Christ but is based on a tabloid image of Michael Jackson sleeping in his oxygen chamber in an effort to stave off his own mortality. In the glut and flow of contemporary visual images death is seen as distant and often hidden away. Painting can confront it without sentimentality and artists can put a finger on our need for mourning helping reconcile us to loss. As Dumas says "you can't 'take' a painting, you make a painting".[47]   Her melancholic pairing reminds us that both traditional deities and contemporary icons are time bound and although we prefer to be provoked and titillated by the stream of media images we also need to remember that our life is transient. Although the language of a painting can be quickly decoded, it takes time to appreciate and it is the very time consuming mode of reception that allows the viewer to be properly affected by the work rather than simply distracted. This slowness is symbiotic with a sense of melancholy allowing time for thoughts to percolate and facilitates solitude and solace for imagination.

---

[45] Storr, Robert Gerhard Richter: Doubt & Belief in Painting 2003 MOMA New York **117**
[46] See also Appendix 1 page 27
[47] Dumas, Marlene "The Private Versus the Public" Marlene Dumas: Miss Interpreted Van Abbesmuseum 1992. **43**

2.0 DEATH OF PAINTING

from today painting is dead[48]

Paul Delaroche, 1839

As if the complex conundrum of melancholia with over 2000 years of history wasn't enough at least it hasn't dramatically changed over that period. Can the same be said of painting? Clement Greenberg, one of the foremost art critics[49] of the 20th Century, believed in an evolving progressive narrative of art that built upon the success of previous generations. He equated progression in art with the 'purification' of the practice, defining Modernist painting as the 'creation of physical objects consisting of pigment spread across flat surfaces of a certain shape'.[50] Abstract Expressionism and subsequently post-painterly abstraction fitted this narrow doctrine, but he considered other work inconsequential and relegated to novelty art. Tremendous pressure was put on artists to conform to the doctrine, in effect cutting painting off from the reality of life and putting it in the 'terminal' condition that culminated in Douglas Crimp declaring "The End of Painting" in an article in October magazine in spring 1981.

In this section I look at what is meant by the 'death of painting' and the artists who challenged Greenberg's linear narrative for art. They chose not to worry about the contaminants of representation, illusion of depth and the like and sought to bring painting back in touch with reality. The eighties[51] became the decade where this new birth of painting fought with Crimp's efforts to finally lay it to rest as a significant form of contemporary art and I briefly describe the movements American Photorealism, New Image/Bad Painting and Neo Expressionism to provide context for the recovery of painting. Finally I speculate that painting that refers to its own great history through the lens of this 'death of painting' whilst maintaining a contemporary relevance may be inherently melancholic.

---

[48] Sontag, Susan. On Photography Penguin Books, 1979. **115**
[49] Greenberg studied at the Hans Hofman School of Fine Art in New York. As a German emigreé steeped in first-hand experience of Cubism, Fauvism and Expressionism in Europe in the early 20th Century, "Hofman prepared to a very considerable extent a framework and an ideology for post-war "colour painting"
Harrison, Clark. "Abstract Expressionism" Concepts of Modern Art Thames and Hudson 2001 **173-4**
[50] Danto, Arthur C. "Painting and the Pale of History" After the End of Art 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **103**
[51] The 1980s was also the decade when the AIDS virus was clinically observed in the USA and the subsequent epidemic exacted a heavy toll on the artistic community. Although beyond the scope of my thesis it would be interesting to explore the parallels with the White Plague of the late 19th Century (tuberculosis) contrasting the painted elegies of each period.

2.1 The Mourning After[52]

I have borrowed the title from an *Art Forum* article in March 2003 that brought together Yves-Alain Bois, Thierry De Duve, Isabelle Graw, David Joselit, Elisabeth Sussman and David Reed for a round table discussion chaired by Arthur C. Danto. By the middle of the 1980's, painting was supposed to have lost all critical validity and Douglas Crimp wrote that soon "painting will be understood as the 'pure idiocy' that it is".[53] Despite Danto opening the discussion by saying "no one today especially believes painting is dead",[54] its tone was unequivocally posthumous as it recalled the eighties as the decade where the new birth of painting fought with Crimp's efforts to finally lay it to rest as a significant form of contemporary art.

What caught my imagination though was not the verbal posturing of the 'mourners', but the amusing play on the word Mourning in the title referring to the analysis of the period of mourning following painting's 'death by critic', the sense of regret in the morning after having made a significant mistake the night before and crucially, painting that referred to this death was inherently melancholic on account of the mourning being blocked.[55] It sowed the first seeds of an idea that contemporary paintings that referenced their own death might be inherently melancholic.

To understand what is meant by death of painting it is first essential to accept that artistic activity has a critical function that defines quality in art, and it is the loss of this critical function in painting that is referred to by the writers.   I found Thierry de Duve's discourse on this nuance the most helpful. He asserts that this critical function is absent from art prior to the Enlightenment and that the subsequent emancipation of humanity marks the beginning of modernity.

> "Before the Enlightenment, the function of art was to honour the dead, serve the Church, ornate bourgeois interiors, placate taste and so on, but its function was never – at least programmatically – to exert critical vigilance over the ethical realm. Once it appears in the artworks, this very function of critical vigilance – precisely because it is new – radically severs them from its pasts; it further forbids anyone to valorise art forms that failed to make the same break on their own. The only modern art of any significance and quality is avant-garde art, and art that is satisfied with exerting functions that predate modernity (placating

---

[52] Danto, Arthur C. "The Mourning After" Artforum March 2003 **208**
[53] Crimp, Douglas The End of Painting 1981 October, Vol. 16, **75**
[54] Danto, Arthur C. "The Mourning After" Artforum March 2003 **208**
[55] Freud terms mourning the "normal" process by which we accept the reality of loss, whereas melancholia is the "morbid pathological" sign of the self's denial of loss and its incorporation of and identification with the fantasmic image of the lost object within itself, blocking the normal mourning process.
Freud, Sigmund "Mourning and Melancholia" Sigmund Freud Volume 11 On Metapsychology 1991Penguin Books 251-268

taste, for instance) loses its value as well as its critical function simply by being retarded, retrograde."[56]

He illustrates this with an example "When push comes to shove, Rodchenko is an artist, Bonnard is not"[57] and then expands the argument, concluding that if critical function and quality do not run together anymore, then placating taste, decorating bourgeois interiors etc. becomes permissible. An analysis of what that hypothesis might mean for art today or even painting in particular is beyond the scope of my project, but one could argue that the contemporary art scene is now run by the large commercial galleries and auction houses and indeed critical vigilance is not synonymous with quality.

However, despite this lack of critical vigilance referred to by Thierry de Duve, it is recognised that from the Renaissance onwards artists began to assert their identity through how they painted and consequently their work could carry 'meaning' beyond just the iconography represented.[58]

In Yves-Alain Bois' seminal essay on the death of painting, "Painting: The Task of Mourning", he concludes that modernist painting was going through a period of manic (celebratory) and melancholic mourning and needed to work through to the 'end' (a death drive) and only when this task was complete would the potential for future painting emerge.[59] To explore this interesting line of enquiry further and see if any evidence exists to support my idea, I have posed three related questions:

1. If critics and artists were in mourning, what aspect of painting died, because clearly meaningful painting continues?
2. What would a painting styled on its own death look like?
3. Are the qualities/aspects/essences of such a painting melancholic?

2.2 What has died?

In 1839, only thirteen years after Niépce[60] had mopped up the surplus solvent from the first true photographic image, the French painter Paul Delaroche is alleged to have predicted that "from today painting is dead".[61] Whatever was on Delaroche's mind at the time, the "death of painting" that is declared repeatedly throughout the 20th Century is not the 'natural' death of a practice or custom,

---

[56] de Duve, Thierry. "Archaeology of Practical Modernism" <u>Kant after Duchamp</u> MIT, 1996. **431-435**

[57] de Duve, Thierry. "Archaeology of Practical Modernism" <u>Kant after Duchamp</u> MIT, 1996. **432**

[58] The role of art criticism and artistic expression is explored in more detail in section **4.2 Expressive Mark Making**

[59] Bois, Yves-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning" <u>Painting as Model</u> Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **243**

[60] Joseph Nicéphore Niépce devised the process that JLM Daguerre, having discouraged Niépce from publishing his work, would later claim as his sole invention after Niépce died in 1833.

[61] Sontag, Susan. <u>On Photography</u> Penguin Books, 1979. **115**

but rather the end of it being taken seriously in a critical sense and being replaced by more relevant[62] innovations for making Art.

Whilst the invention of photography had an undoubted impact on painting, supplanting it as the primary source of images by the end of the 19th Century, painting adapted and survived. What actually died after the introduction of photography was a style of painting that was rooted in the past. Courbet's *The Stonebreakers* from 1849-50 is characteristic of a Modern Art that breaks with tradition and draws instead from popular imagery, an art of the common people. Spurred on by the ideas of Baudelaire and his essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, Manet became one of the first Modernist painters to introduce painterly abstraction[63] into their images. The crucial point is that painterly touch now began to replace verity as the prerequisite for a critically good painting, although as Bataille points out a Manet canvas conflicted with everything a painting was expected to be at the time.[64]

However, the survival of painting as an avant-garde form soon came under threat from the wider implications of industrialisation. This threat was not just photography, for as Walter Benjamin points out in his 1936 essay; *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,*[65] the crisis for painting was linked to the simultaneous rise in socialism that was looking for new art forms for the Industrial Age. Benjamin believed that the ability to reproduce an art work diminished its authentic "aura" and although this idea of diminished aura has since been challenged,[66] the notion of artist as a creative genius making singular works of art came under direct threat with the invention of the readymade, "the offspring of Marcel Duchamp's abandonment of painting".[67]

Facing up to the issue of the death of painting artists could either "renounce the ambition to push painting beyond its loss of social function" and take up another form of art, or "reinvent painting, give it a new meaning by acknowledging the crisis it is in and give the idea of painting, not the craft,

---

[62]Painting's death implies it is no longer considered relevant both in an avant-garde sense and in a society bombarded and seduced by images. In other words painting is reduced to being just 'decoration' to placate taste.

[63] See section **4.2.2 Breaking Free from the Academy - Manet**

[64] "Never prior to Manet had the breach between the taste of the public and the changing types of beauty – which art continually renews – been so conclusively final."

Bataille, Georges <u>Manet: A Biographical and Critical Study</u> 1955 Skira, New York **17**

[65] Benjamin, Walter "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in <u>Modern Art and Modernism</u> ed. Fascina & Harrison 1986 Harpers and Row Ltd, London **217-220**

[66] Art Critic Howard Singerman asserted: "What is important is not that the work is – the original, authentic body - but that it is *seen* – the image, public and multiple" and writer Patrick Frank went further still "Rather than devalue the original, reproductions enhanced its aura, and the more reproductions there were, the more the aura was enhanced." This raises the issue of paintings created to reproduce well which is particularly apposite in our world dominated by images seen on a backlit screen.

Singerman, Howard "In The TEXT" <u>A Forest Of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation</u> 1989 MOCA Los Angeles **162-163**

Frank, Patrick <u>Recasting Benjamin's Aura</u> Mar 1989 New Art Examiner 30-31 cited in Sandler, Irving. "Postmodernist Art Theory" <u>Art of the Postmodern Era</u> Westview Press,1998. **347**

[67] "Mass production seemed to bode the end of painting through its most elaborate *mise en scène*, the invention of the readymade."

Bois, Yves-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning" <u>Painting as Model</u> Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **231**

new birth with each canvas."[68] In effect both things happened, Duchamp renounced painting and went on to invent the readymade as I have noted, and abstract painting evolved in the early 20th Century through cubism and expressionism.[69]

Despite this re-invention, the apocalyptic cloud over painting really began to darken with an exhibition *5x5=25*, which opened in Moscow in September 1921 that was intended by the participants as a farewell to painting. In the exhibition was Rodchenko's triptych *Pure Red Colour, Pure Yellow Colour, Pure Blue Colour,* 1921, presented as a single physical object with raw colour as its essential material. Bois sees this gesture as significant neither "because it was the first 'last picture' nor because it was the first monochrome", but because "it showed that painting could have a real existence only if it claimed its own end."[70] According to Bois "the whole enterprise of modernism, especially abstract painting, which can be taken as it emblem, could not have functioned without an apocalyptic myth."[71] So for Bois abstract painting aware of its break with the tradition of painting and the need to distance itself from painterly touch and gesture begins to evaluate its essential components. He sees this project as a search for the **essence of painting** and whilst it recognises that it is a journey towards its own inevitable death, it is the only valid line of enquiry.[72] To do otherwise would be succumb to the arguments of Duchamp and Rodchenko and believe that their work rendered paintings unnecessary.

So if a painting has an essence, what is this elusive quality that painters are to search for?[73] It was Clement Greenberg who influentially claimed for painting what he thought was true for modernist practice in all fields: an assertion of the medium itself and of the processes particular to it. Therefore, for example, flatness became a defining characteristic of modernism in painting and that, rather than receding into imaginary depth the image materialises as paint on the surface. Greenberg maintained that intrinsic to painting are "the flat surface, the (rectangular) shape of the support, and the properties of the pigment".[74]

These "formal" features could be considered an essence of painting, but as Nigel Cooke maintains in his thesis about the death of painting "this formalism was based on the dissolving of the distinction

---

[68] de Duve, Thierry. "The Readymade and the Tube of Paint" Kant after Duchamp MIT, 1996. **148-9**

[69] The early 20th Century is a period of remarkable growth in new art movements. As part of their promotion it was essential to distance themselves from painting and denounce it as being too chained to tradition and the past to have any contemporary relevance.

[70] Bois, Yves-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning" Painting as Model Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **238**

[71] Bois, Yves-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning" Painting as Model Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **230**

[72] Bois dismisses paintings that do not form part of this project as having "abandoned the task that historically belonged to modern painting and are simply artefacts created for the market and by the market."
Bois, Yves-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning" Painting as Model Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **241**

[73] As Douglas Crimp asks: "what makes it possible to look at the paleolithic markings on the wall of a cave, a 17th Century portrait and an abstract expressionist canvas and say that they are all the same thing. That they belong to the same category of knowledge?"
Crimp, Douglas "The End of Painting" On the Museums Ruins Massachusetts Institute of Technology 1993 **97**

[74] Greenberg, Clement "Modernist Painting" Arts Yearbook 4 1961 **103-4** quoted in...
Sandler, Irving. "Introduction" Art of the Postmodern Era Westview Press,1998. **2**

between picturing and making" and the essence becomes about the painting process being more and more automated. This ironically meant that "the essence moved away from the specifics of painting and became more about utility and efficiency"[75] and in other words painting became more industrial in order to purify it.   Cooke then goes on to argue that subjugating painting's essence to utility undermines the very notion of the essential and consequently "any essence that is killed off by the industrial cannot be an essence at all. It is just another style".[76] In other words the "Death of Painting" has been just the death of a style; one that can be referenced and appropriated in the post-modernist fashion like any other. Cooke calls this style "dead essentialism"; painting continues and its essence is dead. So leaving aside for the moment whether painting actually has an "essence" at all, Bois argues in his end game for painting[77] that the only way forwards for painters after modernism is to keep in mind (continue mourning for) the greatness of painting's past and simultaneously try and engage with its future.

---

[75] Cooke, Nigel. "Painting's Perverse Body" The Ambivalence of the Undead Goldsmiths College 2004 **9**
[76] Cooke, Nigel. "Painting's Perverse Body" The Ambivalence of the Undead Goldsmiths College 2004 **10**
[77] "Let us simply say that the desire for painting remains, and that this desire is not entirely programmed or subsumed by the market: this desire is the sole future possibility for painting, that is, of a non-pathological mourning." i.e. a Freudian blocked mourning, Melancholia. Bois, Yves-Alain. "Painting: The Task of Mourning" Painting as Model Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990. **243-244**

2.3 What would a painting styled on its own death look like?

In post war America, artists valued self-expression of their individual free spirit and theoretical prescription was considered as 'non-artistic' and counter intuitive. The work of the American 'First Generation' of painters, and particularly of Pollock, became associated with the liberation and purification of art's resources of expression, and with the possibility of a greater spontaneity and immediacy in painting. American Modernist criticism[78] represented what became known as 'Post-Painterly Abstraction' as exemplifying a reductive and expressive tendency and their criticism seemed to represent a mainstream (if restricted) form of Modernist art successfully. However, in Russia "Constructivism" had been suppressed as un-Marxist 'formalism' and artists were encouraged to adopt a propaganda style of heroic and social realism. Utopian modernism which had aimed at being reproducible was rejected in favour of a realism 'comprehensible' to the masses. If Communism banned 'formalism' and figuration was considered desirable, then formalism and abstraction must be an essential constituent of free enterprise democracy and this was promoted internationally as 100% pure American art. Consequently there was a tension between freedom of artistic expression and the logic of Greenbergian theory and some artists pushed that logic to a point of seeming finality.

In 1965 Donald Judd broke away from painting and started a new movement that was neither painting nor sculpture (misleadingly, but conventionally) known as minimalism. Initially no common property connected artists to each other except their unsuitability for inclusion in the Greenbergian canon. Fried dismissed Minimalist Art as 'theatre' and condemned Minimalist Artists for their literalism in an article called 'Art & Objecthood' published in *Art Forum* Summer 1967. Fried's critical position[79] was seen as extended authority of imperialistic culture by young artists, and served as a rally for artists who did not want to submit to the authority of the modernist protocols. Their focus was on physical attributes; an anti-illusionist art linked to the Duchampian idea of 'art as object'. Towards the end of the decade, interest shifted to a variety of post-minimal tendencies such as

---

[78] Principally Greenberg & Fried

[79] According to Fried's *Three American Painters*, the function of the Modernist dialectic was 'to provide a principle by which painting can change, transform and renew itself, while perpetuating 'those of its traditional values that do not pertain directly to representation'. The hidden corollary was that admission of representation compromised the possibility of change and renewal and that the self-criticism of painting therefore entailed a continual evacuation of representational aspects. The form which reduction took in Fried's account was thus **quantitative:** a gradual purging of the material and associative in favour of the 'optical' and the expressive. In rejecting this view, and in seeking as it were to claim the Modernist succession for their own practices, the Minimalists proposed a **qualitative** change: not a change from deep to relatively shallow pictorial depth, from shape-evoking to pattern-making line, or from target to chevron to stripe, but a shift from painting and sculpture to 'objects', and subsequently from objects to 'post-objects', the 'Works - Concepts - Processes- Situations-Information'

Harrison, Charles "Conceptual Art" <u>Art & Language</u> 1991 Blackwell Books, Oxford **43-44**

process art and land art, which stressed the materiality of art, but not its 'object-hood', and conceptual art[80] in which ideas alone could be considered works of art.

At the same time other artists challenged the perceived restrictiveness of the Greenbergian doctrine and stayed within the discipline of painting. Of particular interest are American Photorealists,[81] the New Image Painters and a new group of painters labelled Neo-Expressionists.

2.3.1 American Photorealism

Photorealism promises a view into spatial depth, but then cancels this through keeping the viewer preoccupied with the surface of the painting.[82] The surface detail results in a flattening of the subject and ground so that the figure neither steps forward nor recedes into space, echoing the 'all-over' effect of a Pollock painting.

It was no mere irony that these paintings were translations of photographic images. Indeed what was truly timely about this approach was its dual focus: photo-realists not only addressed the world in which they lived but also the phenomenon of how it was represented. Beyond forging a telling chronicle of the times, these artists proposed that painting could constitute a means of thinking about the making and reading of images as a paramount activity of modern life. Ultimately, rather than receiving a death sentence from the camera's invention, painting encompassed photography to redefine and extend its conceptual reach. Thus the evolution of their work is also the story of how representational painting was transformed into both a conceptual practice and a platform for probing the social and cultural histories of our mass media age.[83]

The temporality of these pictures was also provocatively ambiguous. Photography, which records an impression made from the light reflected off physical objects, is conventionally seen as having a direct or indexical relationship to reality. The scene it depicts is tied to a specific and irretrievable moment in time. Representational painting on the other hand, makes no claim on reality beyond that of creating a likeness of its subject. Its subject exists not in a frozen moment of past time, but in an unfolding present. Thus a painting of a photograph would seem to automatically short circuit the

---

[80] As a broad category Conceptual Art generally designates a cluster of 'post-Minimal' forms of practice in which objects are mapped or proposed or prescribed or nominated, and in which those same or other objects are presented to view, if at all, only as contingent illustrations or demonstrations of some 'idea'. That is not only a representation of an object vanishes but the object as well.
Harrison, Charles "Conceptual Art" Art & Language 1991 Blackwell Books, Oxford **47**
[81] This new form of figurative realism included such artists as Robert Bechtle, Vija Clemins, Chuck Close, Philip Pearlstein and Ed Ruscha and was distinct from the Pop Art realism of Warhol and the photo based work of Morely, Richter, Artschwager et al that explicitly addressed the nature of their source material.
[82] In his *The Return of the Real* (1996), the American art historian Hal Foster, following Jaques Lacan's tripartite psychoanalytic schema of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary; sees Photorealism as engaged (he calls it super-realism) in a pursuit of appearance that works so as to mask a repressed reality; the real in this psychic sense, is a darkness at the centre of existence that we wish to avoid, and cannot be represented. In the very anxiety of its concern with gleaming surfaces, Foster argues, Photorealism points to that which it would conceal.
Foster Hal, The Return of the Real: Art and Theory at the End of the Century 1996 October Books/MIT Press **136-144**
[83] Rugoff, Ralph "Painting Modern Life" The Painting of Modern Life 2007 Hayward Publishing **11-12**

indexical status of its source. But in the paintings made by these artists, the contradictory temporal values of these two media were disarmingly merged. They mixed the present tense corporeality of the canvas with the removed and disembodied character of the photograph, engaging us in an elusively shifting experience of time and physical presence. They conjured, in other words, a kind of post-modern temporality inflected by currents of reference and repetition, and in which images of the present were inevitably permeated with a sense of déjà vu.[84]

2.3.2 New Image/Bad Painting

Rather than being a defined movement the terms for this style of painting come from two exhibitions held in 1978, the *New Image Painting* at the Whitney Museum, New York and *"Bad" Painting* curated by Marcia Tucker[85] in the New Museum, New York.

American artists[86] that became associated with this movement rejected photo-realism and developed a look of painterly crudity and ineptness. "They looked to the figuration of Philip Guston with an eye to the imagery of Pollock and Willem de Kooning and the colour field painting of Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still."[87] This approach resulted in attacks both from traditionalists, as they avoided refined techniques, and the avant-garde just for being painters.

In Europe "Bad" Painting can perhaps be traced back to Manet's *Olympia* and was certainly practiced by Picabia and René Magritte although this was without the theoretical foundation that characterised the genre in the 1970s. Early recognised proponents inspired by these artists were almost exclusively German[88] and Susan Neuberger in a catalogue essay for a 2008 exhibition characterised "Bad" Painting as a product of brief working phases within short periods of time and ranged from regressive wishful thinking to a critical analysis of culture. Martin Kippenberger is probably the artist who epitomises the schizophrenic nature of "Bad" Painting, being anti-classical, anti-modern and ultimately anti-painting, yet carrying on painting at the same time as seeing painting as anachronistic.

Eva Badura-Triska describes "Bad" Painting strategies used by artists as ranging "from using supposedly 'outmoded' painting styles and techniques from art history (often seen as a provocation)

---

[84] Rugoff, Ralph "Painting Modern Life" The Painting of Modern Life 2007 Hayward Publishing **14**
[85] I have been unable to locate a copy of the catalogue but according to Susan Neuberger "Tucker defended the then outmoded "figuration", subscribing to the designation of "bad" in the overview for the exhibition".
Neuberger, Susan "The first and the last painting" Bad Painting Good Art 2008 DuMont Buchverlag Köln **12**
[86] They included Susan Rothenberg, Neil Jenney and Robert Moskowitz all of whom worked with a simple figurative shape against a monochrome background "mixing a beguiling simplicity and awkwardness with highly personal symbolism"
Smith, Roberta "The Abstract Image" Art in America Mar-Apr 1979 **102-104** cited in Sandler, Irving. "Introduction" Art of the Postmodern Era 1998 Westview Press **199**
[87] Sandler, Irving. "Introduction" Art of the Postmodern Era 1998 Westview Press **194**
[88] They included Albert Oehlen, Georg Baselitz, Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter although the latter two insisted on working in a variety of styles, using painting to investigate its own nature and purpose.

to deliberately imperfect or crude painting, the introduction of various disruptive factors, and/or overloading with elements of form and content/meaning, through to the development of idiosyncratic, 'inappropriate' or clumsy idioms and an appreciation of kitsch. In keeping with their disregard for Modernism's purist dictates, Bad Painters very often point to the irrelevance of the distinction between figurative and abstract, according it no importance in their work."[89]

Whilst not all artists associated with Bad Painting use all these strategies, one feature that seems to be universal is the use of "low art" as a source of inspiration and images ranging from children's book illustrations (Neil Jenney) and comics (Guston) to photographs from popular magazines (Picabia/Richter/Polke) avoiding traditional art history and received good taste. In Europe the artist's group SPUR declared in their manifesto[90] that the kitsch generation would be the saviour of art! This subsequent embracing of Kitsch ensured the artists distanced themselves from the Greenbergian cannon[91] as he had famously seen kitsch as a threat to high art.[92]

2.3.3 Neo Expressionism

After the end of the Second World War Europe trailed the American lead in art through Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Minimalism and Conceptual Art and it wasn't until the 1980s that Europe was able to challenge the hegemony of the USA. This initiative came from the Trans Avant-Garde movement, a group of Italian painters[93] showing in the open section of the 1980 Venice Biennale and a group of German painters[94] galvanised by the work of Joseph Beuys. A number of American painters[95] were linked with this movement and they directly challenged the growing art-theoretical polemic against painting and considered the photo-realists as heralding what became known as the return to painting.

> "At the heart of every genuine change in taste there is, I suppose, a keen feeling of loss, an existential ache, a sense that something absolutely essential to life of art has been allowed

---

[89] Badura-Triska, Eva "Who becomes a Bad Painter" <u>Bad Painting good art</u> 2008 DuMont Buchverlag Köln **50**

[90] "The tired generation, the angry generation, are over. Now, it is the turn of the kitsch generation. WE INSIST UPON KITSCH, DIRT, THE ORIGINAL MUD, CHAOS. Art is the heap of dung in which kitsch grows. Kitsch is the daughter of art: the daughter is young and perfumed, the mother is an old woman who stinks. We only want one thing: to spread kitsch. Only we can rid the world of its ruins. WE ARE THE PAINTERS OF THE FUTURE."
http://www.notbored.org/spur-manifesto1958.html Last accessed 3 Nov 2012

[91] The notion of a 'strictly optical' content defined by a painting's quality is discussed further in **Section 4.0**

[92] He later came to identify the threat to high art as coming from middlebrow taste rather than kitsch, but this essay was very influential long after it was published (1939), making the modernist 'abstract' movement as academic and elitist as the old dogmas modernism had replaced.
Greenberg, Clement "Avant Garde and Kitsch" in <u>Art & Culture</u> 1989 Beacon Press, Boston **6**

[93] Sandro Chia, Francesco Clememte and Enzo Cucchi

[94] Essentially those identified as Bad Painters in **Section 2.3.2** Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Georg Baselitz, Jörg Immendorf, but expanded to include Anselm Kiefer, Markus Lüpertz and A.R. Penk.

[95] Most notably Julian Schnabel, David Salle and Eric Fischl

to fall into a state of unendurable atrophy. It is to the immediate repair of this perceived void that taste at its profoundest level addresses itself."[96]

This new-found interest in painting drew formidable criticism from several antagonists[97] who argued that painting as an art form had lost all critical validity. This culminated in a series of articles in *October* Magazine[98] attacking painting on art-theoretical and political grounds. The writers rejected both Greenberg's formalism and basic aesthetic terms such as originality, authenticity and transcendence.[99] In place of Greenberg they ensconced Jaques Derrida and Roland Barthes who had analysed the ideological assumptions and implications of signs and language, literature, and literary criticism. Douglas Crimp was contemptuous of painting and particularly neoexpressionist painting, arguing that it was the aesthetic counterpart of the political neo-conservatism of the Reagan administration and it was in this special edition of *October* Magazine that he declared the "End of Painting".[100]

The neoexpressionists claimed they were connecting with their national histories of painting and finding meaning and expressing consciousness in a direct painterly way. The enemies of painting criticised artists for succumbing to market pressures and pandering to the vulgar and uneducated tastes of nouveau riche collectors. At the heart of these heated debates were the issues of appropriation and 'genuine' expression. With hindsight I can see the validity of both side's point of view and it is worth quoting the contrasting views as they still have a bearing on the validity of painting to express emotion today.

One the one hand the artists argued that neo-expressionism could yield authentic images by identifying with the tradition of expressionism. They could self-consciously use the painterly language to embody genuine feelings and intuitions. The most cogent argument came from Peter Halley who pointed out that the original expressionist theory presupposed a more or less fixed self: "A natural or centred innocent or unmediated self that artists could express through spontaneous painting – the sign of authenticity." Conversely artists working after the explosion of mediated imagery had "different emotions to express than those expressed in "previous expressionist art" and consequently the neo-expressionists are "expressing an emotion that is based on some other part of the psyche than the ego, for typically these artists are deprived any traditional sense of self."

---

[96] Kramer, Hilton "The Art Scene of the '80s" October 1985 <u>New Art Examiner</u> 24-25
[97] Most vociferous were Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, Hal Foster, Annette Michelson, Craig Owens and Benjamin Buchloh, all associated with *October* magazine.
[98] October Magazine Volume 16 of 1981 was a special issue titled "The Art World Follies".
[99] Michelson, Annette "The Prospect Before Us" Spring 1981 <u>October</u> Vol. 16 **119**
[100] Crimp, Douglas "The End of Painting" Spring 1981 <u>October</u> Vol. 16 **75**

Therefore Halley believes that although their painting was different from that of their predecessors it is no less genuine.[101]

Nonetheless, art critics continued to question whether the paintings were felt or 'felt' as Peter Schjeldahl quipped, "in the 'spirit of van Gogh' or Kirk Douglas as van Gogh in *Lust for Life*"?[102] Hal Foster put his case for a lack of authenticity in his article *The Expressive Fallacy* in which he asserts that these painters "consciously or not play at expression. Neo-expressionism: the very term signals that Expressionism is a 'gestuary' of largely self-aware acts." He concludes that the Neo-expressionists "return to us our historically most cherished forms as kitsch" and that Expressionism is a language the very gestures of which only testify to a desperation of the loss of the historical, the 'real', and of the subject.[103]

The painter David Salle was a focus for a lot of this vitriol with his fragmented imagery of the coarse, crude and vulgar side of American life, yet was recognised as "addressing the philosophical issues of the day: disjunction, disaffection, meaninglessness, vacuity, loss of authenticity and memory" with the melancholy nature of his presentation.[104] Salle himself maintained that the intuition was in selecting the images from which to paint and that he "never understood the tendency to run a critical Geiger counter over someone's work, measuring the degree of Expressionism… It seems beside the point."[105]

---

[101] Halley, Peter "A note on the 'New Expressionism' Phenomenon" Mar 1983 Arts Magazine **88-89 c**ited in Sandler, Irving. "American neo-expressionism" Art of the Postmodern Era 1998 Westview Press **228**

[102] Schjeldahl, Peter "Notes for Eight Columns…" Oct 1981 Village Voice **80 c**ited in Sandler, Irving. "American neo-expressionism" Art of the Postmodern Era 1998 Westview Press **229**

[103] He also cynically labels the 'crisis' of the individual versus society and that of high versus low culture as clichéd, serving to obscure the real crisis of "the individual… as a consumer of individuality"
Foster, Hal "The Expressive Fallacy" Jan 1983 Art in America **80, 83, 137**

[104]Levin, Kim "The Salle Question" Feb 1987 Village Voice **81-82 c**ited in Sandler, Irving. "American neo-expressionism" Art of the Postmodern Era 1998 Westview Press **240**

[105] David Salle interviewed by Carter Ratcliff in Expressionism Today: An artist's Symposium **58 c**ited in Sandler, Irving. "American neo-expressionism" Art of the Postmodern Era 1998 Westview Press **227**

2.3.4 Death Style

In this new birth of painting the influence of the photographic image was paramount. It allowed painters to critique the flat-bed picture frame[106] through photorealism, it allowed them and others to connect with mass media images by encompassing the tropes of photography within their work, and most significantly it permitted artists easy access to painting's own rich past, facilitating direct and indirect quotation and appropriation. Employing a variety of tactics, painters used a variety of photographic sources to effectively appeal against the 'death sentence' handed down by critics to redefine and extend painting's conceptual reach.

These works do not rest on a secure, one directional reference, but fluctuate between source and transformation, between one sign system and another. In place of wonder we are given uncertainty, but both states of feeling have to do with a mobile rather than a fixed subject matter.[107] Uncanniness can be understood as the effect produced by a familiar object that has been rendered suspect or inexplicably strange, and so provokes an anxious confusion about its status[108]. For example, Glenn Brown seems to imbue a sense of enigma and ambiguity in images of paintings of unblinking precision and clarity. His work seems to upset our fundamental means of picturing the painted object, which is hardly surprising as his object is a manipulated photograph of another painting.

So a painting that is 'styled' on its own 'death' can be defined as being a style that appropriates (mourns for) the look of traditional painting whilst referencing[109] that the modernist end game (the need for authenticity and originality) is over by engaging with new technological developments e.g. photography. In doing so such paintings can give the viewer an uneasy sense of anxiety when trying to decode meaning and I believe the implied 'unresolved loss' inherent in such a 'style' could be a factor in making the work melancholic. Evidence for this 'death style' is discussed in Section 3.1.2 and Sections 4.3.3 & 5.0 have a discourse on paintings that may be considered as potential examples.

---

[106] Steinberg, Leo "Reflections on the State of Criticism" March 1972 Artforum **37-49**
[107] Lawrence Alloway talking about Malcolm Morley's photo-realistic paintings.
Alloway, Lawrence "The paintings of Malcolm Morley" May 1993 Art Press **16-19**
[108] The photographic representation becomes 'absurd' or uncanny, precisely because it has been translated into a medium where it's indexical status and corollary 'truthfulness' is commingled with the conventions of a competing sign system. The result denatures our reading of both media, and underscores the artificiality of how we look at both realist painting and photography as faithful representations of the world.
Rugoff, Ralph "Painting Modern Life" The Painting of Modern Life 2007 Hayward Publishing **15-16**
[109] This is more than an acknowledgement; it is a backward look and then moving on (maybe even subconsciously).

3.0 MARK MAKING

loose, rapid handling or the look of it; masses that blot and fuse instead of shapes that stay distinct; large, conspicuous rhythms; broken colour; uneven saturations or densities of paint; exhibited brush, knife, finger or rag marks- in short, a constellation of physical features... [110]

Clement Greenberg, 1961

I have always been drawn to a quality of sad beauty in places and objects of art. From this early appreciation I have sought out and expanded my knowledge of all things with this sense of melancholy. Coming from a mathematical background I felt it would be a straightforward start to my research to list and review 100 paintings that I considered melancholic to identify what means the artist had used to express this mood and convey it to the viewer. I termed these means the "mark making" of the artist and discuss the selection of these categories of "content" in 3.1.2 below. After classifying these appropriate attributes of my samples I planned to interrogate the results and look for significant dispersions. From these groupings of works I hoped to glean some insight into the threads between contemporary painting and the historical body of painting and an understanding about the significance of each attribute and whether any hypotheses could be drawn. These would then be the focus for further research and guide my practical study.

Suffice to say that this was not only flawed from the outset, but uncovered layers of complexity that, although fascinating, proved impossible to encompass within the scope of my study. This section attempts to explain the method underpinning my research, a discourse on the problems encountered and the direction I took to keep the project manageable yet still offer some insights into the research question I posed.

3.1 100 Paintings: Selection Criteria & Review

The difference between rational, objective study and thought, and the more subjective reflective, meditative study is at the heart of the task of analysing the observed and non-visual characteristics of these 100 paintings. I have attempted to respond textually to a wide variety of painted images,[111] not just from a practical point of view of the process involved in their making but also why they evoke a particular emotion for me. I know from my own experience of seeing paintings first hand that the sensation felt in front of art is also determined by things outside of the artwork itself. So in addition to the physical (formal) aspects of the painting itself, the detailed inquiry needs to be

---

[110] Greenberg, Clement 1961 "After Abstract Expressionism" In Henry Geldzahler, <u>New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970</u> 1969 Pall Mall Press London **361**

[111] Although as noted earlier they are predominately representational.

extended to encompass all the factors that can contribute to the experience of walking into a room and sensing that a particular painting is melancholic. Ideally this means considering four way interaction between the **artist** (psychological state of mind, intent); the content of the **painting** (both style and meaning); the **location and context** in which the painting is seen; and as there is no such thing as 'the innocent eye', the prior knowledge that the **spectator** brings and his state of mind.

The selection of the 100 paintings is strictly a personal choice and is not intended as any kind of definitive list of the 'most melancholic' paintings. Overcoming the analytical awkwardness of decoding and deciphering something visual without denigrating the integrity of the art through my efforts at translation I have, wherever possible, analysed paintings that I have actually seen.[112] This attempt to go beyond the utilitarian semiotic and iconographic translation of something visual into text means that I have occasionally had to compromise on my choice of work, and not interpret my 'favourite' or the 'classical' example in a particular artist's oeuvre. However, I hope that the somewhat arbitrary nature of my selection is offset by my explanation of what I have gleaned in a sensorial and perceptual way through my meditative contemplation of the actual paintings.

I have restricted my written review to a single page summary of the details of the artwork, a reproduction of the painting and where it was seen and when. Each review includes a brief overview of the exhibition setting and the emotional response to the visual encounter with the painting where appropriate. These reviews are included as an appendix and available online.[113]

3.1.1 Interpretation Problems

As a first step the review of paintings proved worthwhile but did have limitations. The problems really start to multiply when undertaking the classification of observations from the sample. Most published literature is written either from a linear historical perspective of stylistic development or a rhetorical grouping of work into categories such as landscape, still life, nudes, portraits, etc. but these distributions proved inadequate as a means of ordering such a random personal selection of work.

Distributing[114] the work according to when it was made introduced the first problem of categorisation. Unsurprisingly, the data showed a heavy bias to contemporary practice: Classical

---

[112] So for example I have not included the work of Ross Bleckner as I have never seen any of his paintings. This was regrettable as Bleckner used appropriated images as a basis for referential paintings as elegies for friends lost at the time of the AIDS epidemic and may have provided a useful contemporary comparison with Munch in the same vein that I contrast van Gogh and G Brown.
[113] Appendix 1 & http://paintingmelancholia.blogspot.com/
[114] For the purposes of this investigation I have defined 'Contemporary' as artists working today, Modern primarily those who died in the 20th Century and/or showed the influence of photography in their work, and Classical as those working earlier than this and without the use of photographic tropes. So, for example, Manet is included in the Modern[114] category, but Courbet is not.

(14%),[115] Modern (23%) and Contemporary[116] (63%), and although I could have done a statistical correlation between period and motif, and relate this to changes in perception of melancholia, I decided that this would add little to my understanding of my main enquiry.

Trying to group the works by subject was not particularly helpful either as portraiture (74%) dominated my choice,[117] either single (54%) or in a group (20%). Although the artist has used the body language of the figure or the context to directly convey a sense of melancholy in a high proportion of these works (39%), an even larger number have clearly managed without being so overt[118] and have used varying degrees of subtlety to create meaning. Therefore grouping by subject was not pursued further.

Trying to define the work by style proved infinitely more difficult to resolve, primarily because deciding on a definition of style itself proved so elusive. Should it have been on the basis of General Styles and if so which groupings? Universal Styles such as Classicism, Painterly or Geometrical for example? Or perhaps Period / Historical Styles such as Baroque, Neo-classicism, Modernism or Expressionism for example? Or School Styles such as the London School or the Ash Can Painters? As Richard Wollheim points out these General Styles form and re-form being shorthand for a set of characteristics[119] that can change with time with artists sometimes in one grouping sometimes in another.

More interesting is the 'Individual Style' of the artist. A style that has a deep seated psychological reality and manifests itself in the painter's output as marks on a surface. Richard Wollheim believes having a pictorial style is a competence analogous with knowing a language, and in response to different stimuli the individual style will manifest itself in different solutions, although within precise boundaries. As Michael Gibson points out when discussing pioneers of artistic expression, an artist doesn't make a 'discovery' in the sense that scientists do. But he does discover 'a means' that may be thought about[120] and practised prior to the mark being made. It is "thanks to this 'means' he can avoid repeating the familiar forms derived from an obsolete conception of the world; he can once

---

[115] All percentages are shown in relation to the total i.e. 50% of the 100 paintings

[116] My concern is primarily with expression of mood in painting after the "End of Painting" so a heavy bias to contemporary painters reflects this interest.

[117] This is perhaps not surprising as it not only reflects the use of the portrait as the most direct way of depicting melancholia but also my own primary interest with figurative painting i.e. in the representational sense.

[118] For example those where the figure serves as a metaphor for the melancholia contained within the image (20%).

[119] E.g. Characteristics of the Baroque: Strong chiaroscuro; Forceful movement; Recession; Liveliness of touch; Diagonal compositions; Deletion of defined volume; Heady emotionalism; Sensitivity to represented texture, may be replaced in time with others.
Wollheim, Richard Painting as an Art 1987 Thames & Hudson, London **26-27**

[120] This rehearsal would seem to preclude spontaneity but Wollheim sees the mark itself as the point when style manifests a psychological reality i.e. meaning. It is the point when artistic intention becomes manifest, what Wollheim calls thematising the image. According to Wollheim the painter allows 'thoughts about the mark he makes, the surface he paints on and the edge of that surface to guide his actions. In this simplification of the painting process, the painter thematises the **mark**, the surface and the edge.
Wollheim, Richard Painting as an Art 1987 Thames & Hudson, London **19-22**

more touch on the heart of the matter"[121] and it is these means of expression that are germane to my enquiry. Following my research into the 'death of painting' and the hypothesis that there may be a 'look' or 'style' of painting that referred to this 'death' I noted those works that showed potential signs of this 'death style'.

3.1.2 Mark Making

A strict definition of 'mark making' in painting would be limited to the physical mark that the painter makes on his canvas (or other support). Although this narrow description can encompass a wide range of possibilities, as the description of the term 'painterly' as my quotation from Greenberg's 1961 essay discussing Abstract Expressionism[122] suggests - I intend to broaden my definition to include other aspects of 'picture' making.[123] However, I must stress that this research is not driven by an ontological desire to discover the "essence" of a melancholic painting nor how the viewer distinguishes it from other paintings. In most cases this is signified by the subject of the painting either directly or metaphorically. My aim is to identify what expressive choices the artist has made to enhance the melancholic mood of the work, what I have termed the artist's mark making.

These 'means' or 'marks' that the artist uses are partly what Thomas McEvilley calls the "content" of the art work in his essay *On the Manner of Addressing Clouds*[124] first published in Art Forum in June 1984. In the essay he gives thirteen of ways of assessing content in an artwork and I have been guided by this list in devising my own checklist for form and content that may or may not contribute to the melancholic mood of a painting:

> Physical – scale, medium, material and temporal duration
>
> Formal Properties – colour, weight and spatial relationships, and painterly marks
>
> Realism - the aspect of the artwork that is understood as representational
>
> Iconographic Tradition - use of symbols/metaphors
>
> Attitudinal Gestures – wit, irony, parody etc. that may appear as qualifiers
>
> Context – the work's relationship with art history and contemporary practice
>
> Verbal Supplements – primarily the title
>
> Aura – biological or physiological responses to the work in situ (experiential)

---

[121] Gibson, Michael Symbolism 1995 Benedikt Taschen Verlag **33**
[122] See opening quotation to this Section.
Greenberg, Clement 1961 "After Abstract Expressionism" In Henry Geldzahler, New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970 1969 Pall Mall Press London **361**
[123] I recognise that this is problematic in terms of definition as for example the negative space in a painting may contain no marks and the colour of paint exists on the palette prior to being applied to the canvas. Yet marks made on the canvas do define the negative space and the juxtaposition of a coloured mark among others may change not just optical content but meaning.
[124] McEvilley, Thomas Art & Discontent 1993 McPherson & Co New York **63-104**

All of these were considered as part of my written review of the 100 artworks and subsequently I categorised the work within a matrix with the intention of making inferences from the classification of the potentially melancholic 'properties' of these 100 works. As I stated earlier this proved unsound, however, the attempt did provide an early impetus and guide to the practical study and suggested the three areas that would be most fruitful for deeper research and analysis given that I could not encompass them all.

Section 4.0 deals with **Colour** and **Expressive Mark Making** in detail and also stresses the experiential aspect listed above. Section 5.0 deals with the content given to a painting by virtue of its **Contextual** relationship with art history.[125] I am specifically interested in painting that refers to its own history through the lens of the 'death of painting' whilst maintaining a contemporary relevance and examine paintings from my 100 that may be considered as potential examples[126] of the 'death style'[127] looking for evidence that such paintings may be inherently melancholic.

---

[125] It isn't a new phenomenon in painting for artists to give meaning to their work through the use of quotation or allusion but as Thomas McEvilley points out the post-Modern interpretation of such appropriations can be complex. For example Johns used a cross-hatched motif from Munch's *Self Portrait: Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1940-43 as the inspiration for his large 3 panelled painting *Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1981. This simple use of Munch's title brings an added dimension to the abstract work as in the original it refers to what is between the clock and the bed – a self-portrait of Munch aged 78 facing death. The clock has no hand or numbers, time has run out.
McEvilley, Thomas Art & Discontent 1993 McPherson & Co New York **94-95**
[126] Not an inclusive list, e.g. the works by G Brown and G Carnegie discussed in Section 4.0 could also have been included here.
[127] See Section 2.3.4

4.0 SEEING & FEELING

Whatever the general character of the story is, the picture must discover it

throughout, whether it be Joyous, Melancholy, Grave, Terrible etc.[128]

Jonathan Richardson, 1725

In the previous chapter I explored the findings of my first hand examination of examples of melancholic paintings. Despite a lack of a rigorous conceptual structure I use this to guide both my practical study and provide a direction for deeper research into how the formal qualities of a painting can express feeling and specifically that melancholy has recognisable visual correlations. This chapter expands on two aspects, specifically how colour and expressive mark making can be used by the artist and interpreted by the viewer as enhancing the emotional (melancholic) intent of a painting. For the most part the research assumes the relationship between emotions and painting that expresses them is causal[129] and similar to the relationship between an emotion and its bodily expression or the action which motivates it. Where appropriate I have combined my own experiential observations with written texts to deduce both the artist's intentions and the viewer's reaction to the work. This research is supported by detailed examples but is not exhaustive on account of the complexities of melancholy itself and the long and varied history of painting. The choices are purely subjective but provide useful insight into how the formal properties of a painting may support the iconography of melancholy.

In his essay *Modernist Painting*, Clement Greenberg argues that "visual art should confine itself exclusively to what is given in visual experience, and make no reference to anything in other orders of experience"[130] and that the artist tries to create something unique and independent of meaning; "content is to be dissolved so completely into the form that the work of art cannot be reproduced".[131] Thomas McEvilley uses these excerpts to question the formalist ideal of 'form without content' - specifically Greenberg's notion of a 'strictly optical' content defined by a painting's quality.[132] He develops the argument that form and content are logically dependent on each other, and excluding the non-optical elements (e.g. emotions and feelings) is impossible (as it is compromised by the viewer's expectations and the artist's intentions).[133] Whilst this argument seems perfectly logical from today's perspective, at the time Greenberg's (Kantian) desire to purify

---

[128] Richardson, Jonathan "Of Expression" An essay on the Theory of Painting, 1725 1971 Scolar Press, England **87**

[129] The exceptions in my research are those where the expressive marks are used as tropes possibly ironically but also see Alan Tormey The Concept of Expression Princeton 1971 for the denial that expression is a causal notion.

[130] Greenberg, Clement "Modernist Painting" in Modern Art and Modernism ed. Fascina & Harrison 1986 Harpers and Row Ltd, London **8**

[131] Greenberg, Clement "Avant Garde and Kitsch" in Art & Culture 1989 Beacon Press, Boston **6**

[132] McEvilley, Thomas "Heads it's Form, Tails it's not Content" in Art & Discontent 1991 McPherson & Co, New York pp**25**

[133] McEvilley, Thomas "Heads it's Form, Tails it's not Content" in Art & Discontent 1991 McPherson & Co, New York pp**27-45**

painting of non-optical content was taken very seriously and partly contributed to the mass disengagement with painting in the 1970s. Crucially McEvilley deduces that if form and content are mutually dependent then the feeling or "thought content"[134] will be grounded in the formal properties of the painting; the colour, weight and spatial relationships, and painterly marks.

4.1 Colour is the New Black

In his book *Theory of Colours* published in 1812, Goethe challenged the Newtonian understanding of coloured light with a more experiential approach and according to McEvilley asserts that the "activity of beholding an unbroken expanse of a single colour is said to awaken awareness of universality and to harmonise the beholder with the basic unity of things".[135] If the monochrome could carry meaning then surely the colour it was painted was significant too. In *Point and Line to Plane* Kandinsky attempts to codify the sensual and emotional value of colours[136] and forms so as to enable the artist to control the expressive means at his disposal. Kandinsky was interested in theosophy and attended lectures by Rudolf Steiner; in his book, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, published in 1914 he is quite specific which colours have melancholic associations.[137] Whilst I do not agree with Kandinsky's assertions and cannot go into the subject in depth, I would like to explore three specific areas of the use of colour in painting and their possible melancholic associations: the black monochrome; the use of grey; and the juxtaposition of strong acidic colours.

4.1.1 Black Monochrome – Malevich & Carnegie

Even in the simplest form of painting, the monochrome, it is possible to have philosophical content if the artist intends it and this content can be experienced by a sensitive spectator. For an example of how this dynamic operates I will start with a discussion of Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* of 1915. So, although Malevich aimed the painting, not at the viewer in general, but at a small elite community of avant-garde artists, he made a direct reference to a religious element in his work by hanging it high in the corner of the room at the 0.10 exhibition, traditionally reserved in Russian homes for religious icons. In other words, part avant-garde manifesto painting of a non-objective form playing no representational or symbolic role; and part "emblem of the wiping out of the art of the past":[138] a beginning to launch Suprematism and establish his position as an artist and an end, an erasure of the past. Summarising his ambitions in a letter in June 1916, Malevich wrote: "A plane of painted colour on a white canvas sheet gives a strong sensation of space directly to our

---

[134] McEvilley, Thomas "Heads it's Form, Tails it's not Content" in <u>Art & Discontent</u> 1991 McPherson & Co, New York pp**49**

[135] McEvilley, Thomas "Heads it's Form, Tails it's not Content" in <u>Art & Discontent</u> 1991 McPherson & Co, New York **51**

[136] Lynton, Norbert "Expressionism" <u>Concepts of Modern Art</u> 2001 Thames & Hudson, London **48**

[137] Kandinsky, Wassily "VI. The Language of Form and Colour" <u>The Art of Spiritual Harmony</u> 1914 Kessinger Publishing, USA **75** Kandinsky believes when dark blue sinks almost to black, it echoes a grief that is hardly human.

[138] Danto, Arthur C "Historical Museum of Monochrome Painting" <u>After the End of Art</u> 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **154**

consciousness. It transports me into an endless emptiness, where all around you sense the creative nodes of the universe."[139]

Despite his written manifesto the positive aspect of the painting's meaning was not communicated to the critics at the time; for them the association with death was irresistible. One of whom wrote "The corpse of the Art of Painting, the art of nature with make-up added, has been placed in its coffin and marked with the *Black Square*"[140] and identified by another writer as an emblem of "the cult of emptiness, of darkness, of nothingness".[141] Clearly they interpreted the painting in a melancholic sense, perhaps expressing what Lyotard calls a "collective nostalgia for the unattainable" and referring specifically to Malevich's square paintings he states "it will enable us to see only by making it impossible to see it; it will please only by causing pain".[142] I believe Lyotard sees *Black Square* as a black void: a depiction of the void left by the collapse of traditional religious beliefs and the inability of their symbols to convey spiritual meaning.

One can argue that Malevich conceived *Black Square* as a melancholic work[143] and there is evidence that he had a melancholic temperament, but I think that stretches the anecdotal material too far. As an avant-garde artist we can understand his desire to distance himself from the art of the past and as his own writing emphasises he wants to communicate the positive outlook of the work (for him). However, *'Black Square'* is a work that perfectly visualises the point of emptiness and loss that eludes ready visualisation or representation, and is consequently melancholic in nature. It is the visual equivalent of Nerval's *'Black Sun'* the dazzling darkness that "conjures up the melancholic person's complicity with the world of darkness".[144] So even though Malevich was not mourning the loss of traditional art, the critics at the time keenly sensed the signification[145] of this non-representational painting. After his death in 1935, the painting was attached to the front of the hearse and on his deathbed it was exhibited above him as a poignant melancholic symbol.

---

[139] Unfortunately I do not have a definitive reference for the origin of the quotation; I believe it is from a Letter from Malevich to Matiushin, June 1916, "Pisma k M.V. Matiushinu," ed. E.F. Kovtun, in Ezhegodnik rukospinogo otdela Pushkinskogo doma na 1974 god, Leningrad, 1976, p. **192** and is quoted without reference in Douglas, Charlotte <u>Malevich</u> 1994 Thames & Hudson, London **86**

[140] Ivan Klyun, an early follower of Malevich quoted in Zhadova, Larissa A. <u>Malevich: Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art 1910-1930</u> 1982 Thames and Hudson, London **43**

[141] Danto, Arthur C "Historical Museum of Monochrome Painting" <u>After the End of Art</u> 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **154**

[142] Lyotard, J <u>The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge</u> trans Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi 1984 Manchester UP, Manchester **81** quoted in Shaw, Philip <u>The Sublime</u> 2008 Routledge, Abingdon **116**

[143] The motif of the black square on white first appeared on the stage curtain Malevich designed for the Russian Futurist opera "Victory over the Sun". Whereas the Italian Futurists (F T Marinetti) had the Murder of Moonshine as a symbol of sentiment and melancholy, the Russians turned against the sun itself, the symbol of logic and rationality.
Douglas, Charlotte "The New Russian Art and Italian Futurism" <u>Art Journal</u>, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Spring, 1975) **234**

[144] Kristeva, Julia <u>Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia</u> 1989 Columbia UP, Chichester **147**

[145] I do not want to discuss (Peircean) Semiotics but I believe this is known as a Rheme (where the sign is represented for the interpretant as a possibility, a concept). This non-representational element is perhaps the closest we can come to sensing the lost object (Lacan – the objet petit a), something that cannot be represented, that is opaque in our physical world.

In the latter half of the 20th Century 'West is best' prevailed as American foreign policy mobilised a national Modernist art to exploit the image of a disinterested and democratic culture. American Modernist criticism (principally Greenberg & Freid) represented what became known as 'Post-Painterly Abstraction' as exemplifying a reductive and expressive tendency. Amongst these "New York Painters" Robert Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko and Frank Stella all produced black monochromes of differing styles and for each of them their paintings carried different meaning. For example Ad Reinhardt who worked mainly on variations of black paintings from 1953 until his death in 1967 saw them as pure and empty of narratives, projecting no emotions, and broadcasting no beliefs. He fervently believed that the paintings - square, matte, black with subliminal traces of underlying grids - "rather than forecasting the death of painting as a viable art form, affirmed painting's potential to transcend the contradictory rhetoric that surrounded it in contemporary criticism and the increasing commercial influences of the market".[146] In her essay on Minimalism, Suzi Gablik writes "the neutral emptiness of the black paintings appeared, to many people, as such a total retreat from humanistic concerns that they could only be an aberration, synonymous with all the anti-subjective, materialistic, determinist, anti-life in our culture - aspiring to nothing more elevated than boredom and futility".[147] Today we wouldn't read Reinhardt's black paintings the same way but the associations of the blackness with death, darkness and the void remain valid and the spectator can contemplate them and reflect on their emptiness and nothingness.

Gillian Carnegie is one of several contemporary artists that are still experimenting with the black monochrome and I saw her painting *Black Square*, 2002 [Fig. 1] at the Tate Triennial in 2003. However, it is not a black square in the sense of either Malevich or Reinhardt, but a thick matt black impasto of oil paint that has been 'expressively' pushed and scraped to produce the effect of trees, leaves and branches. Sustained looking reveals that the woodland scene isn't uniformly black at all; there are hints of greens and reds on the forest floor and perhaps a dark blue sky glimpsed through the treetops.

Given that Carnegie's original impetus for these works "was the challenge of depicting a night scene, rather than as a conscious referencing of the monochrome tradition in painting"[148] it is difficult to argue in terms of her 'intending' to make a melancholic painting. The only stab at a subconscious meaning in the work comes from Monika Szewczyk who, noting that Carnegie is a fan of Balthus,

---

[146] Ad Reinhardt's writings on art read as a litany of negative aphorisms. Describing his signature black paintings, he wrote: "A free, unmanipulated, unmanipulatable, useless, unmarketable, irreducible, unphotographable, unreproducible, inexplicable icon.".
Spector, Nancy http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/date_work_md_133A_1.html last accessed 02 March2011
[147] Gablik, Suzi "Minimalism" Concepts of Modern Art 2001 Thames & Hudson, London **247**
[148] Tufnell, Ben Days Like These 2003 Tate Publishing, London **48**

sees "the dark, dark, wood as a trigger of the pornographic imagery of *Little Red Riding Hood*".[149]   If it was painted with intent it would have been a good example of re-integrating the syntax with the semantic of visual 'language' by using Malevich's black modernist space for figurative ends through the lens of Ad Reinhardt's 'meaningless' black monochromes.

The image derives from a photograph taken by Carnegie of the night view of a landscape at Hampstead Heath in North London.[150]   Although every form is perfectly recognisable, at no point does Carnegie attempt to use paint to describe the natural world, but takes the interplay between subject and medium to extremes.

She applies paint in such a way that it never stops looking like paint, never tries to imitate the texture of anything other than paint and yet, miraculously, despite the blackness forms a picture. The image is almost sculpted out of the thick dense black impasto that covers every inch of the surface with savage strokes from a variety of brushes and palette knives.

Her work does not make me think of the 'death of painting' referencing of art history, but more of an academic exploration of the boundaries of painting.[151]   She works on different series (exploring the genres of still life, landscape, the nude and portraiture) seemingly as a painterly exercise testing her originality in an obsessive (but different) manner in each, but shows them separately juxtaposing the different genres together.   This tactic prevents comparison within the series and consequently in an exhibition of her work it seems like the only common thread is the materiality of paint.

4.1.2 Monumental Grey – Richter

Although he later painted from photographs[152] in colour, Gerhard Richter specifically uses grey to insinuate a different sense of temporality into his painting by suggesting aged photographs and magazine clippings, thereby opening the present to evocative memories from the past.   His his early use of monochrome helped maintain a distance (for the painter and viewer) between the original image and the painting; perhaps in a similar way to Andy Warhol's use of *Photomat* booth images for his screen prints.   As Richter's *Photo Pictures* evolved, he experimented with various referents to the

---

[149] Szewczyk, Monika "Her Pornographic Imagination" " Afterall #16 Autumn/Winter 2007 **77**
[150] http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=104064&tabview=text last accessed 02 March2011
[151] Writing in the art magazine Afterall, critic Barry Schwabsky seems to agree with this analysis seeing her perhaps awkward and perverse artistic/stylistic choices not as a game with the public's expectations but as self-analytical rigour. That her innate scepticism toward her own art of painting is more passionate engagement than apathy or cynicism; and that her work in fact takes an equally disenchanted view of both abstraction and representation.
Schwabsky, Barry "Critics vs. Gillian Carnegie" Afterall #16 Autumn/Winter 2007 **81-88**
[152]"Do you know what was great? Finding out that a stupid, ridiculous thing like copying a postcard could lead to a picture. And then the freedom to paint whatever you felt like. Stags, aircraft, kings, secretaries. Not having to invent anything anymore, forgetting everything you meant by painting – colour, composition, space – and all the things you previously knew and thought. Suddenly none of this was a prior necessity for art."
 Richter, Gerhard The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993 1995 Thames & Hudson, **33-34**

original photograph such as borders and text. However, the 'trademarks' that his work became recognised by, were the 'blurring'[153] of the image and the enlarged size. If he was to be faithful to the Dada spirit then surely he would have made the paintings of the object actual size, instead he magnifies and consequently monumentalises[154] the subject of the photograph in his paintings. "The photograph… attacked by light, by humidity, it fades, weaken, vanishes; there is nothing left to do but throw it away. Earlier societies managed so that memory, the substitute for life, was eternal and that at least the thing which spoke Death should itself be immortal: this was the Monument. But by making the (mortal) photograph into the general and somehow natural witness of "what has been" modern society has renounced the Monument."[155]

This transformation is perhaps at its strongest in the 15 paintings that make up the *Oktober 18, 1977* cycle that includes *Dead (Tote)*, 1988 [Fig. 2]. They are painted in grisaille mainly from newspaper photographs[156] that have been photo-manipulated to reduce detail by increasing contrast. The image has been painted and then whilst the paint is still wet, further details removed by either softening outlines with a brush or dragging brushes or a wet squeegee over the surface. In the case of *Dead (Tote)* this feathering of the painting acts as a *sfumato* pall over the corpse of Ulrike Meinhof. This blurring of the details works in concert with the grey to signify the doubt associated with the mystery surrounding the circumstances of her suicide.

The RAF had been formed partly to confront the German refusal to mourn the catastrophe of National Socialism and yet failed to reach closure with the death of the remaining founder members.

On the morning of 18th October 1977 Baader, Ensslin and Raspe were found dead in their cells at Stammheim prison and whether or not they had committed suicide can neither be proven nor disproven.

Richter hoped that by looking at the paintings people think about the unresolved issues rather than fascination at the dead bodies[157] and Robert Storr concludes that the paintings were, in part at least,

---

[153] Moorhouse, Paul Gerhard Richter: Portraits 2009 National Portrait Gallery, London **69**

[154] "In the Age of Reproduction Gerhard Richter… is the deviation of the multiple into the original, the successful passage of the singular into the plural."
Blistène, Bernard Mechaniques et manuel dans l'art de Gerhard Richter Galleries Magazine (April-May 1988) **90-95,132,141** quoted in Storr, Robert Gerhard Richter: Doubt & Belief in Painting 2003 MOMA New York **56**

[155] Barthes, Roland Camera Lucida 2000 Vintage, London **93**

[156] "Consists of 15 paintings depicting people or scenes from the Baader-Meinhof story. With one exception… all are based on video footage, press images, and evidentiary pictures from the police archives which Richter clipped from news magazines, or copies of which were made available to the artist by friends." Ignoring all pictures of terrorist acts and their victims, he "concentrated instead on the terrible denouement of their destructive, self-destructive, and ultimately futile efforts at toppling the German power structure and transforming Germany."
Storr, Robert Gerhard Richter: Doubt & Belief in Painting 2003 MOMA New York **117**

[157] Magnani, Gregor "Gerhard Richter: For me it is Absolutely Necessary that the Baader-Meinhof is a Subject for Art," Flash Art, International edition (May-June 1989), **69**

a mourning for the idealism of the RAF if not the ideas.[158] Richter's own notes written in preparation for a press conference in Krefeld February 1989 back up this assertion where he speaks of his distress at the deaths in custody of the terrorists and goes on to say: "It is impossible for me to interpret the pictures. That is: in the first place they are too emotional; they are, if possible, an expression of a speechless emotion. They are the almost forlorn attempt to give shape to feelings of compassion, grief and horror (as if the pictorial repetition of the events were a way of understanding those events, being able to live with them)."[159]

For once Richter's statement regarding the use of grey is clear: "When it's painted grey like this it's partly a way of establishing distance. I knew it was anachronism to return to my old technique, but I couldn't really do anything else"[160] and "it is impossible to paint the misery of life, except maybe in grey, to cover it."[161] So given Richter's intentions for these paintings and that he returned to the grisaille after setting it aside for 10 years; can we say that the 'greyness' contributed to the melancholy mood or ambience or is it just a useful way of referencing and interrogate the photographic sources for the images?

In the late 1960s, Richter took a hiatus from representational painting altogether and made a number of monochrome pictures that were grey all over, which he claimed were motivated by not knowing what to paint. He seems to have been drawn to the neutrality and inconspicuousness of the colour, writing that grey is the epitome of non-statement "…it does not trigger off feelings or associations; it is actually neither visible nor invisible. It has the capacity that no other colour has, to make 'nothing' visible."[162] Robert Storr believes that these abstract grey paintings (of which there are over 100) carried Richter's emotional weight of his anxious neutrality to the death of painting arguments.[163] He goes on to conclude that Richter had won "a reprieve" for his chosen medium and quotes Richter not only feeling positive about the series but that when seen as a group rather than individually "… I no longer feel that they are sad, or if so, they're **sad in a pleasant way**."[164] A curious (bittersweet) melancholic statement for someone who set a course between the "Manichean world of all white nothing or all black nothing"[165] searching for the 'end of painting' and invoking grey as

---

[158] "Identifying with the idealism but not the ideal of the Red Army Faction, Richter painted a lament for the mesmerising, unrealistic and potentially ruinous visions to which critical reason gives rise."
Storr, Robert Gerhard Richter: Doubt & Belief in Painting 2003 MOMA New York **119**

[159] Richter, Gerhard The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993 1995 Thames & Hudson, **173-4**

[160] James Hall, 'Oktober Revelation.' The Guardian (London) (August 30 1989). p.37 quoted by Storr, Robert Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977 2000 MOMA, New York **112**

[161] Magnani, Gregor "Gerhard Richter: For me it is Absolutely Necessary that the Baader-Meinhof is a Subject for Art," Flash Art, International edition (May-June 1989), **69**

[162] Richter, Gerhard "Letter to Edy de Wilde" The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993 1995 Thames & Hudson, **82-3**

[163] Storr, Robert Gerhard Richter: Doubt & Belief in Painting 2003 MOMA New York **95**

[164] Van Bruggen, Coosje "Gerhard Richter: Painting as a Moral Act" Artforum 9 (May 1985) **84** quoted in Storr, Robert Gerhard Richter: Doubt & Belief in Painting 2003 MOMA New York **95**

[165] Storr, Robert Gerhard Richter: Doubt & Belief in Painting 2003 MOMA New **94**

the "absolute nothing, the only possible equivalent for indifference, non-commitment, absence of opinion, absence of shape."[166]

I believe that the use of grisaille in the '*Oktober 18, 1977*' cycle of paintings does help convey a melancholic mood, but that Richter makes use of all the tropes of photography to transform the photographic into the Monumental rather than just the properties of grey as a colour. The source photographs point to the events surrounding the 18th October 1977, but Richter's paintings are a Monument to the memory of the lives lost and the unresolved circumstances of their death.

4.1.3 Flat Colour – Tuymans

Luc Tuymans relies on photographic sources for inspiration even more than Gerhard Richter and acknowledges that today the main source of such imagery is the television screen.[167] In preparation for a painting Tuymans draws either from memory or directly from the photographic source. These drawings are the first step, the authentic attempt to perpetrate the 'forgery' that is the photographic capture of reality.[168] The process of drawing mimics memory, selective about what to include and through it Tuymans further distances himself from the real.[169]

But unlike Richter, Tuymans is not interested in the Modernist discourse surrounding the death of painting and has remained aloof from the critical discourse about representation.[170] He avoids the mechanisation of painting itself and instead paints canvases that seem anachronistic with their painterly clumsiness and carefully staged obsolescence.[171] His visible use of nails to secure the canvas to the stretcher and the use of craquelure in some paintings is a deliberate strategy to ensure the paintings "look old from the start".[172]

Tuymans' muted palette reinforces this look of premature aging, which combined with his wet-in-wet tentative short brush strokes blurs, conceals and de-emphases the subject - using painting's "non-figurative capacity" to hide what is presented.[173] "He typically uses only a couple of colours in a single canvas, mixing them with white and black to create highlights (tints) and shadows (shades) in a constricted spectrum between light and dark. For example a single earth tone—ochre, umber, or sienna—is mixed with a large amount of white to create the dominant, essentially monochromatic,

---

[166] Richter, Gerhard "Letter to Edy de Wilde" The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993 1995 Thames & Hudson, **82-3**
[167] "The portrait of Condolezza Rice is only a painted likeness up to a certain point; even the format reminds us of a television picture. The fact that a painted portrait can be executed in landscape format, is a very recent phenomenon that has everything to do with the shapes of our projection surfaces and screens."
Vermeiren, Gerrit Luc Tuymans: I Don't Get It 2007 Luidon, Ghent **20-21**
[168] Hoptman, Laura "Mirrorman" Parkett #60 2000 **124**
[169] In this case the index or trace that was the film.
[170] Mosquera, Gerard "Painting on the Edge" Parkett #60 2000 **136**
[171] Loock, Ulrich "On layers of sign relations…" Luc Tuymans 2007 Phaidon, London **47**
[172] Aliaga, Juan Vincente "Interview" Luc Tuymans 2007 Phaidon, London **8**
[173] Mosquera, Gerard "Painting on the Edge" Parkett #60 2000 **134**

area of the painting. By adding bits of black to this mix (which because it is painted before the under-layers dry, tends to have a feathered edge), the artist renders forms like noses, eye sockets, and cheekbones, while staying within the established colour family. The minute tonal differentiation that results gives these faces their pasty complexions and further flattens the claustrophobic space in the paintings."[174]

Ulrich Loock describes Tuymans paintings as "pictures of empty rooms" and concludes that the use of "mostly faded colours and inordinate use of wet-in-wet" contributes to the paintings having the "weakness of an after image". Loock invokes Walter Benjamin's "gaze of the melancholic" and the "*facies Hippocratica*" to underscore his opinion that they are signs that portend loss.[175]

The image Tuymans often choses is a synecdoche - a fragment that stands in for the whole. This adds a crucial sense of incompletion even to a related cycle of his work and invokes the idea of a partial remembering. Finally, Nancy Spector draws attention to Tuymans' fondness for the presence of physical traces of what has previously transpired. His painting technique reinforces these indicators of things past; "the passage of time and all that accompanies it – absence, loss, memory and death – are inseparable from the signifying role of the index and its intrinsically melancholic nature."[176]

Tuymans was invited to represent Belgium at the 2001 Venice Biennale and he painted a series of works, *Mwana Kitoko – Beautiful White Man 2000-2001*, dealing with the murky overthrow of newly elected Prime Minister Lumumba[177] and the granting of independence to the Belgian Congo. By focusing on the objects and buildings that were the silent witnesses rather than trying to depict the actual events[178] Tuymans involves the viewer more. If the viewer knows the history then the series will provide the meaning, otherwise he has to piece together the meaning from researching the context for the images. For example in *Chalk*, 2000 [Fig. 3], the murdered Patrice Lumumba appears

[174] Kantor, Jordan *The Tuymans Effect* Artforum International, November 2004

[175] "They are pictures of empty rooms, of isolated things, pictures of a world that is frozen beneath the gaze, shattered, deathly still. Walter Benjamin defines the gaze wherein the world appears as a collection of dead fragments as the gaze of the melancholic. The representational form of his world is allegory, which Benjamin compares with the symbol. He resists traditional and inadequate definitions of allegory, seeing it only as an exemplification, a picture to be deciphered for its concept, a hieroglyph. 'While in the symbol, with the transfiguration of decline, the transfigured face of nature fleetingly reveals itself in the light of salvation, in the allegory of the 'facies hippocratica' of history lies beneath the eyes of the viewer as a petrified primal landscape. The history of everything about it that is untimely, sorrowful or doomed forms itself into a face – no a skull.'" NB. The **facies Hippocratica** is the change produced in the face by impending death and the patient's facial appearance may be described thus: the nose sharp, the eyes sunken, the temples fallen in, the ears cold and drawn in and their lobes distorted, the skin of the face hard, stretched and dry, and the colour of the face pale or dusky.... Loock, Ulrich "On layers of sign relations..." Luc Tuymans 2007 Phaidon, London **56**

[176] Spector, Nancy "The Unforgiving Trace" Luc Tuymans 2007 Phaidon, London **101**

[177] "Lumumba was the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the independent Republic of Congo in 1960. He later became caught in the struggle between East and West for African domination during the Cold War, and his brutal murder in 1961 has been linked to the CIA and the Belgian Government."
http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/tuymans/room10.htm Last Accessed 18 March 2011

[178] For example like '*El tres de mayo de 1808 en Madrid*'.

only in the form of two teeth held in a pair of black gloved hands.[179] Tuymans does not even give any clue to the meaning behind the image with the title he chose, but through this tiny detail the horror of the atrocious events takes root in the individual memory.

So even more than Richter, Tuymans uses a number of strategies to distance himself and the viewer from the original image, but his purpose is different. A number of critics have remarked that although Richter wants to expose the unspoken in his '*Oktober 18, 1977*' cycle he is essentially looking for catharsis,[180] whereas Tuymans wants confrontation without sorrow. He states that he wants to remain indifferent[181] to his subjects creating what he terms an "authentic forgery".[182] By this I think he acknowledges that the work is introspective and about feelings, but that the artist doesn't reveal a sense of self, or identity in his paintings.

The wet-in-wet brushwork and faded palette definitely contributes to his work being consistently melancholic. His paintings signify classic cases of blocked mourning - addressing the trauma of loss rather than the therapeutic resolution of mourning. [183]

4.1.4 Juxtaposition of Strong Acidic Colour – Van Gogh & Brown

In his writings Mark Rothko[184] has a number of observations to make about the deterioration in the use of bright colour since the time of Giotto which he attributes to the discovery of perspective and the subsequent desire of the artist to illustrate the illusion of depth of space through tonality.[185] Rothko also notes the effect of the prevalence of colour harmony and that "instead of affecting the emotions sensually by the interaction of colours, the artist affected mood through the pervasion of the entire surface by a single colour mood…"[186] I mention this by way of introduction because in the middle of the 19th Century not only did low cost reliable pigments become readily available, but colour theory advanced from a reliance on Newton's discovery of spectral colours. Whilst researching colour classification for a dye maker, French chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul put

---

[179] Three days after Lumumba's assassination his body was exhumed and dissolved in an acid bath and one of the Belgian secret service agents admitted to having personally saved three of his victim's teeth.
Reust, Hans Rudolf "In the dark regions of the World" Parkett #60 2000 **154**
[180] Reust, Hans Rudolf "In the dark regions of the World" Parkett #60 2000 **154**
[181] Aliaga, Juan Vincente "Interview" Luc Tuymans 2007 Phaidon, London **26**
[182] "With the idea of a 'painting of memory', Tuymans returns to the concept of the 'authentic forgery' as a condition of painting. Since painting, like memory, is fundamentally belated, it is false in its relationship towards its past object, but authentic as its inadequate - and thus autonomous representation."
Loock, Ulrich "On layers of sign relations…" Luc Tuymans 2007 Phaidon, London **34**
[183] "In flagrant disregard for modernism, Tuymans reaffirms the idea that the meaning is more important than the picture."
Loock, Ulrich "On layers of sign relations…" Luc Tuymans 2007 Phaidon, London **38**
[184] Rothko, Mark The Artists Reality: Philosophies of Art 2004 Thomas Shore, USA **38-42**
[185] "A painter was not interested in giving the sensation of colourfulness, but rather the sensation of the recession of colour, that is in its various intervals of grey as it receded."
Rothko, Mark The Artists Reality: Philosophies of Art 2004 Thomas Shore, USA **38**
[186] Rothko, Mark The Artists Reality: Philosophies of Art 2004 Thomas Shore, USA **38**

forwards a set of fundamental principles[187] that would have a profound influence on the development of painting in France and elsewhere. Chevreul found that the apparent brightness of a particular colour depended more on the colours surrounding it than on its intensity and that the effect was most marked when the pair were complimentary colours: a red next to a green.[188] As a result of this pioneering work a change in artist's perception and treatment of colour contrasts and harmonies took place in the 1850s, noticeable in the work of Delacroix at the time and subsequently in that of the Impressionists.

This change took hold in Paris and by autumn 1884, Theo van Gogh wrote to his brother Vincent to tell him that it was hard to sell Vincent's dark pictures in Paris where modern painters were using a much brighter palette.[189] Van Gogh was clearly struggling to understand what his brother meant by impressionism and when he arrived out of the blue in Paris in 1886 he was shocked by their work and but was attracted to the painting of Delacroix.[190] Despite this initial reaction he quickly assimilated ideas ranging from the expressive power of a heavily loaded free brush stroke, the advanced colour theories of Chevreul as practised by Pissarro and Seurat, and the use of non-realistic exaggerated colours from Gauguin.

Experimenting with neo-impressionist techniques he developed a loose 'Cloisonist'[191] or 'Synthetist' style of painting, often using large, bold and expressive brush strokes that created their own patterns in relief on the surface.

This style rejected optical mixing of colour for intense turbulent monochrome areas where the hue varied slightly form one stroke to the next.[192]

After his move to Arles in Provence he produced over 100 paintings exploring the use of colour including *'Night Café'* 1888 [Fig. 4]. He describes the night café as "a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad, commit a crime"[193] and in December, after a quarrel with Gauguin it was here he cut off a piece of his ear. It is probably the prime example of his use of colour to locate meaning in

---

[187] "In the case where the eye sees at the same time two contiguous colours, they will appear as dissimilar as possible, both in their optical composition and in the height of their tone"
An 1839 publication by Michel Eugène Chevreul quoted in Bomford, David et al Art in the Making: Impressionism 1990 Yale UP London **87**
[188] Chervreul also defined successive contrasts of colours, "whereby the eye, having looked at a patch of colour for a time, perceives the complimentary colour on looking away." He cites the work of Scherffer, published in 1754, who correctly proposes that the effect was caused by retinal fatigue. This may relate to the feelings of nausea induced by certain colour juxtapositions.
Bomford, David et al Art in the Making: Impressionism 1990 Yale UP London **87**
[189] De Leeuw, Ronald The Letters of Vincent van Gogh 1996 Penguin Books, London **283**
[190]Zwikker, Roelie "Colour and Japonisme" The Real Van Gogh 2010 Royal Academy of Arts, London **94**
[191] The term comes from *cloisons*, French for compartments, and is a style of painting developed by Louis Anquetin and Emil Bernard based upon Japanese ceramics whose surface is divided by continuous metal strips. Bernard was interested in the expressive power of colour treated as a unified plane and *Synthetism* is the use of areas of non-naturalistic colour in a similar manner, favoured by Gauguin after befriending Bernard in 1888.
Dorra, Henri Symbolist Art Theories 1995 University of California Press, London **177**
[192] Dorra, Henri Symbolist Art Theories 1995 University of California Press, London **212**
[193] http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let677/letter.html#translation Last Accessed 26 March 2011

an emotional state of what van Gogh called an "ardent temperament".[194] Unfortunately I did not see *'The Night Café'* when it was exhibited briefly in Amsterdam in 2009 especially as ownership disputes and the fragility of the painting rarely allows the work to travel from the Yale University gallery in New Haven, Connecticut. Consequently I give van Gogh's description of this powerful and melancholy work taken from his letters to his brother:

> "It often seems to me that the night is much more alive and richly coloured than the day. Now as for recovering the money paid to the landlord through my painting, I'm not making a point of it, because the painting is one of the ugliest I've done. It's the equivalent, though different, of the potato eaters.
>
> I've tried to express the terrible human passions with the red and the green.
>
> The room is blood-red and dull yellow, a green billiard table in the centre; there are four lemon yellow lamps with an orange and green glow. Everywhere it's a battle and an antithesis of the most different greens and reds; in the characters of the sleeping ruffians, small in the empty, high room, some purple and blue. The blood-red and the yellow-green of the billiard table, for example, contrast with the little bit of delicate Louis XV green of the counter, where there's a pink bouquet.
>
> The white clothes of the owner, watching over things from a corner in this furnace, become lemon yellow, pale luminous green."[195]
>
> "All of that in an ambience of a hellish furnace, in pale sulphur."[196]

So instead of a realist interpretation of what he sees, van Gogh has used "colour more arbitrarily in order to express"[197] himself forcefully. The juxtaposition of yellow and green[198] was favoured by portrait painters of the Elizabethan era[199] such as Nicholas Hilliard to express jealousy tinged with hope. He paints the night café as though it were a brimstone chamber in hell with the mirror on the wall behind the owner reflecting either flames or congealed blood. The seated occupants are sunk in attitudes of ennui or alcoholic depression while the clock floats above them, time permanently frozen at just past midnight. I do not think the setting or even the associations we have with the location and van Gogh that are the major force behind the painting's melancholic power. I believe this is rooted in the strong contrasting acidic colours, specifically the sense of nausea that the optical

---

[194] Describing the Night Café to his brother: "It's a colour, then, that isn't locally true from the realist point of view of *trompe l'oeil*, but a colour suggesting some emotion, an ardent temperament."
http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let676/letter.html#translation Last Accessed 26 March 2011
[195] http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let676/letter.html#translation Last Accessed 26 March 2011
[196] http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let677/letter.html#translation Last Accessed 26 March 2011
[197] De Leeuw, Ronald The Letters of Vincent van Gogh 1996 Penguin Books, London **390-91**
[198] With a green and yellow melancholy/She sat like patience on a monument/Smiling at grief.
Shakespeare, William "Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will" The Complete Works Odhams Press **89**
[199] Sarafianos, Aris The many colours of **black bile**: the melancholies of knowing and feeling 2005 Papers of Surrealism Issue 4 **5-6**

effect of the colour scheme induces. Even when the Impressionists used this effect with some subtlety to suggest shimmering, some critics felt uneasy in front of the paintings probably due to the *Opponent-Process Theory* of colour perception. The eye becomes rapidly 'fatigued' looking at any strong colour such that when looking away the colour persists briefly and is replaced by a negative after-image, which is always close to the compliment of the original colour.[200]

4.1.5 Conclusions

In a monochrome, black will have the strongest melancholic connotations through its association with the four humours, grief and mourning and the infinity of the dark void, but melancholy lends itself to a wide range of interpretations in representational works. Clearly the use of colour in the depiction of melancholy is far more varied than the traditional 'brown study' historically recommended to artists in 1725[201] and the associations asserted by Kandinsky in 1914 would suggest. In addition to those colours discussed in this section I could add examples of the "Red Melancholy" of desire such as *The Dancer Anita Berber,* 1925 by Otto Dix and *True Blond Draped,* 1999 by Lisa Yuskavage and the "White Melancholy" of ennui and oblivion epitomised by the bleak inner stillness sought by Jenny Diski in her book *Skating to Antarctica*[202] and that I felt in front of Michael Raedecker's triptych *Tipping Point,* 2007. There are also strong associations of blue with Melancholy both in music and the endless vastness of the ocean and the sky. Cold blues were a favourite colour of Edvard Munch, used for example to evoke twilight and by Adriana Varejão in her immense painting of a tiled sauna *O Sedutor,* 2004.[203] In conclusion, if the artistic intention is to produce a melancholic painting, a variety of colours can be used with subtlety to help a painting convey melancholic "feelings," "emotions" and "thoughts" implying that melancholy does have visual correlates. The problem is how numerous and varied these correlations can be and I think that is due to the complexity of melancholy itself. Clearly the use of black or sombre palette is readily interpreted by the viewer as melancholic, even if this isn't the artist's intention. Wanting to get beyond these symbolic associations I explore the infinite variations and juxtapositions that are possible through the use of transparent and strong acidic colour in my practical study looking for unusual combinations with melancholic correlation.

---

[200] Explained by the Young-Helmholz theory of colour perception, as modified by German physiologist Ewald Hering. It is interesting that Hering's **Opponent-process theory** for colour vision became a universal psychological and neurological model that was expanded to explain addictive and emotional behaviour by his co-worker at the University of Pennsylvania, Richard Solomon. Unfortunately this study of mood swings is beyond the scope of my research.
Mueller, Conrad G. Light and Vision 1969 Time Incorporated **122-123**

[201] "The colouring of a picture must be varied according to the subject, the time and place. If the subject be grave, melancholy, or terrible, the general tinct of the colouring must incline to brown, black, or red and gloomy; but be gay and pleasant in subjects of joy and triumph."
Richardson, Jonathan An essay on the Theory of Painting 1725 1971 Scolar Press, England **154**

[202] "White hospital sheets seemed to hold out the promise of what I really wanted: a place of safety, a white oblivion."
Diski, Jenny Skating to Antarctica 2005 Virago Press, London **2**

[203] Apart from *Night in Saint Cloud* all other paintings mentioned are reviewed in Appendix 1 Pgs. 23, 72 & 101.

4.2 Expressive Mark Making

Since the time of Vasari[204] art has been conceived as a progressive unfolding narrative.[205] So before looking at the work of Contemporary artists it is important to consider the historical development of expressive mark making as a vehicle for carrying or enhancing meaning in painting. Realism derived from the ancient art of Greece became the defining characteristic of Western Art under the Academic rules governing both the content and performance of art that were developed from Renaissance theory. The importance of mimesis[206] was such that, from the Greeks until the start of modernism,[207] the view was held that a painting should not look as if it was painted. In fact most written criticism of paintings tends to focus on the meanings[208] of the represented subjects rather than on the modes of representation i.e. the painterly mark.[209] Where gesture is discussed it tends to be in the context of attributing work to an artist. Nevertheless it is accepted that "once the personality of an artist was admitted as a factor determining the character of a work of art, as it was increasingly during the Renaissance, art could function more openly as a means of self-revelation".[210] Whilst Vasari doesn't quite go this far, he does acknowledge the development of artistic individuality, even making some perceptive comments about the painterly technique in the later works by Titian for example.[211]

This association of painterly identity with loose free brush-work continues through Tintoretto, Rubens, Velazquez, Hals, Boucher, Gainsborough, Fragonard, Delacroix, Manet, and Van Gogh and into the 20th Century. To the knowledgeable spectator each of the artists can be identified by their

---

[204] Giorgio Vasari, an apprentice of Michaelangelo is usually taken to have 'invented' art history when he completed his *Lives of the Artists* in 1550 and this model roughly held sway until Greenberg evolved an approach to criticism based on physical attributes rather than on meaning.
Vasari, Giorgio trans. Julia Bondandella The Lives of the Artists 1998 Oxford UP

[205] Greenberg totally subscribed to a developmental progressive view of art history in which gains and breakthroughs were made in the advancement of art's goals.
Danto, Arthur C "Painting, Politics and Post-Historical Art" After the End of Art 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **137**

[206] The Classic story tells of a painting competition between two Greek artists. Zeuxis showed his work first and was proud that his skill with the paint was good enough to deceive the birds into trying to peck at the grapes painted on his canvas. Zeuxis revelled in the praise lavished on him by Parrhasios for his skill, but then remembered that he had yet to see his rivals work. He asked him to remove the veil over the painting so that he could judge his skill. Parrhasios replied that the painting was of a veil, and the deceived Zeuxis had no choice but to declare Parrhasios the winner.

[207] Danto describes the 'project' of the modernist phase of art as trying to achieve increasingly adequate attainments of its pure state.
Danto, Arthur C "Painting, Politics and Post-Historical Art" After the End of Art 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **136**

[208] Pre-Greenberg critics preferred to write about semantics (the study of meaning: the relation between signifiers, such as words, phrases, signs and symbols) and what they stand for, rather than syntax (principles, methods and rules).
Danto, Arthur C "Painting and the Pale of History" After the End of Art 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **108**

[209] Certainly scholars working from photographs would attenuate the physical characteristics that might be seen in the actual painting, but even more obviously painterly sketches are usually only discussed in terms of preparation for an academic work.

[210] Lynton, Norbert "Expressionism" Concepts of Modern Art 2001 Thames & Hudson, London **30**

[211] He commends Titian for the verisimilitude of his early work "such that hairs were so well distinguished from one another that they could be counted" but also praises his last works that "are executed with such large and bold brush-strokes and in such bold outlines that they cannot be seen from close up, but appear perfect from a distance"
Vasari, Giorgio trans. Julia Bondandella The Lives of the Artists 1998 Oxford UP **490-491, 504**

individual styles and their work is spread over several historical periods, yet they are unified by their use of painterly marks 're-presenting'[212] their artistic intentions on canvas.

Having found a new sense of identity in the wake of photography's assimilation of the task of mimesis,[213] painting then had to contend with the modernist trajectory from Aleksandr Rodchenko's declaration in 1921 that his three monochrome paintings were the last paintings through to Greenberg and Crimp. Greenberg overlooks the mark as one of painting's intrinsic qualities, but does talk about 'painterly'. Expression was 'out'; concept and art as a self-referring object was 'in' and there was no shortage of artists attempting to distance themselves from painterly touch in their work e.g. Robert Ryman's black paintings are painted with a 12" brush, and use the mark as mechanical means to cover surface in paint. Ironically it is the exploration of the expressive qualities of the mark (Neo-expressionism) that heralds the survival of painting from the 'end game' discourse, but in the Post-Modern world the mark may be knowingly made rather than a genuine expression of an emotion.

The two artists who in retrospect inspired painters to challenge the restrictions placed on painting were Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Rauschenberg[214] took Duchamp as his mentor and made his own ready-mades from junk that he called combines. *Odalisk,* 1955-58 is intended as a parody of the harem nude favoured by French painters such as Ingres and Matisse. This combine comprises a box with pictures of pin-ups and classical nudes pasted to the sides, on a phallic post that pierces a cushion at the base, and surmounted by a cockerel; trails of white household paint over the nudes are the only evidence of painting. Johns also worked with objects in his paintings but took Magritte's 1928 painting *The Treason of Images*[215] as his starting point and made his theme the difference between signs and art. His best known paintings are of targets and flags, working them with encaustic wax to give an abstract painterly surface that held the attention rather than the target or flag as a sign. In *Target with Plaster Casts*, 1955, the five ringed target is topped with nine plaster casts of body parts each dipped in monochrome paint setting up a dialogue between the target (sign) as an expressive painting and the casts (signs) as a passive portrait.

The expressive mark (some directly appropriated) has become established as a source of self-reference within painting's armoury allowing concept and representation to co-exist. This re-

---

[212]Thematisation is by and large pursued so as to endow the resultant surface with content and/or meaning and consequently the artist is re-presenting his intentions. Also see section 3.1.2
Wollheim, Richard Painting as Art 1987 Thames & Hudson, London **19-22**
[213] The great traditional paradigm of the visual arts has been, in fact, that of mimesis, which served the theoretical purposes of art for several centuries.
Danto, Arthur C "Three Decades After the End of Art" After the End of Art 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **29**
[214] I discuss Rauschenberg's paintings *Factum I* and *Factum II* in Section 4.3.
[215] A painting of a pipe with the words "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" painted underneath. It is a magnificent statement about language, meaning, and symbols in images; because it reminds us we are looking at a painting of a pipe not a pipe.

presenting needn't be figurative as Johns demonstrated with his painting *Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1981[216], but to allow comparisons between the mimesis stemming from the Greek idealisation of the human form, the development of the use of expressive marks with psychological content and the knowing use of these expressive marks as a trope, I will focus on figurative examples grouped into two sections:

1. The first will focus on three artists who are adept at using paint not just for figurative representation, but as a material to symbolise what lies beneath the surface of the skin. They are also examples of painters working in different periods of radical change, when the freedom of artistic expression required viewers to adjust to new forms of representation. My choices increasingly utilise abstract marks that resolve themselves into a representation from a distance but revert to just marks close up. I am interested in whether this abstraction defers the reading of the painting leaving time (room) for the viewer to project emotion onto the image. It was in the Renaissance era when the skill of artists began to be acknowledged as individual intention rather than the dabbling of saints. In *Flaying of the Marsyas* Titian literally depicts the skinning of a figure through dramatic use of colour and handling of paint. As freedom from patronage increased artists began to experiment with new ideas only to be rebuffed by the 'old order' as suffering from pretensions that outstripped their ability. Eduard Manet following in the wake of photography cut himself off from the academic style of the day and forged an independent painterly style that caused a scandal with paintings such as *Olympia* but led to recognition by many[217] as the founder of Modernism in art. Finally Jenny Saville, a contemporary artist following in the footsteps of the British figurative tradition that had persisted with the idiom as a vehicle for emotional meaning despite the ascendency of abstract expressionism in the mid-20th Century.

2. The second section features three artists I am interested in as pioneers of expressive marks used to express angst in different ways; from directly as the artist paints, through the knowing use of irony to self-reference, but is not intended as a history of expressive mark making. The first section covers the early work of Norwegian painter Edvard Munch and in particular his painting *The Sick Child* and how his work evolved to distort likeness in order to express feelings of angst. His distortions of nature almost bordered on caricature but his passion about trying to express genuine emotion was such that his marks and those of Vincent van Gogh became a language adopted by subsequent artists. After World War II this use of expressive marks was adopted by

---

[216] Johns used a cross-hatched motif from Munch's *Self Portrait: Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1940-43 as the inspiration for this abstract work.

[217] "Manet's became the first Modernist pictures by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the flat surfaces on which they were painted".

Greenberg, Clement "Modernist Painting" in <u>Modern Art and Modernism</u> ed. Fascina & Harrison 1986 Harpers and Row Ltd, London **6**

the Abstract Expressionists for non-figurative ends as signifiers of a spontaneous style. This assimilation of marks into style began to be parodied by artists such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and David Salle[218] and I discuss the work of Philip Guston who stopped abstract painting and exiled himself, retreating to drawing nothing except rudimentary shapes and forms. These evolve into full blown figurative paintings done in a grotesque cartoon form that expressed emotions ranging self-loathing to dissatisfaction with the doctrine of Abstract Expressionism. Glenn Brown takes this a stage further with his paintings based on photographic reproductions of paintings by other artists. He interrogates the orthodoxy of Abstract Expressionism by replicating the tropes of expressionism without spontaneity, but with a meticulously painted, totally flat surface. He demonstrates a passion for painting, but his technique is cool and detached. Despite this lack of spontaneous activity, his reflective images carry meaning albeit in a different way to Munch and Guston.

4.2.1 New Realities

Painting has proved adept at shifting towards a more subjective interpretation of reality; from Renaissance images valued for transcending experience, through the complex illusionism of a Velázquez, to Manet's flattening of the image to achieve a more visual immediacy and to a contemporary use of the materiality of paint to evoke sensuality. Today it is common to refer to a contemporary figurative work of art as realistic that would have been incomprehensible 150 years ago but that has as much to do with the signs[219] that refer to bodily awareness and social existence as the shallowness of the painter's modelling or the thickness of the paint. However, familiarity allows the language of a painting can be quickly decoded and I am interested in whether abstraction in a figurative painting defers understanding leaving time for the viewer to project emotion onto the image. The more time consuming the reception the more symbiotic it is with a sense of melancholy, allowing time for thoughts to percolate and the viewer to be properly affected by the work rather than simply distracted.

---

[218] I don't discuss Salle further but I am thinking of his painting *'Tennyson'*, 1983 which among other motifs includes a found wooden relief of an ear that is attached to the left side. It is intended as homage to the Jasper Johns painting *'Tennyson'*, 1958 and references objects found in John's work, but seems more like an emphatic reminder of the true passion of van Gogh.

[219] Jaques Lacan explains the importance of the difference between the lure of the symbol and the trick of trompe l'oeil in his interpretation of the painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasios : "If the birds rushed to the surface on which Zeuxis had deposited his dabs of colour, taking the picture for edible grapes, let us observe that such an undertaking does not imply in the least that the grapes were admirably reproduced like those we can see in a basket held by Caravaggio's *Bacchus* in the Uffizi. If the grapes had been painted in this way, it is not very likely that the birds would have been deceived, for why should birds see grapes portrayed with such extraordinary verisimilitude? There would have to be something more reduced, something closer to the sign, in representing grapes for the birds. But the opposite example of Parrhasios makes it clear that if one wants to deceive a man, what one presents to him is a painting of a veil, that is something that incites him to ask what is behind it."
Lacan, Jacques The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis 1994 Penguin Books **111-2**

4.2.1.1 Testing the Boundaries of Perception - Titian

As Arthur C Danto observes in the introduction to *After the End of Art*, devotional images in the Christian West before c1400 "were not considered as having been produced by artists – human beings putting marks on surfaces – but were regarded as having a miraculous provenance…"[220] The concept of the artist became established in the Renaissance and it was during this period that the tableau came to epitomise the pinnacle of Western Painting. These paintings were of historical, religious and mythological subjects and incorporated the understanding of the rules of perspective to translate three dimensions onto a flat surface.

Titian is rightly considered one of the great masters of this period and style of painting and I have chosen to examine the *Flaying of the Marsyas*, 1570-76 [Fig. 5]. I always recognised in his work the superb deftness of touch and use of glazes, but in this painting the paint is palpably like flesh; one of his latest works and one of his greatest.

The painting depicts Ovid's account of the punishment of the satyr Marsyas for daring to challenge Apollo to a flute contest and then losing. Titian paints a life sized Marsyas paying his forfeit by being hung upside down and flayed alive, with a self-portrait of himself as Midas judging the contest. Midas, once a student of Orpheus, is painted in the classic pose used throughout history to evoke creative thought as well as melancholy. Orpheus' music possibly represents a cure for Midas' melancholic despair as his unseeing eyes stare blankly downward at the pool of blood on the ground, bound to the terrestrial reality in front of him. His own mortality horribly emphasised by the small cute dog hungrily lapping up the spilt blood. Venice was stricken with the plague in 1576 and Titian died in August of that year.

The setting and grouping of the painting in the gallery added to its' melancholic aspect in the exhibition where I saw it for the first time. Hung high on the wall between the *Death of Actaeon* and *Tarquin and Lucretia* our gaze is level with Marsyas' eyes. We look closely to see if he has found a way to transcend the inherent horror of what is happening to him as a result of his hubris. So much about this painting is brilliant.

The theatre and oppressive intensity created by the closeness of the figures to the front of the picture plane, Titian's vibrant brushwork almost as violent as the subject and the fact that up close the image dissolves into just paint with the figure and ground almost indistinguishable. It would be wrong to speculate that Titian's direct and spontaneous marks are personal and expressive of his

---

[220] Danto, Arthur C "Introduction" <u>After the End of Art</u> 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **3**

experience of personal tragedy[221] but they do contribute to the sensation of melancholia suggested by the narrative of the myth depicted.

The painting has rightly been seen as a meditation on mortality and human suffering, it is also a huge source of inspiration to anyone wanting to coalesce a body of brush strokes into the illusion of flesh.

Titian is acknowledged as a master picture maker and the *Flaying of Marsyas* is a classic example of the Western Picture that was to become institutionalised as the Academic style. These Academies of Art were set up to train aspiring artists in the principles of picture making using a very rigid system of education which unfortunately wasn't always conducive to creating something fresh, mobile, light and fascinating as Titan's masterpiece. This studio based art featuring a reduced palette and restricted subject matter held sway until the mid. 19th Century when their methods began to be challenged by a number of artists in response to technological advances and changing social circumstances.

4.2.1.2 Breaking Free from the Academy - Manet

So when Éduoard Manet declared his intention not to follow in his father's footsteps and become an artist not a lawyer, he declined his father's help in getting a place at the École des Beaux-Arts and enrolled in the independent studio of Thomas Couture in Paris. Couture was academically trained but a political liberal who despite his modern views criticised Manet for his independence.[222] Georges Bataille in his book on Manet quotes Baudelaire's view of Couture's immense salon painting *The Romans during the Decadence*, 1847 [Fig. 6] as a bunch of wretches posing in costumes with improvised leers believing they were enacting a colourful piece of ancient history that represented an allegory of contemporary French society. Manet was ill at ease often criticising the stiff poses of the life models, but whatever the problems, he remained in the studio for six years until 1856. He certainly learnt valuable skills there but drew his inspiration from Titian not the academic style of Couture; it was not the majestic old forms in their prime that he rejected, but the pale sterile shadow of them that remained.[223]

Like many French painters[224] in the 1850s, Manet was looking for a fresh 'voice' that spoke of his times and this meant breaking with the Academy which was opposed to innovation. Manet travelled extensively in Europe and looked to the paintings of the old masters for support but was consumed

---

[221] Titian's daughter Lavinia died in 1661.

[222] Rubin, James Manet 2010 Flamarrion, Paris **19**

[223] Bataille describes Couture as an "academic painter of the dreariest kind" and the painting as a "finicking, supremely insipid piece of painting preening itself in all the vulgar ostentation of the 'grand manner'". In other words, it might aspire to Jacques Louis David's '*Oath of the Horatii*', but it doesn't rise above soft pornography appealing to the popular ideals and tastes of bourgeois sponsors.
Bataille, Georges Manet: A Biographical and Critical Study 1955 Skira, New York **56-7**

[224] Courbet is the most obvious example with his Realist Manifesto in which he encourages artists to recognise no authority, but to draw on a tradition of "reasoned and independent consciousness". He echoes the role of personal expression developed in Romanticism but restricts himself to subject matter from the real world.
Nochlin, Linda Courbet 2007 Thames & Hudson, London **114**

by an aspiration to be a 'painter of modern life' that was fed on Baudelaire's poetry.[225] Larry Ligo, in his dissertation on the influence of Baudelaire on Manet, crucially asserts that it was Baudelaire's aesthetic that was to lead Manet to adopt a 'photographic' look in his paintings. He goes on to suggest that not only did Manet adopt the tropes of the photographic studio (plain background, stark lighting) but also the imperfections of the photographs of the time (inability to produce half-tones, incorrect colour rendition turning darks to lights).[226]

Clement Greenberg was very keen on the translation to flatness[227] in Manet's work and for Greenberg it was Manet that deflected the art of painting from its representational agenda to one in which the means of representation became the object of representation. "Manet's became the first Modernist pictures by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the flat surfaces on which they were painted".[228]

Foucault also saw Manet as a turning point in representational painting: "Manet certainly did not invent non-representational painting since everything in his work is representational. However, he incorporated the basic material elements of painting into representation. He was on the brink of inventing the picture as object, the painting as object. This was basically the pre-requisite for being able to liberate oneself entirely from representation and allow the surface to play exclusively with its properties, the physical or material properties."[229]

My interest in the photographic references in Manet's work lies not only with his adoption of the Baudelairien aesthetic, his dissatisfaction with the academic 'craft' and the consequent emphasis on the materiality of the paint in his marks, but also with the fact that the resulting paintings appeared incomplete and required the viewer to begin to use his imagination to resolve the image and grasp the pictorial meaning.

The obvious example of Manet's work to examine would be *Olympia*, 1863 [Fig. 7] and compare the painting style to that of his inspiration, Titian's reclining nude, the *Venus of Urbino* circa 1538. It definitely contains a lot of Baudelairien symbolism such as the figure's excessive slimness, the shameless display, the stare, satin slippers and of course the black cat[230] but despite this I didn't find

[225] Bataille, Georges Manet: A Biographical and Critical Study 1955 Skira, New York **19**
[226] Ligo, Larry Manet, Baudelaire and Photography 2006 Edward Mellon Press, **79**
[227] Flatness, the consciousness of paint and brushstroke, the rectangular shape – all of them 'non-mimetic' features of what may have been residually mimetic paintings – displaced perspective, foreshortening, chiaroscuro as the progress points of a developmental sequence. "The essence of Modernism lies as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence."
Clement Greenberg cited in Danto, Arthur C "Introduction" After the End of Art 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **7-8**
[228] Clement Greenberg cited in Danto, Arthur C "Introduction" After the End of Art 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **7**
[229] From unpublished notes of a lecture given in Tunisia in 1971 Le noir et couleur cited in Gingeras, Alison M ed, "Luc Tuymans interviewed by Sabine Folie" 'Dear Painter, paint me...': Painting the Figure since late Picabia 2002 Centre Pompidou, Paris **120**
[230] Larry Ligo quotes extensively from the most complete discussion of the Baudelairien implications of Olympia by Jean Ravenel published in 1865 in a paper called L'Epoque.
Ligo, Larry Manet, Baudelaire and Photography 2006 Edward Mellon Press **329-335**

it a particularly melancholic painting.[231] Manet was in a more positive frame of mind when *Olympia* was conceived and painted, but I think it is more to do with the subject being easy to read by today's standards despite the deep shadows and absence of half tones.

One often overlooked melancholy note is the subtle way Manet introduces the duality of the language of flowers. He paints *Olympia* with an orchid in her hair and the maid presenting a bouquet of cut flowers presumably from an admirer. For Bataille the look of something can also hide another message and in his essay *The Language of Flowers*[232] he sees delicacy and beauty of the flower betraying its signification of death; so that when "we proffer flowers to a loved one, we are at the same time presenting a memento mori".[233]

I first saw *Branch of White Peonies and Pruning Shears*, 1864 [Fig. 8] at an exhibition at the National Gallery, London in December 2000 and subsequently in the Museé D'Orsay in Paris. It is only small and I was impressed by how few brush marks Manet had used to execute the painting yet still convey the subject. It is on a brown background that in accordance with French Academic principles recedes in tone to give depth, and is of two cut white peony stems and the pruning shears. The flower heads are a combination of fat pure white pigment and a limited use of white mixed with green-grey and yellow-grey. They are set up on a table, the edge of which is parallel to the bottom of the canvas, suggesting a studio set up with ambiguous space rather than the defined space of a living room.

As Richard Brettell notes in the catalogue for the exhibition the painted marks are countable, each mark representing an individual flower petal. In Brettell's opinion, Manet must have 'rehearsed and rehearsed' the brush-marks before he could paint such a 'self-consciously gestural masterpiece'. This technique is totally at odds with the classical use of line as exemplified by Ingres[234] and taught at the Academy.[235] Manet uses the strokes of colour to describe form, giving the flower heads mass rather than just a pleasing hue. James Rubin describes Manet's colourist approach as 'paralleling nature free of academic recipes'. He goes on to elaborate that 'by combining line and colour, it combined hand and eye' – that is, it was a way of seeing transposed materially to the canvas. In

[231] What it did do was attract a lot of negative and hostile comment that certainly intensified Manet's severe depression in 1885. In 1863 Manet reacted so badly to criticism that he stopped painting until 1864, and early in 1865 he destroyed several paintings and resigned from the Societé Nationale Des Beaux-Arts. "In 1865, the ordinary practices of his [Manet's] life changed [significantly]. He went less often to the Café Guerbois. He spent hours in his apartment doing nothing. When he did leave his wife [in the morning] he rarely went to the studio. One often found him taking long aimless walks to dissipate his boredom."
Proust, A Eduoard Manet: Souvenirs 1913 **48** cited in Ligo, Larry Manet, Baudelaire and Photography 2006 Edward Mellon Press **361** and Letter from Manet to Baudelaire cited in Ligo, Larry Manet, Baudelaire and Photography 2006 Edward Mellon Press **361**
[232] Bataille, Georges First published in the surrealist magazine Documents, in 1929
[233] Cooke, Nigel The ambivalence of the undead: entropy, duality and the sublime as perspectives on contemporary painting 2006 University of London **29**
[234] Ingres was profoundly respectful of the past, in particular the style of Raphael and assumed the role of a guardian of academic orthodoxy against the ideas of colour and form practiced by Delacroix. One only has to compare his various sterile Odalesques with Manet's Olympia to see how much Manet was transgressing the Academic principles.
[235] Rubin, James Manet 2010 Flamarrion, Paris **126**

Rubin's opinion that very materiality endowed it with 'the ability to act like nature, to affect the viewer psychologically, like music (however disharmonious), rather than, as in narrative art, intellectually'.[236]

Larry Ligo explains that the choice of peonies as a subject could have a melancholic significance. In addition to its curative powers, Ligo writes that 'the peony was thought to be particularly helpful in healing certain mental disorders, such as nightmares, epilepsy and melancholy'.[237] Ligo also sees the paintings of peonies as having Baudelairien overtones on account of being innately dualistic and being manifestations of death-in-life. On the one hand the flowers are believed to have curative powers and are 'symbols of longevity', yet being cut flowers they represent 'an age old symbol of transience'.[238] It is possible of course that Manet just liked peonies and wanted to paint some from his garden but Ligo ties this sudden interest to the period in his life when he was emotionally troubled and makes capital over the inclusion of the pruning shears – 'the counterpoint of the scythe of the grim reaper, who passes without warning cutting life short'.[239] So for him the 'death-in-life portrayed in Manet's still lives does not represent, as in ordinary *vanitas* paintings, death's ultimate victory; rather, Manet's peony paintings represent the eternal struggle between life and death in the human soul which, according to Baudelaire, leads ultimately to a state of melancholy'.

I do read the painting as a melancholic metaphor and accept that this may have guided his choice of flower for this series of still lives, but most interesting is his use of fast and apparently spontaneous gesture to render the subject without feeling the need to paint half tones. According to Darian Leader, mourning is a long arduous process of separating the image of the lost loved one from the place it held in the unconscious. The loss leaves an opaque hole in our physical world, a point of emptiness and loss that eludes ready visualisation. The non-representational element in a work of art is perhaps the closest a melancholic can come to sensing the 'lost object'[240] and consequently the incompleteness in Manet's paintings implied he could make sense out of an inferred experience of loss.

I am wary of putting ideas before the art, but I think the struggle Manet had to gain recognition did make him a melancholic and that this is a factor in not only his choice of subject, but is evident in the

---

[236] Rubin, James <u>Manet</u> 2010 Flamarrion, Paris **126**
[237] The word Peony derives from Paeon, the Greek god of healing and the balm that he used in his ministrations was made of a flower that later took his name. Whist I did find references that ground peony seeds were taken in the Middles Ages as a preventative against bad and melancholy dreams there is only a passing reference in Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, whereas several herbs do get a specific mention along with the flower Marigold, which is 'much approved against melancholy, and often used therefore in our ordinary broth, as good against this and many other diseases'.
Burton, Robert <u>Anatomy of Melancholy</u> 2001 NYRB, New York **Part II Section IV p215-6**
[238] Ligo also quotes extensively from a description of the Manet peony paintings by André Fraigneau which highlights the *vanitas* aspects of the theme.
Ligo, Larry <u>Manet, Baudelaire and Photography</u> 2006 Edward Mellon Press **363-4**
[239] Ligo, Larry <u>Manet, Baudelaire and Photography</u> 2006 Edward Mellon Press **362-4**
[240] Leader, Darian <u>The New Black</u> 2008 Hamish Hamilton **132-3**

way he painted.[241] There is a tension between the outward appearance of the peonies and shears as things and Manet's subjective response that although it was probably rehearsed makes explicit a sensation as well as a narrative. The acid test is that had the flowers been painted in an Academic manner by Manet's friend Henri Fantin-Latour, would I find them more or less melancholic and the answer has to be less so and this has to be connected to the 'abstract' nature of his marks.

4.2.1.3 Return to Painting - Saville

In 1863 Baudelaire had based his treatise "The Painter of Modern Life" on the illustrator Constantin Guys, but it was Manet who tried the hardest to explore the reality of being such an artist. In the middle of the 20th Century Abstract Expressionism emerged as a radical stance within the Modernist discourse, one that was supported by Greenberg and others as America's first world class art. Greenberg, part of the intellectual elite was a powerful arbiter of taste and denigrated the use of the human figure as being connected with narrative and thus outside of painting's area of competence.[242]   Failure to acknowledge this essentialist 'doctrine' condemned artists to carping provincialism, but still some artists[243] did continue to paint in defiance of the transcendent urges of abstract painting in favour of more pragmatic attempts to depict the human condition through figurative painting. Ironically it was Greenberg's ideology that led to what is known as the end game for painting[244] and it was figurative painting in the guise of neo-expressionism that led to a resurgence of interest in the discipline.

In the UK this "return to painting" finally began to attract some critical attention when a handful of painters were included in the 'Sensation' exhibition of works from the Charles Saatchi collection at the Royal Academy, London in 1997. Amongst these were the paintings of Jenny Saville, whose entire show had been purchased by Saatchi at the end of her postgraduate education at the Slade School of art in 1993.

These early works were of distorted women's bodies on huge canvases that used both a larger than life size image and tight framing to good effect. They were seen as disquieting by some and as reclaiming the female body from centuries of male painters by others. The use of a quote from

---

[241]Although not about Manet specifically, Roger Fry writing in the catalogue for the Post-Impressionist exhibition at Grafton Galleries in 1912, noted: "accusations of clumsiness and incapacity were freely made " by a public " which had come to admire above everything in a picture the skill with which the artist produced illusion (and which) represented an art in which such skill was completely subordinated to the **direct expression of feeling**". In his view the artists shown were "attempting to express … certain spiritual experiences"
Fry, Roger "The French Post-Impressionists" in <u>Modern Art and Modernism</u> ed. Fascina & Harrison 1986 Harpers and Row Ltd, London **89**
[242] Greenberg argued that the advance of modernist painting involves the progressive disappearance of figure in ground until the undifferentiated surface becomes the thing itself.
Greenberg, Clement "Modernist Painting" in <u>Modern Art and Modernism</u> ed. Fascina & Harrison 1986 Harpers and Row Ltd, London **6-9**
[243] E.g. Francis Bacon / Alice Neel / Georg Baselitz / Lucian Freud
[244] see Section 2.0 Death of Painting

deconstructionist theorist Luce Irigaray's call for a feminine symbolic[245] in one of the paintings ensured a lively dialogue from both feminist writers and upholders of tradition.   So on the one hand Sarah Kent wrote that Saville had 'claimed the female nude for her own sex' and experiences painting[246] with 'the same pangs of guilt engendered from eating forbidden foods',[247] whilst Brian Sewell carped at Saatchi's patronage, criticised the paint handling and brushwork, and commented that 'had the images been painted by a man, the feminist viragos of art and politics would have been in hysterical pursuit to rend him limb from limb'.[248]

By the time she was showing her work at the Gagosian Gallery in New York in 1999, the writing had become more measured and there was only one painting (*Hem* 1998-99) that referred directly to her earlier foreshortened giantesses. Now that the polemic had died down, the paint handling was getting as much praise as the concepts behind the images, even if Linda Nochlin commented that despite "the lush gouts of paint and the evocations of Rubens, Saville is at heart a conceptual artist".[249] Her next show, *Migrants*, at the Gagosian Gallery in 2003 provided further evidence of this development of her painterly skills. The painting *Pause,* 2002-3 [Fig. 9] was one of six paintings in the solo exhibition and although I haven't had chance to see it, I have seen a large self-portrait *Reverse* 2002-3[250] from the same exhibition that is painted in a very similar style.

Saville does not paint from life but instead composes paintings from images taken from photographs, medical textbooks and newspapers. She has even attended plastic surgery operations in order to see how flesh can be moved and manipulated. Nochlin refers to the "photographic images of the scarlet, painfully bloated torsos of burn victims"[251] that photographs of Saville's studio clearly show along with colour reproductions of Velasquez, Sargent and De Kooning, and I suspected correctly that this image is derived from an image of a horrific burn.

It depicts a semi-clad woman from the waist up who has been grasped on the arm by an unseen figure off the canvas to the right perhaps restraining her mid scream. The flesh on her face and left hand looks either raw or covered in blood. It looks like she has either been burnt or badly beaten. A cast shadow in the background of the image does gives a suggestion of depth but it is devoid of clear

---

[245] The sentence is scratched into the painted image in *Propped* in mirrored script and reads: "If we continue to speak in this sameness-speak as men have spoken for centuries, we will fail each other." It is a translation of a passage in Luce Irigaray's Ce Sexe Qui N'en est Pas Un (1997 Paris Minuit p205)
Quoted in Meagher, Michelle Jenny Saville and a Feminist Aesthetics of Disgust 2003 Hypatia, Vol. 18, No. 4, **25**

[246] Lest we forget "The feminist critique of painting as tainted, not just because of the overwhelming majority of 'masters' but because of all the sexist traits of manipulation, power, empiricism amid the possessive gaze is not so easily bypassed by Saville in her quest to join the tradition she loves."
Cohen, David Three Young Artists Spring 1994 Modern Painters **88-90**

[247] Kent, Sarah Shark Infested Waters. The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90s 1994 Zwemmer Books, London

[248] Sewell, Brian A Misogynous Regiment of Women 28 April 1994 Evening Standard

[249] Going on to say that "Saville's work actually has more in common with feminist performance art and imagery of the photographed body-object than with that of an old-time paint-slinger like (Lucien) Freud". No doubt meant as a compliment!
Nochlin, Linda Floating in Gender Nirvana March 2000 Art in America **94-97**

[250] **See Appendix 1**

[251] Nochlin Linda "Migrants" Saville 2005 Rizzoli International Publications Inc. **11**

narrative clues. The press release for the exhibition attributes this disturbing painting to how deeply the artist is influenced by current world events. I thought they were suggesting an influence from 9/11 but the source is a newspaper photograph of a half-clothed woman running from a suicide bomb in Israel. Instead of copying the photograph though, Saville has placed her own body into the situation and painted herself in the role of the victim. She achieves this through multiple compositional sketches done presumably with an overhead projector to rehearse her brush marks and experiment with the figure and its relationship with the ground.

It is painted with a mixture of thick and thin layers of paint with areas left as raw canvas recalling a modernist strategy whereby there should be evidence of the 'making' of the image and referencing the flatness of the surface. The effect is to make the figure and in particular the hands reach out to the viewer, which in turn is challenged by the occasional mark that goes across the form pinning it to the surface.[252] Like Cezanne she acknowledges that "each mark should have its own perspective"[253] and certainly each gesture and mark can be enjoyed individually in her work. Despite the scale of the painting, the brushwork is vigorous and energetic in passages, careful and refined in others. The larger than life size of her work means that close up in front of the painting we are only aware of the painted surface, seeing perhaps an abstract landscape, but stepping back the seemingly incoherent marks and colours resolve into a meaningful figure. The palette is predominately subtle variations of a few colours, not the morbid flesh tones of her early work, but bold vibrant reds that recall Degas and Velazquez.

Her work is often compared with Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud but she cites Willem De Kooning[254] whose extensive vocabulary provides her "textbook" of marks, and Velasquez where the materiality of the paint literally adds another dimension as key references.[255] Nochlin describes her brush work as "apotropaic" and notes her use of burn bandages to achieve subtle textures and reference the surface of the canvas itself[256] acknowledging that Saville is pushing painting into unexplored territories. She describes Saville's work as post-"post-painterly," wrenching this term out of its original Greenbergian context: "painterliness pushed so far over the top that it signifies a kind of

---

[252] Perhaps this is what Nochlin means by Saville's use of "ambiguous formal language"
Nochlin, Linda "Migrants" Saville 2005 Rizzoli International Publications Inc. **11**
[253] Scharma, Simon. "Interview with Jenny Saville"2005 Saville Rizzoli International Publications Inc. **124 - 127**
[254] In conversation with Suzie Mackenzie of the Guardian she explains her love of visceral artists that concentrate on the body "He's (de Kooning) really my man. He doesn't depict anything, yet it's more than representation, it's about the meaning of existence and pushing the medium of paint."
http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/oct/22/art.friezeartfair2005/print
[255] Schwabsky, Barry. "Jenny Saville: Unapologetic" Jenny Saville 2005 Macro Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome **103-105**
[256] Nochlin Linda "Migrants" Saville 2005 Rizzoli International Publications Inc. **11**

disease of the pictorial, a symptom of some deep disturbance in the relation of pigment to canvas".[257]

Donald Kuspit believes her works remind us that "not only are paintings more expressively alive than photographs…but that paint is a medium particularly suited to the rendering of human flesh, as Willem de Kooning suggested".[258] In her essay "Skinning the Paint", Emily Braun observes that Leon Kossoff "repeatedly applied the paint and scraped it off again, a skinning process that mimics the excoriation and regeneration of the epidermal layer".[259] Saville has described paint as human paste[260] suggesting that a further analogy can be made between not only the painter's palette knife and the skinning knife in Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas* but in her case with seeing the surgeon's knife wielded in cosmetic surgery operations she has witnessed. In her interview with Barry Schwabsky she said there was "immense conviction in making the pictures for *Migrants*, and an element of self-loathing" and "I'm interested in the pathology of painting, in that you put something down that's ugly and make it desirable."[261] As Saville points out in conversation talking about a face damaged by a car crash: "Your eye tries to piece together the wholeness you are comfortable with — there's an attempt by the eye to repair, it's an instinctive action born out of fear of breakdown or formlessness."[262]

Painting flesh, as Emily Braun puts it, "dissects the physiology of perception by foregrounding and intensifying the experience of form coming into being, seemingly out of the most random correlations."[263]   But Schwabsky's observation about the conflict between the paint and the represented flesh in Saville's paintings is perhaps the most apposite. They are based on a twofold relation to the body: the image as a representation of it and the material as a metaphor for it. The two are never given in perfect synchronicity, although they can sometimes reinforce each other, there is always a tension between them.[264] In the most literal sense this tension can be a matter of

[257] Nochlin also speaks of Saville's "uncanny combination of delicate brushwork and brutal slathering of pigment; a perspectival extravagance which at once bespeaks the objectivity of the photograph and the empathic angst of Expressionism"
Nochlin, Linda "Floating in Gender Nirvana" March 2000 Art in America **94-97**
[258] Kuspit, Donald "Jenny Saville's Tragic Women" Ag/S 2003 Art New England 24 no5 **13**
[259] Braun, Emily "Skinning the Paint" Paint Made Flesh 2009 Vanderbilt University Press **29**
[260] Scharma, Simon. "Interview with Jenny Saville"2005 Saville Rizzoli International Publications Inc. **124 - 127**
[261] Schwabsky, Barry. "Jenny Saville: Unapologetic" Jenny Saville 2005 Macro Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome **103-105**
[262] Scharma, Simon. "Interview with Jenny Saville"2005 Saville Rizzoli International Publications Inc. **124 - 127**
[263] Braun, Emily "Skinning the Paint" Paint Made Flesh 2009 Vanderbilt University Press **30**
[264] Her comment reminded me of Francis Bacon's observation in conversation with David Sylvester that "What made the sockets of the eyes, the nose, or mouth but the paint moving from one contour into another made a likeness of this person I was trying to paint. The next day I tried to take it further and make it more poignant, more near, and I lost the image completely. Because this type of image is a kind of tightrope walk between what is called figurative painting and abstraction… "
Sylvester, David Interviews with Francis Bacon 1975 Alden Press, Oxford **12**

viewpoint. "When you stand back from the painting there's an intellectual encounter. Close, it becomes abstract, sensual."[265]

John Gray, in his essay linking Francis Bacon, J G Ballard and Saville, makes an interesting comparison between Saville and the protagonist in Ballard's novel *Atrocity Exhibition*, that both are "reclaiming the body from personality".[266] This painting like the others in the *Migrants* exhibition is not a traditional portrait, even when it is a self-portrait of Saville.[267] It is not about the personality of the subject, it is a portrait of a feeling or a sensation. This is the crucial development in her work providing a balance between the conceptual ideas or meaning, the subject (the painted body) and the material (the body of paint) making her work engaging.[268]

In his review of the painting Donald Kuspit suggests that she depicts a woman depleted by trauma with a morbidity that "becomes traumatically overt much the way it does in Munch's *The Scream*"[269] and other reviewers have spoken of "repulsion," "brutalized femininity," and an "abject self-image" which as Barry Schwabsky points out are psychological and existential states which are, to say the least, difficult to take lightly.[270]

Painting my own facsimile[271] albeit on a smaller scale and seeing *Reverse* in London reinforced my reading of the painting as melancholy. The hands and 'silent' scream of the figure appeal to my sympathies; an emotional response that may identify with the painter's point of view - perhaps vicariously feeling her character's suffering. Susan Sontag has written that society has a fascination with scenes of suffering[272] and Jacky Bowring has identified the possibility of finding a melancholic beauty not just in the landscape, but in the suffering of others.[273] However, since researching her work and this series in particular I am now less sure of how I would react in front of the painting itself. Seeing the source photograph certainly added a dimension of reality that affected my perception as did reading other critic's interpretations of the painting. What Saville is inquiring into is not the nature of events in the physical world, but our reaction to it. Emile Zola defined a work of

---

[265] Schwabsky, Barry. "Jenny Saville: Unapologetic" Jenny Saville 2005 Macro Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome **103-105**
[266] Gray, John 2005 Saville Rizzoli International Publications Inc.
[267] "I am not interested in portraits as such. I am not interested in the outward personality. I do not use the anatomy of my face because I like it, not at all. I use it because it brings out something from inside, a neurosis."
http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/oct/22/art.friezeartfair2005/print
[268] Cecily Brown for example also makes copious references to de Kooning and other Abstract expressionists, but meaning is absent, her paintings are all about the paint. Nicola Tyson also explores just how distorted a figure can be as it fluctuates between abstraction and figuration, but her brushwork doesn't need to convince in the same way that Saville's does.
see Appendix 1 pg.11 & pg.90
[269] Kuspit, Donald Jenny Saville's Tragic Women Art New England 24 no5 Ag/S 2003 **13**
[270] Schwabsky, Barry. "Jenny Saville: Unapologetic" Jenny Saville 2005 Macro Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome **103-105**
[271] See Appendix 2 Practical Study, section A2.1.13
[272] "appetite for seeing bodies in pain is almost as keen as the desire for ones that show the body naked"
Sontag,Susan Regarding the Pain of Others 2004 Penguin Books, London **36**
[273] "The aestheticising of pain is an expression of schadenfeude, a narcosis that sees beholders suspend emotional responses in favour of finding aesthetic pleasure."
Bowring, Jacky Field Guide to Melancholy 2008 Oldcastle Books, Herts. **47**

art as a "corner of nature seen through a temperament"[274] and I think this painting, like the others in the *Migrants* series, leaves room in use of abstract marks and colour for the viewer to project his own temperament onto the work. In my experience the larger than life size certainly intensifies the phenomenological impact of her work and I suspect the emotional response would be even stronger in front of the painting; but this response might just be a projection of my own melancholy nature.

I believe the strength of her work, like that of Titian and Manet before her, is not what she has seen and painted but how she paints.[275] She is an artist who engages with the sensory and evocative aspects of paint to work immediately on the emotional and physical responses of the onlooker through scale, painterly marks, and value, hue and saturation of colour. Many find her work difficult to look at as her subject is usually about the damage done to the body through burning, bleach, accident and above all surgery. She is making us aware of how flesh itself has become a realist canvas and consequently this use of slashing abstract marks and colour enables the paint, a membrane through which the misery leaks,[276] to be read as an appropriate metaphor for human flesh altered by the surgeons hand to mirror socially accepted ideals of beauty. However, the uneasy sense of anxiety felt in front of the work has more to do with how the subject is represented than underlying meaning.

She utilises photography, image software[277] and contemporary subject matter and one can make an argument that whilst her work doesn't appropriate the look of traditional painting it does engage with the history of painting through genres, styles and quotation. However, although I feel a strong sense of pathos in many of her paintings I don't believe this is due to any implied 'loss' inherent in her 'style' related to her use of art historical 'quotation'.

4.2.2 Artistic Intention: Angst/ Irony / Self Reference

The previous section traced the use of painterly marks to break from the (academic) tradition of the day and test the vocabulary used by earlier artists. Adapting it to their needs and incorporating it into their own developing accent (style). As discussed in Section 3.1.1, an artist doesn't make a 'discovery' in the sense that scientists do. But he does discover 'a means' and it is "thanks to this 'means' he can avoid repeating the familiar forms derived from an obsolete conception of the world;

---

[274] Gombrich, EH <u>Art & Illusion</u> 2002Phaidon Press Ltd **55**
[275] Although she forsakes flatness in her images through contrasting thick and thin passages of paint (mimetic features) she shows clear awareness that the means of representation has to become the object of representation
[276] I owe this wonderfully apt description to Mark Scala.
Scala, Mark "Fragmentation and Reconstitution" <u>Paint Made Flesh</u> 2009 Vanderbilt University Press **66**
[277] She uses Photoshop to push the saturation of the colours and then trials these colours on the sketches in different thickness and dryness of paint to bring texture into play.

he can once more touch on the heart of the matter"[278] and communicate with the viewers of the day. Gombrich uses the analogy of finding the right key to open a lock.[279]

However, once the key is shaped it is easy to repeat the performance; the new form becomes easier for the viewer to decode and understand, and subsequent artists don't need a special insight or emotional state of mind; they just copy the 'master' key. Yet if expressionism means anything, it means the use of art to transmit personal experience. Writing about Expressionism, Norbert Lynton was sceptical about how many artists were genuine expressionists: "The exploitation of personality appears to be essential to it, and this calls for a certain amount of conscious or unconscious posing on the part of those artists not endowed with personalities of their own".[280] The artist Robert Rauschenberg was equally sceptical and in order to show that neither urge nor method alone make an artwork, but rather a mix of artist's intention and chance, impulsive gestures and thought, he created twin pieces in 1957, *Factum I* and *Factum II*, repeating the same falsely spontaneous brush strokes in both. Through his controlled repetition, the pictorial gesture – the sole mark of the artist – was transformed into a stereotype, making a parody of Abstract Expressionism and its goal of the absolute.[281]

Consequently, the relationship between artistic intent and expression has become complex in contemporary painting as the gestures and attitude of artistic expression may not be 'heartfelt' or 'authentic'; after all Munch went on to do six versions of *The Sick Child*. I will compare the use of expressive marks with genuine psychological content[282] with the knowing use of these expressive marks as a shorthand language (trope) to convey meaning and/or to make a self-referential point within the discourse of art. This raises the question of whether these self-aware gestures represent a nostalgic pastiche and/or are a way of using the past to express a contemporary psyche and make sense of changing notion of self.

4.2.2.1 Soul Painting – Edvard Munch

One of the two artists who perhaps best epitomise laying bare their soul on the canvas is the Norwegian Edvard Munch.[283] Returning to the analogy of the key, Munch as a young painter was looking for a key to unlock the emotions in his mind and find a means to express them. His friend

---

[278] Gibson, Michael Symbolism 1995 Benedikt Taschen Verlag **33**
[279] Gombrich, EH Art & Illusion 2002Phaidon Press Ltd **304**
[280] Lynton, Norbert "Expressionism" Concepts of Modern Art 2001 Thames & Hudson, London **39**
[281] http://www.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-Rauschenberg-EN/ENS-rauschenberg-EN.htm Last Accessed 22 Nov 2011
[282] There is always likely to be uncertainty, vagueness and ambiguity about the corresponding emotion in the spectator's mind, leaving room between the various expressive ways in which the painting can be seen and the way in which the artist intended it to be seen. We have to rely on the artist trying to fit correspondence to cause. As Richard Wollheim posits "The correctness of a broad interpretation of the artist's intention carries conviction in connection with expression. Why should an artist want his audience to perceive his paintings as expressive of particular feelings and emotions unless they had thro' the way they caused him to paint led the painting to be as it is?"
Wollheim, Richard Painting as an Art 1987 Thames & Hudson, London **86**
[283] The other is Vincent van Gogh, already discussed in section 4.1.3: Juxtaposition of Strong Acidic Colour. In fact Munch was slightly ahead of Van Gogh in developing an expressive style.

the author Hans Jaeger suggested Munch should write his life story; not the routines and mundane details of his childhood diaries, but thoughts, suppressed memories, opinions and emotions about the past. Munch took up the challenge and started to write on loose sheets peppered with illustrations: the last walk with his mother, the account of her death, his own near-death experience, the arguments with his father and his sister Sophie's death.[284] Jaeger was fond of debating existential questions with Christiana's Bohemians, but Munch could see little point in the central question posed by the doctrine of nihilism; 'what should we be doing if the whole of existence is absurd?' For Munch the answer was obvious, 'painting of course' but although he had abundant material for emotionally charged paintings, he was still searching for how he should paint.[285]

He wanted to be able to isolate exactly what occurred at that moment when an artist looks at a subject and feels impelled to paint it: what Kierkegaard[286] describes as the boundless feeling of the moment that splits the past and the present, giving a glimpse of eternity.[287] Sue Prideaux quotes Munch from his diaries on this subject: 'One must paint precisely the fleeting moment of significance - one must capture the exact experience separating that significant moment from the next - the exact moment when the motif struck one.' And 'In some circumstances a chair may seem to be just as interesting as a human being. In some way or another it must have caught the interest, in which case the onlooker's interest must somehow be engaged in the same way. It's not the chair that should be painted, but what the person has felt at the sight of it.'[288]

His laboratory and testing ground for how such things were to be achieved was the canvas that is now called *The Sick Child*, 1885-6 [Fig. 10]. It was to become known as the first Expressionist masterpiece,[289] but during the long welter of uncertainty surrounding its creation it was thought of loosely as the first of his 'soul paintings' and he gave it the abstract title *A Study*. He sensed it was to be the most important picture of his life, bought the largest piece of canvas so far and painted the death of his sister Sophie in the intense atmosphere of home rather than in his studio. He cut everything out of the written narrative: himself, the praying father, the other family figures, the

---

[284] His mother Laura had died in 1868 of consumption when Munch was 5 years old, Edvard suffered a near fatal pulmonary haemorrhage aged 13 in 1875, and his sister Sophie died 2 years later aged 15 also of tuberculosis. Consequently the writing cure initiated by Jaeger had the effect of a period of self-administered psychoanalysis: among the deepest and most painful memories, it dredged Sophie's terror of death and his father's dreadful insistence to the girl that she would be better off dead and with God.
 Prideaux, Sue Edvard Munch: Behind the Scream 2005 Yale University Press London **82-83**
[285] Munch was not attracted by Realism's sole concern with things capable of being seen, nor by Impressionism's world where 'the girl behind the bar at the Folies Bergères was a picture of rude health and even in the umbrella pictures no one seemed to get wet'.
Prideaux, Sue Edvard Munch: Behind the Scream 2005 Yale University Press London **81**
[286] Søren Kierkegaard is considered to be the 'father of existentialism'. He was bequeathed a fathomless sense of guilt and a relentless burden of melancholy by his own father and interestingly wrote about the cynical, bored aestheticism of the modern flâneur.
In part from http://www.iep.utm.edu/kierkega/ Last Accessed 24 Nov 2011
[287] Prideaux, Sue Edvard Munch: Behind the Scream 2005 Yale University Press London **83**
[288] Probably dates from 1890 and he may have seen Van Gogh's famous chair when he wrote this passage.
Prideaux, Sue Edvard Munch: Behind the Scream 2005 Yale University Press London **84** Ref T2770 in Munch's papers in the Munch Museum Oslo.
[289] Van Gogh was still adding the final touches to *The Potato Eaters* in 1886 and had not yet mastered the techniques that would later make him famous.

complicated family tensions, the context of room and furniture. Everything was distilled into the strongest possible image of grief, a dying child and anguished mother: a pieta. Finally he took the wicker chair in which Sophie had died, moved it to the easel and began to paint the picture.[290]

The painting took over a year to complete[291] and shows Sophie sat up with her head propped on a white pillow, thin wisps of her hair tinged with orange, turned to face her mother sitting at her side. The woman's head is bowed in sorrow and despair, unable to hide her pain from the child who looks over her head towards the window with tired, weary eyes. The cramped space is bounded at the left by a bedside cupboard with a medicine bottle on it (bearing mute witness to the course of the illness), at the back by a light wall which the pillow seems to blend in with, and at the right by a cold sea-green curtain with touches of red. In the foreground, right a half empty glass is on a small table.

He applied paint in several layers with great immediacy, and then broke up the surface again by scraping off whole areas, or by scratching deep into the paint skin using the end of his brush, palette knives and even a kitchen blade.[292] The result was a work of a decidedly "haptic quality - the physical traces of his handiwork process still visible in the structure".[293] The marks visible[294] in the multiple layers of paint, and the many corrections and changes reinforce the subject of illness.

When Munch first showed *The Sick Child* at the Autumn Exhibition in October 1886 under the title *Study* there was a storm of indignation,[295] numerous critics condemned Munch's approach as "incoherent daubs of paint", "the ravings of a madman", "devoid of all spirituality", "a blurred travesty of Art".[296] It wasn't the subject that shocked the critics and the public, nor was it the gloomy palette[297] it was Munch's style of painting that caused the problem. In the 1880s and 1890s

---

[290] Prideaux, Sue Edvard Munch: Behind the Scream 2005 Yale University Press London **86**
The use of the chair comes from Jens Thiis cited in Jens Thiis, Edvard Munch og hans samtid: skelton, livet og kunsten, geniet (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1934 p135).
[291] Munch's first sexual experience apparently took place in the summer of 1885, when he was 21. He was having an affair with Millie Thaulow, the wife of a distant cousin, at the same time he was painting *The Sick Child*. They would meet in the woods near the charming fishing village of Aasgaardstrand that was to feature in many paintings. He was maddened and thrilled while the relationship lasted and tormented and desolate when Millie ended it after two years. The Peter Watkins film brings out how much of an impact this might have had on his painting, but this doesn't come across in biographies and not even mentioned in works earlier than 1960. Watkin's interpretation is supported by the Munch museum.
[292] Watkins, Peter Edvard Munch 1975 NRK,Norway DVD 55:09mins
[293] Bucharton, Dieter ed Edvard Munch: Signs of Modern Art 2007 Fondation Beyeler **42**
[294] Unfortunately I haven't seen the Oslo version of this picture (hung between *Death in the Sickroom* and *The Morning After,* facing *The Scream*) for 25 years or so and would like chance to see it again. However I did see a self-portrait, painted in the same style a few months later in 1886, at the Royal Academy in 2005. The unfinished sketchy impression seems intended by Munch and the broken, damaged face in this self-portrait can be seen as a metaphor for the traces left by life on the subject.
[295] In his recent essay 'Edvard Munch and the Critics in the 1880s', Nils Messel explained for the first time that Munch's critics in the 1880s were not all negative, as writings about Munch have generally maintained, but that, on the contrary, his talent was widely recognised. See Messel 1994 q as FN 18 in Muller-Westermann, Iris Munch by Himself 2005 Thames & Hudson **25**
[296] Morgenbladet, 28 Oct. 1886 quoted in Prideaux, Sue Edvard Munch: Behind the Scream 2005 Yale University Press, London **89**
[297] Good colouring ... in a picture is of consequence, not only as it is a truer representation of nature, where everything is beautiful in its kind, but as administering a considerable degree of pleasure to the sense. The colouring of a picture must be varied according to the subject, the time and place. If the subject be grave, melancholy, or terrible, the general tinct of the colouring must incline to brown, black, or red and gloomy; but be gay and pleasant in subjects of joy and triumph.
Richardson, Jonathan An essay on the Theory of Painting 1725 1971 Scolar Press, England **155**

the composition was a highly fashionable theme[298] and there are many examples of this genre painting. Munch will have seen *Dying Child* by Hans Heyerdahl,[299] a painter whose technique was close to Munch's, and two works by Christian Krohg; *The Sick Girl*, 1880-1 [Fig. 11] and *The Mother at the Sick Child's Bedside* of 1884. All three were drawing on their own sisters' dying illnesses, but a comparison of the three artists, shows plainly that "Munch was representing an inner experience, not an outer happening".[300]

The thinned down paint fore-grounded, the rough sketchy character of the picture and the audience unaccustomed to the idea of the painter showing not what he saw but what he felt, were unable to interpret language. The overall effect was not one of naturalistic physical presentation, of detailed anatomically correct modelling using light and shadow. Instead the painting draws its power from within, the light in it is not falling on the figures and objects from outside but is radiating from within the pillow and the face of the sick girl which is almost transparent. Arne Eggum contrasts Munch's style with that of Krohg: "in Munch's painting what the eyes focus on (the girl) have been reproduced relatively sharply, whereas the surroundings which are out of focus are depicted blurred. In Krohg's painting the air is crystal clear, without any atmosphere."[301] Eggum notes that Munch recalled being so "overwhelmed with feeling that he saw his subject, through tears and trembling eyelashes, turning into stripes on the canvas; he felt it like that... it was the artists reaction to his subject."[302]

Gombrich points out that for the viewer to switch from reading 'Representational' to 'Expressionist' painting an understanding of the possibilities is required; that for artistic communication to be possible "there must be not only a sender but a receiver suitably attuned."[303] Slowly the use of this painterly language to express inner emotions, giving rise to a visible form, gained currency, and now this way of representing the world of the mind and transcending reality is an accepted convention.

The painter later confessed "most of my later work had its origin in this picture"[304] and writing with the benefit of hindsight biographer J.P. Hodin clearly appreciates that with this painting Munch had found a new 'means' of artistic expression and that the artistic language that he fashioned was not the result of outside stimulus but was a mode of expression developed from within that was both

---

[298] "As for the sick Child it was in the period I think of as the age of the pillow. A great many painters did pictures of sick children on their pillows." The Swede Ernst Josephson and the Dane Michael Ancher were the pillow painters referred to by Munch. They are also sad because of the subject but without Munch's investment of his personal grief in his method they lack 'truth'.
Edvard Munch in 1930 writing to Jens Thiis (Director of the *Nasjonalgalleriet* in Oslo). Quoted in Bischoff, Ulrich <u>Munch</u> 2000 Taschen, Germany **10**
[299] "one of the few works by another artist that Munch admired in writing"
Smith, Roberta <u>So Typecast You Could Scream</u> 13th February 2009 New York Times
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/13/arts/design/13munc.html Last accessed 2 Mar 2013
[300] Hodin, JP <u>Edvard Munch</u> 1972 Thames & Hudson, London **22**
[301] Eggum, Arne <u>Munch and Photography</u> 1989 Yale University Press, London **30**
[302] Eggum, Arne <u>Munch and Photography</u> 1989 Yale University Press, London **31**
[303] Gombrich, EH <u>Art & Illusion</u> 2002 Phaidon Press **316**
[304] Benesch, Otto <u>Edvard Munch</u> 1960 Phaidon London **6**

radical and honest.[305] Otto Benesch goes even further and his summary has such a resonance with my own enquiry that I have quoted it in full:

"There are echoes in this painting of the shock the artist sustained in the death of one of his sisters. The deliberate destruction of the compact areas of pigment makes the solid form appear transparent and reveals behind it something which could not have been shown if the coloured surface only had been faithfully rendered. The picture takes as its subject people who by their suffering or by their compassion, experience the transition from this world to the world beyond."[306]

Humiliated and shocked by the outburst of vitriol he painted a defiant self-portrait in the same style but then went back to painting in a more naturalistic way. This loss of confidence was evident in his other works of the period, but the change in style did help him get a scholarship and in 1889 Munch moved to Paris, supported by an artist's bursary from the Norwegian state.

In 1890 Knut Hamsun completed his novel *Hunger*[307] and published an article called *From the Unconscious Life of the Soul* in which he equated the notion of soul with the unconscious mind and suggested that a 'spiritual' awareness could induce a feeling of alterity, especially in the landscape.[308] At the same time Munch began to "superimpose figures on the landscape in his paintings and express emotional states such as loneliness and melancholy in the interaction of motifs".[309] He exhibited a painting called *Evening* that is now known as *Melancholy*, 1891 [Fig. 12].[310] The painting was inspired by the news of his lover's, Millie Thaulow, imminent remarriage, but Munch uses another love triangle that between Oda and Christian Krohg and Jappe Nilssen. It shows a figure in the foreground (Nilssen) head in hands in the classic melancholic pose lost in reverie, gazing out over the fjord at Åsgårdstrand where Munch used to spend his summer. In the background Oda and Christian are about to descend into a waiting yellow boat.

---

[305] "Of all Munch's early paintings the most important is The Sick Child. In this painting his experience of the death of his mother and of his sister Sophie is the psychological driving power behind a work which far surpassed anything produced in Norwegian painting at that time." Hodin also quotes Jens Thiis (Director of the *Nasjonalgalleriet* in Oslo between 1908 -1941) on the innovation of *The Sick Child*: "It is the first monumental figure painting, and represents an enormous development in the painterly conception of a theme, when compared with the informative realistic painting of those times"
Hodin, JP Edvard Munch 1972 Thames & Hudson, London **22**

[306] Benesch, Otto Edvard Munch 1960 Phaidon London **6**

[307] "A book startling in its psychological disclosure, its stream of consciousness style, and its description of the urban environment as predatory and ruinous."
Berman Patricia G. "Edvard Munch's 'Modern Life of the Soul'" The Modern Life of the Soul 2006 MoMA, New York **37**

[308] "For today's restless, curious and receptive people fewer and fewer of nature's many secrets remain hidden. More and more people, sensitive people leading profound lives, often find themselves in the most unusual spiritual state, rapture. It is an utterly inexplicable, mute and strange kind of rapture, one in which they appear to be addressed from afar, from the sky or the sea. Enveloping its victims, it seems to appear out of nowhere. At the same time, it produces an excruciatingly well-developed sense of hearing, permitting a vaguely perceived awareness of sounds. It also leads to an almost unreal ability to gaze into, and unlock, the mysteries of heretoforth dark and forbidden worlds. Finally, whilst in this state of rapture, they also experience an acute sense of danger. Yet most of us are unable to fathom the meaning of these spiritual events."
Hamsun, Knut "Fra det ubevidste Sjaeleliv" 1890 Santiden, Norway 1 **332** quoted in Berman Patricia G. "Edvard Munch's 'Modern Life of the Soul" The Modern Life of the Soul 2006 MoMA, New York

[309] Bucharton, Dieter ed Edvard Munch: Signs of Modern Art 2007 Fondation Beyeler **44**

[310] Munch is notorious not only for doing various versions of the same painting but also changing their names and it has appeared under various titles: *Jappe on the Beach*, *The Yellow Boat* and *Jealousy*.
Benesch, Otto Edvard Munch 1960 Phaidon London **12**

Painted at twilight the colours nervously blend together creating an oppressive atmosphere; patches of violet, venomous greens contrast with the yellow of the boat and the shining woman in white. "Wavy contours link the background with foreground...and all along the shore the water drips and trickles like some harbinger of some dreadful tidings."[311] Indeed Munch strove to achieve the maximum intensity of expression by means of simplification and the stylisation of line, shape and colour. The background scene of the beach at Åsgårdstrand can be interpreted as "a mental projection of the foreground figure",[312] and the choice of colour of symbolic significance. The painting became part of his '*Frieze of Life*',[313] and in the context of Hamsun's eliding of Soul and Mind it is most likely a projection the melancholic darkness of Munch's soul caused by his disturbed love for Mille Thaulow; a relationship loaded with sexual tension, infidelity, adultery and guilt.

Like *The Sick Child* it was a subject that meant a lot to him and the painting exists in a number of versions. Indeed he did copies and different versions of all his early masterpieces and reworked many of them as prints. This tendency towards repetition was clearly shown in the 2012 exhibition of his work *Edvard Munch: The Modern Eye* at Tate Modern in London and Angela Lampe's catalogue essay[314] cites several sources on the serial nature of his work. She notes that Munch defended his status as "an original, authentic creative artist, as a painter who is beholden to memory and who has no choice but to revisit motifs" but concludes that it was probably financial considerations and the need to earn a living that persuaded Munch to make new versions for collectors. It is telling that I feel disappointed in front of the later versions of *The Sick Child* and crave the opportunity to see the original 1880-81 version again. This implies that even though the copies are painted by Munch, they lack the authentic ritual of the original; a blind devotion to the hope of absolute sincerity.

Munch's repetition of his paintings and subsequent series of prints of the motifs has resulted in them becoming repeatable as emotional shorthand in a similar way to his expressionist marks. Jasper Johns is among those[315] drawn to the iconic value of Munch's ouvre and used a cross-hatched motif from Munch's *Self Portrait: Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1940-43 to inspire several paintings. This use of the motif may be seen as a parody of the expressionist mark but by titling one large 3 panelled painting *Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1981 the work, although abstract, becomes a melancholic allegory for old age[316]. One cannot assume Johns chose title for introspective reasons, but one can speculate that like most of his work he is encouraging the viewer to follow the clues,

---

[311] Benesch, Otto Edvard Munch 1960 Phaidon London **11-12**

[312] Gilman, Clare "Catalogue of Plates" The Modern Life of the Soul 2006 MoMA, New York **209**

[313] The Frieze of Life was a mutable concept for Munch, subject to repeated shifts, in terms of images included in it.

[314] Lampe, Angela. "Dislocated Motifs: Munch's Tendency Towards Repetition" in Edvard Munch: The Modern Eye 2012 Tate Publishing **31-39**

[315] Andy Warhol did screen prints of *The Scream, Madonna* and the *Self Portrait* of 1895.

[316] Johns was 51 in 1981 and had been using the motif extensively since the 1970s.

and in this case think about what is between the clock and the bed i.e. the 78 year old Munch close to death.

Now we view Munch's paintings through the accumulated layers of history and through mass media that creates an ironic distance. Munch's *The Scream,* 1893 has been reproduced everywhere from coffee mugs to political posters and provided the inspiration for ghost-face mask that featured in Wes Craven's *Scream* movies . A sense that nothing is really real and unfortunately the public image of misunderstood artistic creativity, fuelled by 'biopics' of Vincent Van Gogh[317] and others, has culminated in the depiction of angst-ridden artist *Brian* in the TV comedy *Spaced.*[318] Consequently in a world where everything is appropriated, a quotation from the past, recycled, it has become difficult to express genuine emotion without being ridiculed unless one hides behind a measure of irony.

4.2.2.2 Loving History Madly[319] - Philip Guston

Philip Guston is perhaps a good example of a painter searching for a coherent emotional response to his lingering grief, but only late in his career does he develop the necessary expressive language. His first attempts use a figurative idiom but he abandons this and switches to abstraction. Despite modest success he is never really comfortable as an Abstract Expressionist and figurative elements increasingly lurk behind the abstraction. Finally, in frustration, he returns to drawing objects and then uses the abstract marks he has developed to successfully express himself combining irony with his early figurative motifs to do so.

Guston' early abstractions evoked forms of objects in an abstract field, forms that gradually became more reduced. Already Guston felt something was still getting between him and the canvas; "The desire for direct expression finally became so strong that even the interval necessary to reach back to the palette beside me became too long, I forced myself to paint the entire work without stepping back to look at it".[320] The result was *White Painting I,*[321] painted in under an hour in 1951, in which

---

[317] In particular Kirk Douglas as the troubled Van Gogh in *Lust for Life* by Vincente Minelli, based on Irving Stone's biographical novel about the life of Vincent Van Gogh.
[318] "Brian is every offensive 'artistic' stereotype rolled into one scrawny dishevelled loser. Brian can't paint unless he is unhappy. When he can't 'vocalise his torment' he plays a cassette of constant screaming and wailing called *Voices of Despair*."
Abbott, Denise Nothing Like the Real Thing 2001 Frieze Magazine #60, London **69**
[319] "I love history madly. The dead are more to my taste than the living." Flaubert cited in Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **59**
[320] I am not sure if this quote is paraphrased but it crops up unattributed a number of times (Ashton/Kauss/Auping/Blackwood). I think it derives from an unpublished interview with Karl Fortress, April 14, 1966 at Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass. 1966, and taped for Archives of American Art, Washington, D. C. Guston's daughter Musa Meyer quotes it in full in *Night Studio* as follows..."I wanted to see if I could paint a picture - have a run so to speak - without stepping back and looking at the canvas," Philip said later about this painting, " and to be willing to accept what happened, to suspend criticism. Instead of walking back, pulling out a cigarette and thinking, to not suspend my own endeavours, but to test myself, to see if my sense of structure was inherent. I would stand in front of the surface and simply keep on painting for three or four hours. I began to see that when I did that, I did not lose structure at all."
Meyer, Musa Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston 1991 Thames & Hudson, London **49**

shapes had given way entirely to brush marks. Writing in *Modern Painters* in 2003 the author Nicole Krauss considers it "one of the most critical paintings in Guston's evolution", describing the burst of tan and grey brush strokes in the centre of a roughly square white field as the "shorthand record of a monologue without words." For Krauss the painting is a record of both "a liberation and a pledge - kept for the rest of Guston's life – to fuse thought and action, to make a record of his experience, and to follow his instinct, no matter how strange, stark or ugly its revelations."[322] I am unsure how authoritative Krauss' opinion is, but it certainly fits the narrative that throughout the 1950s and 1960s Guston was becoming increasingly uneasy with the purging from painting of metaphysical qualities and underlying physical symbolic or allegorical themes[323] associated with earlier phases of expressionism.

This focus on the mark meant that Guston didn't need to paint large in order to feel part of the painting, as was the trend at the time,[324] but instead started to populate his abstract fields with forms. By 1959 Guston was making an appearance in his work, albeit heavily abstracted. In *The Painter* he is depicted as a hooded figure with arm raised and brush in hand working on an image of a blue solid form. This development certainly went against the evolution of abstract expressionism and the critics[325] mistrusted the elements, not quite apparent yet, of self-irony. As Dore Ashton remarks "the comic, the grotesque and the ironic were waiting in the wings of Guston's drama."[326] As the 1960s progressed Guston reduced his palette to just white and black and painted forms that stood out against the background, usually occupying the centre of the canvas, and made use of the titles as clues to possible meanings. Unfortunately I haven't seen any of this group of paintings.

---

[321] The equation of raw canvas and white hood anticipates Guston's more explicit metaphors for painting, e.g., a bloody whip is a red paintbrush, of his Marlborough period.
Cooper, Harry Recognizing Guston (in four slips) Winter, 2002 October, Vol. 99 **126**

[322] Krauss, Nicole The First Painter After the Last Winter 2003 Modern Painters **88-89**

[323] In other words he wasn't happy with the Greenberg concept of cleansing painting to an art of pure opticality as described in the opening paragraph of this section (Seeing & Feeling). In order to maintain its distinction from other art forms, painting would focus exclusively on its inherent physical characteristics: colour, shape, and support. I found the following quotation from Dore Ashton helpful in understanding this drive in respect to the things that Guston held close to his heart. "In the past it had been taken for granted that analogy was the primary mode of perception in the arts. Recognition sprang from just the analogy, and paint was in the service of memory and sensibility. A few strokes and voilà asparagus – not real asparagus but an analogy for asparagus. However, when painting became autonomous, a thing among other things, the given analogy was challenged. If the canvas was a thing in itself, the given system of analogies was challenged. If the canvas was a thing in itself, complete, concrete, and not virtual, the dimension of analogy had to be purged, or adjusted."
Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **3**

[324] I am thinking of Rothko, Pollock and Newman for example.

[325] An exception was David Sylvester who, commenting on his exhibition at the Whitechapel gallery in 1963, praised Guston's ability to encompass both exquisite gradations and violent juxtapositions in a single painting. He recognised that "a Guston is a fragment of a world apart" and that the paintings "are intensely withdrawn and private, with the privacy of the dark, not of the ivory tower". Best of all Sylvester accurately identified the character of Guston's painterly meditation: "What matters is that these paintings are palpably about a man's struggle with himself and reflect its reality and urgency... the more recent works (which seem to me the finest) are so packed with doubts and denials as to have gone far beyond the brink of what we think of as coherence..."
Sylvester, David "Philip Guston" 15 February 1963 The New Statesman, cited in Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **134**

[326] Dore Ashton identifies the prototypes in Guston's earlier work as a caricaturist: "There was always a tendency to caricature in Guston's drawing, which departed freely from mimetic description in order to stress the character of the action in his compositions. Caricature is at its best a characterising gesture. If all the objects staggering to the fore in disguise in the last abstractions were not precisely identifiable in their lineaments, they could be sensed in the character of Guston's line."
Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **135-137**

However, *Prospects,* 1964 is owned by the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra and on their website Steven Tonkin describes the brushwork and the use of titles as follows:

> "Yet whilst the black elements in *Prospects* are pronounced, the intertwining of Guston's brushstrokes means that these features never fully disengage from the grey; they are distinguishable yet still grounded in the weave of the brushstrokes. The title *Prospects* suggests that at this time Guston was questioning which direction his work would take in the future..."

I believe these late abstractions are a good example of Guston realising that form and content are logically dependent on each other and that the latter cannot be excluded, even from abstract painting.[327]

Guston's addiction to the history of art[328] was a source of constant worry to him, locating him at a tangent to the course of modern art, and in the late 1960s he retreated to a studio in Woodstock and started to draw and paint figuratively again. Ashton summarised his mood "The problem with modern painting, he insisted, was not that it was too hermetic, but that it was all too clear. Unlike Piero. The avant-garde mystique of no yesterday and no tomorrow had reached the banal level of much American life."[329] In his isolation he began to make innumerable small paintings [Fig.18] of firmly delineated and modelled simple objects, solid things mainly lodged in the studio: mugs, shoes, light bulbs, boots, and old flat-irons; but also "things that lived in his fantasy, such as undefinable but solid objects recalling the geometer's forms in Dürer's *Melancholia*."[330]

Guston first exhibited his late figure paintings at the Marlborough Gallery in New York in 1970, and they didn't go down well. The dependably venomous[331] Hilton Kramer of *The New York Times* broadcast his extreme disapproval by calling his review of the show, "A Mandarin Pretending to be a Stumblebum." It certainly shocked many that he was prepared to jettison twenty years work and go off in another direction and within the ranks of Abstract Expressionism[332] he was denounced as "a

---

[327] There is also an early related quote from Guston: "I do not see why the loss of faith in the known image and symbol in our time should be celebrated as freedom. It is a loss of faith from which we suffer, and this pathos motivates modern painting and poetry at its heart"
Guston, Philip 1958 cited in Hughes, Robert "The Future That Was" The Shock of the New 1996 Thames and Hudson Ltd, London **397**

[328] "Guston had three sets of heroes: the painters of the Italian Renaissance, Masaccio, Giotto and, above all, Piero della Francesca; the cartoonists of his childhood George Herriman, the creator of Krazy Kat, and Bud Fischer of Mutt and Jeff, who remained lodged in his mind's eye; and his pantheon of writers, Beckett, Kafka, Kierkegaard and Isaac Babel." From other material I have read, Uccello, Goya (*Capricios , Black Paintings*), James Ensor and Giorgio de Chirico can safely be added to the painters and Flaubert, T. S. Eliot, Nathaniel West and Erwin Panofsky to the writers.
Krauss, Nicole The First Painter After the Last Winter 2003 Modern Painters **89**

[329] Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **150**

[330] Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **173**

[331] A package of negative reviews reached him in Venice, the *Xerox Underground* he called it and dumped it in a canal!
Corbett, William Philip Guston's Late Work: A Memoir 1994 Zoland Books Cambridge MA **7**

[332] After the opening, his wife jotted in her diary: "Philip said Lee Krasner hadn't spoken to him at the gallery; had told someone that the work was 'embarrassing.'"
Meyer, Musa Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston 1991 Thames & Hudson, London **157**

Judas, a cynical defector to the crude style and vernacular spirit of Pop art and comic strips".[333] One or two reviewers were cruel enough to suggest that the shift was purely opportunistic, a desperate last throw of the dice by an artist who had never quite been accepted into the canon of the Abstract Expressionist "greats".   Exceptions to the adverse reaction came from his friend Willem De Kooning who saw the new paintings as a celebration of 'freedom',[334] and the show also received a favourable review from "one of the most sensitive and cant free American art critics of the day, Harold Rosenberg"[335] writing in *The New Yorker*.

One of the motifs that probably upset the viewer more than anything was the laconic use by Guston, who was Jewish and a political radical, of hooded figures[336] in a seemingly comic reference to the Klu Klux Klan.   In one self-portrait from 1969 *By the Window* [Fig. 13] he showed himself hooded, smoking a cigarette with his head is in his hand in contemplation. He is seated at a table in front of a window with the blind up, the room empty apart from a standard lamp and a framed picture hung from a nail on the window wall. The sketchily painted figure seems more pathetic than threatening, seeing himself perhaps as a victim, hated and persecuted, suffering from the artist's melancholia (lassitude and vacant stare) that the pose suggests. Indeed wherever Guston has lived, there have always been three reproductions hanging in his kitchen: Piero's *Flagellation,* Uccello's *Battle of San Romano,* and Dürer's *Melancholia.*[337]

Freud saw melancholy as "mourning interrupted and diverted by narcissistic regression" and observed that melancholia and mania often go together.[338]   Harry Cooper believes Guston demonstrates an oedipal wish in some of his early work[339] and notes that Guston wrote, describing with apparent innocence a chronic manic-depressive condition, "the counterpart of melancholy can become unbearable excitement.... You'd think I'd be familiar by now with all these going on-but that's not the way it works, is it?"[340]

Not much has been written about Guston's interest in Dürer, yet the print is an emblem of a strong philosophical tendency on his part. Its mood of intense serious doubt aptly fits the persona of Guston that I divine from the many books and essays that I have read on his life and work, and the

[333] Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **6**

[334] Meyer, Musa Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston 1991 Thames & Hudson, London **157**

[335] Rosenberg, Harold Liberation from Detachment The New Yorker 7 November 170 **136-141** cited in Graham-Dixon, Andrew "A Maker of Worlds" Philip Guston Retrospective 2003 Thames and Hudson New York **55**

[336] The hooded Ku Klux Klan figures, so characteristic of Guston's return to figuration in the Sixties, have their roots in Guston's childhood fears that anti-Semitism might turn virulent in America, and had entered his work as early as the 1930s. Dore Ashton also links the hood with Guston's enduring love for the painters of Quattrocento Italy, many of whom had painted hooded figures in procession. It is probable that Guston had seen reproductions of Piero della Francesca's *Madonna della Misericordia,* in which one of the kneeling figures wears a penitential hood. I know they also feature prominently in works by Goya, another of his favourites.
Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **7**

[337] Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **54**

[338] "Mourning and Melancholia," Collected Papers 4 , **152-70**

[339] By drawing in the consciously acceptable form of guilt mixed with melancholy!
Cooper, Harry Recognizing Guston (in four slips)   Winter, 2002 October, Vol. 99 **114**

[340] Letter to Ashton, August 11, 1975, cited in Meyer, Musa Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston 1991 Thames & Hudson, London **172**

significance of *Melancholia* [Fig. 14] to Guston becomes unavoidable when one thinks about "his recurrent anxiety about meaning" and realises that through his study he knows what makes an immortal work of art, but cannot create his own. As Dore Ashton observes "the tragedy of knowing and not knowing how to enact is intimately familiar to Guston, and to most artists of a romantic stamp."[341] In addition I believe one can read his return to a figurative idiom as the action of a melancholic, blocked in his mourning, circulating his grief, brooding, unable to let go.

In writing published after his death Guston justified his apostasy from abstraction, claiming it had become formally and spiritually moribund: "American abstract art is a lie, a sham, a cover up for a poverty of the spirit. A mask to hide the fear of revealing oneself. A lie to cover up how bad one can be. Unwilling to show this badness, this rawness. It is laughable, this lie. Anything but this! What a sham! Abstract art hides it, hides the lie, a fake! Don't let it show! It is an escape from the true feelings we have, from the 'raw', primitive feelings about the world and us in it. In America"[342] "Where are the wooden floors, the light bulbs, the cigarette smoke? Where are the brick walls? Where is what we feel, without notions, ideas, food, intentions? No, just to conform to the banks, the plaza, monuments to the people who own this country, give everyone the soothing lullaby of 'art'. We all know what this is, don't we"[343]

In hindsight Donald Kuspit sees Guston's breakthrough as a breakdown: his loss of faith in fine art, whether in Social Realist or Abstract Expressionist form, symbolising his loss of faith in himself. Kuspit suggests that its origin has to do with Guston's unconscious guilt at repudiating his Jewish identity by changing his family name from 'Goldstein' to 'Guston' and this betrayal of his heritage takes an emotional toll, eventually returning with a vengeance in his late work.

> "Making high modern fine art was an avenue of assimilation, as Harold Rosenberg suggested, and it is to Guston's credit that he finally rejected the comforts of assimilation in favour of suffering, that is, the self-doubt of the modern Jew, caught between two cultures and belonging to neither, however emotionally he belongs to both. Guston's Jewish self-doubt compounded his self-doubt as an artist, but finally gave him his own peculiar vision of the human condition."[344]

Throughout the 1970s he continued to produce paintings that were assertively figurative but the portraits as a self-loathing hooded artist gave way to a different caricature; a gigantic melancholic head with one staring eyeball. In matters of self-destruction, he continued drinking, smoking sixty

---

[341] Ashton, Dore <u>Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston</u> 1976 Viking Press, New York **54-56**
[342] Meyer, Musa <u>Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston</u> 1991 Thames & Hudson, London **170**
[343] Meyer, Musa <u>Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston</u> 1991 Thames & Hudson, London **170**
[344] Kuspit, Donald <u>Philip Guston's Self-Doubt</u> http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit12-4-03.asp Acc. 19 December 2011

Camel cigarettes a day, and over eating even after a first heart attack nearly killed him. In a tersely titled work of 1973, *Painting, Smoking, Eating*, a synopsis of Guston's reduction to essentials (cigarette in mouth, a lavishly painted plate of ketchup coated French fries on his chest), the painter is welded to his bed but his (inner) eye never sleeps and his finger is drawing a red line on a painting of the boots that are piled up in the studio. This obsession with boots could, as Andrew Graham-Dixon suggests, be a reference to his much loved older brother Nat who died of gangrene many years before, after having his legs crushed in a car accident.[345] Alternatively it could signify his memories of images of the holocaust and bear witness to the despair and contempt he felt at the perceived moral bankruptcy of the Nixon administration: "Our whole lives (since I can remember) are made up of the most extreme cruelties of Holocausts. We are the witnesses of this hell. When I think of the victims, it is unbearable. To paint, to write, to teach, in the most dedicated sincere way, is the most intimate affirmation of creative life we possess in these despairing years. I have never been so close to what I've painted, not pictures, but a substitute world which comes from the world"[346]

In Guston's works from the late 1970s his view of the world seems apocalyptic and titles, such as *Deluge*, invoke the Old Testament's solution for cleansing society. *The Pit* [Fig. 15] is from 1976 and recalls Renaissance religious depictions of the damned cast into Hell (No doubt Guston saw the Signorelli in Orvieto).   The scene is a barren waste land against a black sky with an 'above' and 'below'. On the boulder strewn ground, fires seem to be raging against the black void, and a painted canvas[347] shows the image of acid rain falling on a red sea of fire. Below is nothing but darkness and a green lake with Guston's own alter-ego, in the form of the huge, bruised 'butter bean' head, with a single unblinking eye looking downward, as though into the depths. There is no complete body to be seen, just disembodied spaghetti legs of humans and horses falling into the pit, their soles (souls) turned upwards, joining the head that is damned to watch and suffer along with them. Although the Cyclopean head lacks a cigarette, it is pretty clear that it is Guston staring down into the watery depths with masochistic passivity.

Like many of the paintings from this period *The Pit* draws on the brushwork from his early abstract paintings which combined with a limited palette evokes a primitive clumsiness appropriate to the subject.   His method of painting has more in common with the European tradition tracing back to

[345] Graham-Dixon, Andrew "A Maker of Worlds" Philip Guston Retrospective 2003 Thames and Hudson New York **63**
[346] Guston reflecting after the 1973 coup in Chile, cited in Ashton, Dore Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston 1976 Viking Press, New York **177**
[347] Kuspit reads this as the frame of a mirror, reflecting "the fire that cremated the bodies - and thinning it out, as though mimesis could not help being inadequate to it."
Kuspit, Donald Philip Guston's Self-Doubt http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit12-4-03.asp Acc. 19 December 2011

frescos rather than American painting.[348] The paint is dragged or scumbled onto the surface in a deliberate way such that it exudes from under the pressure of the brush giving a varying thickness and density to the marks. Guston successfully employs this delicate brush work and refined touch to ensure that the colour flickers, complimenting the almost graphic caricature of his brutal motifs. Although the paint is applied in bold forceful strokes, there is no gestural velocity to these marks; they are slow and definite, building up the surface over time rather than quickly with large scale brushes.

When I saw the painting I was convinced that Guston had "borrowed" this motif from the more melancholic creations of comic artist Robert Crumb,[349] but I have also read that this is pure coincidence and that both share similar inspirations from older comic artists.[350] More important is that Guston is emancipating the motif from the role of humour. Much in the same way, Baudelaire noticed that Daumier's caricatures became masks of the human passions, without which "Munch could never have evolved his intensely tragic physiognomies."[351] Consequently Guston can be seen as reviving "the breakdown of the barriers between caricature and great art" and indeed, once the language became understood, it became the model for what was later called "bad painting."

4.2.2.3 Dead Souls[352] - Glenn Brown

Studying at art school in the mid-1980s, Glenn Brown names[353] postmodern artists such as Jeff Koons, Cindy Sherman, and Heim Steinbeck and painters Sigmar Polke, David Salle and Julian Schnabel as contemporary influences but he was also drawn to the more formal use of space by older painters such as Matisse and Picasso. Knowing that he wanted to paint, but struggling to know what to paint, he followed the lead set by Gerhard Richter and started out painting from photographs. Brown's early subjects included photographs of modernist architecture, the moon's surface, observatories and satellites and as an experiment a photographic reproduction of a Frank Auerbach painting, *Head of J.Y.M.*, 1973.

Underlying his approach is the idea, derived from Marcel Duchamp's 'readymades', that artistic creation can be a matter of altering existing material rather than creating from scratch. In presenting 'pictures' that have already been 'read' i.e. interpreted and modified from their original

---

[348] His love of the frescos of Piero della Francesca and Signorelli is well documented but from a closer time-frame I see more of mid-career Picasso than Pollock. Guston carefully applying the paint, feeling the touch of the brush on canvas. Personal rather than industrial.
[349] A view shared by Kuspit: "His absurd one-eyed head, derived from a comic strip invention by R. Crumb, was celebrated for its vulgar daring and pariah authenticity."
Kuspit, Donald Philip Guston's Self-Doubt http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit12-4-03.asp Acc. 19 December 2011
[350] Berkson, Bill "Philip Guston and the Funnies" Philip Guston Retrospective 2003 Thames and Hudson New York **73**
[351] Gombrich, EH Art & Illusion 2002 Phaidon Press Ltd **301**
[352] "The dead are more useful than the living". Nikolai Gogol
[353] Glenn Brown in interview with Rochelle Steiner
Steiner, Rochelle Glenn Brown: Catalogue 2004 Serpentine Gallery Publishing **95**

state, artists painting from photographs connect their own work to our activity as viewers. [354] One of the most disorienting aspects of painting from a photographic source as a subject is the way it conflates flatness and illusionism,[355] something Brown was to capitalise on in his work. A strategy he chalks up to being a "bad Modernist".[356]

Like all Brown's early photo–based paintings, the painting, *Atom Age Vampire*, 1991, based on *Head of J.Y.M.* has the sheer flat surface of the reproduction, not the thick impasto daubs of paint of Auerbach's portrait. By working in this way Brown had created a figurative painting without perspective; something that he then developed into a practice that examined the paradox of the Greenbergian doctrines and set up a number of dialectical dialogues between various aspects of fine art painting. In particular Brown set the 'modernist belief in authentic expression, against the postmodern expulsion of the thinking, feeling articulate subject'.[357] In the earlier sections, the heartfelt (authentic) gestural mark making assumes a relationship between emotions and painting that is causal, and exactly like the relationship between an emotion and its bodily expression. This is not the case with Brown's work. In this section I will explore these dialectical moves and try and answer how these help his work convey a sense of melancholia through the appropriation of the expressionist marks of others, what I have termed 'synthetic expressionism'.

Brown soon realised that he had found a space for his technical skill in an art world that valued conceptual ideas over the ability to paint in a style from an earlier period.[358] Rather than exploit the loophole presented by painting from photographs, he would paint paintings from reproductions, and rather than imitate, he would approximate and elaborate his source material to create new meanings. Frank Auerbach's *Head of J.Y.M.*, 1973, was to be the inspiration for seven of works by Brown. The first one, *Atom Age Vampire*, 1991, painted when Brown was still studying at Goldsmiths College, is the most similar to the original source. In others he begins to experiment with the palette, the background, and both distorting and changing the image. The choice of title is a masterstroke. It is borrowed from a 1960s Italian film directed by Anton Giulio Majano, in which a patient who has been disfigured in a car crash becomes more beautiful, while the doctor treating her becomes more hideous. It indirectly references Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey,* the

---

[354] By mixing painterly and photographic codes to create complex and contradictory sets of pictorial signs, paintings from photographs can unsettle preconceptions about both media while probing the role played by codes and conventions in forging our perception and understanding of the world.
Rugoff, Ralph "Painting Modern Life" The Painting of Modern Life 2007 Hayward Publishing **12-13**

[355] See **Section 2.3.1 American Photorealism**

[356] Alison M Gingeras, ed, 'Dear Painter, paint me…': Painting the Figure since late Picabia, Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou; Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien; and Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2002, **10-11**

[357] Grunenberg, Christopher "Capability Brown" Glenn Brown 2009 Tate Publishing, London **18**

[358] There is no room in the art world of today for a painting in the style of an earlier period unless it is in the framework of what Danto calls the 'mention function'. It would have to make a statement about the kind of painting it exemplified, and not a statement about what a painting of an 'early subject' is about.
Danto, Arthur C "Modalities of History" After the End of Art 1997 Princeton UP, Chichester **206**

appropriation of the ideas of others, and how in the 'updated' version, painted flesh has been supplanted by the deterioration of real thing. It cleverly referenced the underlying concept of his work and also set the tone for the critical reviews[359] that his paintings would enjoy later in his career. Michael Bracewell notes that just as Basil Hallward's (the artist in Wilde's novel) portrait of Dorian Grey reveals the decay and corrupting soul of the sitter while Dorian himself remains eternally ageless and handsome, so in 'Brown's art we see a fateful contract between painting itself, art history and aesthetic putrefaction'.[360]

Munch described his early work as 'soul painting', paintings that lay bare his soul and personally I like the analogy between Brown's work and the souls of the dead. Painted portraits have been noted for their ability to draw out the character of the sitter and Brown, through his selection, appropriation, and vision, seems to be creating a visual interpretation of the afterlife of these dead souls: "When I work from thick-surfaced paintings — the Auerbach's, the Karel Appel, the De Kooning — they've almost all been portrait heads, in all of them there was originally a model sitting in a chair in the studio who gets characterised by that artist. He finishes it and it gets photographed. The photograph gets turned into a print which gets put in a book. I get that book and do my paintings from it. Through those stages, the original person gets further and further back. Further and further lost, further removed. The whole notion that there was a character underneath the image kept me wanting to do them. It was that sort of loss, as if they were ghosts."[361]

The portraits that inspire him are chosen for the beauty or ugliness of the printed reproductions he has to work from, not necessarily because he especially values the original works, which he has sometimes never seen. Reproductions, he claims, show variations in colour and tone, flatten the surface so the brushstrokes are invisible, and give little indication of size or scale; it is these inaccuracies that inspire him to transform the pictures into entirely new works. The images, not the people, become his subject matter.

At this point it would be useful to briefly describe his working practice and I will use *Death Disco*, 2004 [Fig. 16] to examine how this transformation results in a melancholic painting of loneliness and ennui. Brown starts with a vague idea of the kind of painting he wants and makes small sketches of the idea to determine the size, colour and type of background. He then trawls through books, magazines and catalogues looking for paintings that fit his ideas. 'Most works are made from two

[359] His portraits based on the work of others have even been described as 'Zombies', feeding on the 'corpse of painting'.
Grunenberg, Christopher "Capability Brown" <u>Glenn Brown</u> 2009 Tate Publishing, London **23-25**
[360] Bracewell, Michael "Concerning the Art of Glenn Brown" <u>Glenn Brown: 3 Exhibitions</u> 2009 Gagosian Gallery Publications, New York **68**
[361] Myers, Terry R and Paul, Frederick <u>Glenn Brown</u> interview with Stephen Hepworth 2000 Centre d'Art du Domaine de Kerguehennec **74**

elements: an original painting, which acts as a skeleton, and a second painting, which acts as a colour model or skin.'[362]

Having chosen the reproductions to work from, in this case a bad catalogue reproduction of a Rembrandt's *Flora* of 1634, he seeks to inject his own authorship by distorting the image through manipulating the reproduction and seizing upon the discrepancies between the original and the reproduced image.   In this painting he 'elongates the original almost beyond recognition, suppressing the suggestion of pregnancy in Rembrandt's Saskia[363] (the model for his Flora), and removing the shepherdess's *houette*, the sign for her pastoral calling.'[364]   He places the figure in the centre of the painting against a large monochrome background borrowed from van Gogh's *L'Arlésienne: Madame Joseph- Michel Ginoux,* 1888. He uses van Gogh's palette from the same source, but not the broad impasto rapid brush work.[365]

Instead he uses fine brushes to replicate the contours of the brush marks in the manipulated reproduction of Rembrandt's original adding simulated impasto marks of his own devising. "Instead of Brown's copies of impasto brush marks being fast and simple operations, as a gestural painter's marks would be, he labours intensely for days, sometimes weeks, with his small brushes to reproduce the action of the marks by giving the impression that they were freshly handled in an instant."[366] To this grisaille he adds strong highlights and finally thin tinted glazes giving a richness of colour and an illusion of depth similar to that in an old master. This illusion is further enhanced by the softening those edges that he wants to recede into space and sharpening those he wishes to come forwards.

The title *Death Disco* comes from the dark, nihilistic 1979 Public Image Limited (PiL) song of the same name. Brown's titles are never accidental but John Lydon's lyrics[367] dedicated to his dying mother and delivered in a tortured scream probably don't have any significance to Brown beyond the reference to decaying flowers.

The result is a transformation of pregnant but modest Saskia crowned with flowers as Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers, springtime and fertility, into a vision of decay and death. Instead of the

---

[362] Alison M Gingeras, ed, 'Dear Painter, paint me...': Painting the Figure since late Picabia, interview by Sabine Folie, Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou; Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien; and Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2002, **89**
[363] Saskia van Uylenburgh, Rembrant's wife.
[364] Freedberg, David "Against Cliché: Glenn Brown and the Possibilities of Painting" Glenn Brown 3 Exhibitions 2009 Gagosian Gallery Publications, New York **106**
[365] Vincent van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo that he finished the painting L'Arlésienne in under an hour. http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let717/letter.html Last Accesses 4 January 2012
[366] Stubbs, Michael "Glenn Brown: No Visible Means of Support" Glenn Brown 2009 Tate Publishing, London **105**
[367] "Watch her slowly die // Saw it in her eyes // Choking on a bed // Flowers rotting dead"

muted palette of the original we have a nauseous mix of reds, blues and greens against a poisonous lemon yellow background.

The extreme smoothness of the painted surface of the wooden panel becomes a flat simulacrum of the original - the brush marks you can see are false, and the real ones hidden.

There is a tension between the glamour of the shiny reflective surface and the blemishes of the woman's skin, her bloodshot eyes and the drooping floral garland. Christopher Grunenberg describes this paradox as the abuse of Photo-realism's "gleaming luxury surfaces"[368] in the service of surreal abjection. The viewer is attracted by the look and technical proficiency of the surface that gives the image credibility, but at the same time repulsed by the disintegrating face and nauseous juxtaposition of colour. Returning to the analogy of the "Afterlife", the meaning of the image seems suspended between being and nothingness. "I like my paintings to have one foot in the grave, as it were, and to be not quite of this world. I would like them to exist in a dream world, which I think of as being the place that they occupy, a world that is made up the accumulation of images that we have stored in our subconscious, and that coagulate and mutate when we sleep."[369]

However close we get, there is nothing there. No revelation, no sudden spiritual illumination, just detail dissolving into abstract lines, patterns, dry brushstrokes and unnatural colour.[370]

Is Brown hiding in the detail? Are his thoughts permeating the swirling flawless surface that he renders devoid of any display of emotion? Referring to Photorealist painting, Grunenberg concludes "perfection is never innocent and the obsessive-compulsive devotion to technical precision and desperate indulgence in insignificant minutiae, rendered with exquisite mastery, reveal a dark apocalyptic streak, the 'death drive' of detail, as Adorno calls it."[371] Kristeva in her work *Black Sun* identifies the sadness of depression with a mourning for the lost other (mother, breast) given up at weaning. She believes melancholia is not just mourning for the lost mother, but also for the 'lost self' and ties this 'narcissistic' melancholia to Freud's theory of the 'death drive'. Kristeva goes on to stress that through artistic expression[372] one can approach the mourned loss and deal with it successfully. So it is possible that the smokescreen of surface detail hides Brown's lost self, but I don't believe it is this aspect that suffuses all his work with melancholy.

---

[368] Frederick Jameson cited in Grunenberg, Christopher "Capability Brown" Glenn Brown 2009 Tate Publishing, London **15**
[369] Glenn Brown cited in Bracewell, Michael "Concerning the Art of Glenn Brown" Glenn Brown 3 Exhibitions 2009 Gagosian Gallery Publications, New York **68**
[370] Grunenberg, Christopher "Capability Brown" Glenn Brown 2009 Tate Publishing, London **26**
[371] Grunenberg, Christopher "Capability Brown" Glenn Brown 2009 Tate Publishing, London **18**
[372] Kristeva, Julia Black Sun 1989 Columbia University Press, New York **16-17 & 24-25**

The obsession with detail and use of academic techniques is something Greenberg noted about the methods of Surrealist painters. "The Surrealist motive for a naturalistic technique is plain. The more vividly, literally, painstakingly the absurd and the fantastic are represented, the greater their shock."[373] In his essay Greenberg concludes by dismissing most Surrealist painting on grounds of its dangerous proximity to kitsch.[374] I think that it is the relationship that Brown's work has with kitsch that is the source of the melancholy that pervades it.

Glenn Brown has stated, "I want to make work that has popular sentiment but involves deconstruction of images".[375] His appropriations of illustrations of sci-fi landscapes, paintings of abstract body parts as well as readily identifiable art historical image, albeit in this case with low cultural ambitions, is not to comment politically upon or critique his subject matter. Alison Gingeras believes his motivation for appropriation is born out of "lovingly fetishizing his sources, whether obscure or iconic art works … further blurring the cultural status of original and copy, traditional methods and avant-garde gestures."[376] This may be the case, but as I mentioned at the outset, I believe it evolved into a practice that had a dialogue between cool postmodernist ideas and painting by the way of Greenberg's doctrine. Greenberg sought to avoid contamination of Art by popular culture by escaping to his erudite "modernist tower" and setting out his rules for re-shaping the medium of painting so that the old intentions of high art could be maintained. Setting out the dilemma facing the contemporary art world in his essay *Avant Garde and Kitsch*[377] he emphasised that painters can make the old gestures, but they cannot seriously mean them. Fear of being kitsch resulted in idioms of painting being avoided and artists such as Guston struggling to express themselves adequately as Abstract Expressionists. Brown goes a step beyond Guston's betrayal of Modernism and takes his lead from Jeff Koons by embracing kitsch. By making work that satirises real emotion in the brush mark "traditional notions of meaning, depth and superficiality are rendered void as the false sentiment of kitsch is juxtaposed with the assumed authenticity of Modernist mark making."[378]

Let us return to *Death Disco* and see what the genesis of Brown's awakening of this "Sleeping Beauty" has to tell us about her aura of melancholia. Rembrandt's Flora comes from an age of

[373] "The Surrealist represents his more or less fantastic images in sharp and literal detail, as if they had been posed for him. Seldom does he violate any of the canons of academic technique, and he vies with and sometimes imitates colour photography, even to the very quality of his paint."
Greenberg, Clement "Surrealist Painting" The Collected Essays and Criticism: Perceptions and judgments, 1939-1944 ed. John O'Brian 1986 Chicago University Press, Chicago **229**

[374] "Its (Surrealist Art's) very horrors are nostalgic and day-dreamy, having associations with a more pleasant-seeming past, which is resuscitated in brighter, iridescent colours, smoother contours, glossier surfaces, and sharper outlines." ibid **231**

[375] Myers, Terry R and Paul, Frederick Glenn Brown interview with Stephen Hepworth 2000 Centre d'Art du Domaine de Kerguehennec **67**

[376] As was the case with first generation "pictures" artists such as Sherrie Levine or Cindy Sherman in the late 1970s. Alison Gingeras in conversation with Rochelle Steiner in "A Careful Concoction of Push and Pull" Issue 15 / Spring 2009 Tate Etc. **42**

[377] Greenberg, Clement "Avant Garde and Kitsch" in Art & Culture 1989 Beacon Press, Boston **3-21**

[378] Grunenberg, Christopher "Capability Brown" Glenn Brown 2009 Tate Publishing, London **15**

authenticity before mechanical reproduction unintentionally enhanced the value of immediacy and originality. Walter Benjamin in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*[379] speaks of the 'aura' of such works of art being diminished by photographic reproduction; a loss of meaning that only by seeing the original *in situ* can convey.   So Brown has chosen as his object to paint: a poor photographic reproduction, with its built in sense of loss, that depicts the young pregnant wife of Rembrandt dressed up as a shepherdess and who was to die a year after giving birth. He paints her in colours borrowed from a van Gogh painting of Madame Ginoux done at the height of his anxiety when Gauguin was sharing the *Yellow House* in Arles in December 1888. The painting is a trompe l'oeil of expressionist brush marks on a 'wooden' panel that to complete the deception would have the added touch of wood veneer edges[380] if it were it a later work. The title, to those 'in the know' about the lyrics, brings an extra level of borrowed angst to the piece whose methodical creation has been if anything the complete anti-thesis of expressive and existential artistic impetus.   The artist knowingly signifies a heart breaking melancholy through the accumulation of 'marks' supporting this narrative in the painting, and although the immaculate surface attracts us with its technical beauty, it also keeps us at a safe emotional distance from him. The surface seems to operate in a manner reminiscent of the ideas expressed in the work of director David Lynch.[381] For all its detail, truth is in short supply.

One of the definitions of kitsch[382] sees it as something "intended to arouse an emotional effect rather than permit disinterested contemplation, another holds kitsch to be that artistic practice that, to ennoble itself and to ennoble the purchaser, imitates and quotes the art of the museums."[383] I think Brown's paintings do both knowingly,[384] but he has awoken not just the soul of Rembrandt's Saskia as *Flora*, he has brought the memory of 'traditional' painting back to life. His work references the lost aura of authenticity, something fragmented by poor reproductions, by creating a piece of kitsch, albeit with irony, he has tapped into the inherent melancholy of the kitsch object.

---

[379] Benjamin, Walter "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in <u>Modern Art and Modernism</u> ed. Fascina & Harrison 1986 Harpers and Row Ltd, London **217-220**

[380] Mike Stubbs suggests that this trickery to create a simulacrum of a traditional wooden panel is a deliberate ploy on Brown's part to reinforce their status as kitsch objects.
Stubbs, Michael "Glenn Brown: No Visible Means of Support" <u>Glenn Brown</u> 2009 Tate Publishing, London **105**

[381] Especially Twin Peaks and Blue Velvet. On the surface everything looks fine but soon it is apparent that there is something rotten too. Scrape away the 'white picket fence' and 'damn fine cups of coffee' and dysfunctionality is running rampant; something that would normally be hidden in the perfect world of "The American Dream" that is pedalled by a lot of American television and movies.

[382] One indirect definition of kitsch comes from Schopenhauer when he outlines the difference between the artistic and the interesting, this last being understood as art that stimulates the user's senses. On reflection this seems to perfectly sum up my feelings in front of Brown's work – initially overpowered by the ideas and the skill but drawn to the sophisticated kitsch emotion.
http://www.archive.org/stream/theworldaswillan01schouoft/theworldaswillan01schouoft_djvu.txt Accessed 7 Jan 2012

[383] Eco, Umberto "The Ugliness of Others: Kitsch & Camp" <u>On Ugliness</u> 2007 Harvill Secker, London 397

[384] "I couldn't see why expression should be aligned only with the brush mark… However, I like clichés. I like portraits and flowers and still lives and trompe l'oeil and the story of Van Gogh cutting off his ear. These things involve sentiment, and sentiment… makes me cry."
Alison M Gingeras, ed, <u>'Dear Painter, paint me…': Painting the Figure since late Picabia</u>, interview by Sabine Folie, Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou; Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien; and Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2002, **87**

Whilst I remain convinced that Glenn Brown's paintings are melancholic, and that these works can be classified as being painted in what Nigel Cooke called *Dead Essentialism*,[385] a 'death style', a painting styled on its own death, I question whether Brown can still be having a dialogue with the 'flat-bed picture plane' long after the argument has moved on[386] and wonder if it is now just a way of mining the tradition of painting and using it as the raw material for an authenticity that is either nostalgically recovered or melancholically longed for.[387]   This returns to the question of whether the expressed emotion needs to be authentically felt and expressed by the artist and I believe that whilst experience helps it cannot be considered essential to making melancholic paintings.[388]

---

[385] Cooke, Nigel. "Painting's Perverse Body" <u>The Ambivalence of the Undead</u> 2004 Goldsmiths College **9**
[386] Especially as what were taboos in the 1990s, such as paintings of flowers, still lives, figures and religious subjects no longer raise an eyebrow.
[387] I have concerns that although painting styles may die, kitsch survives and with it the memory or longing for the lost aura.
[388] See section 1.1.2

5.0 CONTEXT: TRADITION AS A RESOURCE

"...tradition is no longer a burden, but a newly discovered resource."[389]

Elizabeth Baker, 1982

At the outset I speculated[390] whether it would be possible for contemporary painting to engage with the history of painting and balance this with a modern method of working that acknowledges the 'Death of Painting' to produce paintings that use the inherent loss to supplement meaning. In his thesis Nigel Cooke suggested the term 'death style'[391] to describe this style of painting and in this section I consider specific examples and try to unpack how the references to the history of painting impact the meaning of the work.

Before considering specific examples of this 'death style' I need to clarify two issues. The first is that in the late 1970s and 1980s art criticism changed from being centred on Greenbergian formalism and young critics adopted the ideas of French theoreticians such as Derrida[392] and Barthes.[393] This change led to a post-modernist practice of appropriation that some critics argued was not about a creative inspiration, but more a search for success on the back of someone else's originality implying a creative bankruptcy.[394] All painters paint 'paint' to a certain extent and where this stops being "influenced by" and becomes appropriation depends on their intentions. For the purposes of this section I am referring to appropriation from historical sources that demonstrate a love of painting and bring something new to the original source to add meaning in today's social and cultural world. The second point concerns the painting process. I do not mean to infer that the paintings are made by machines; just that a definite process (method of painting) is developed and

---

[389] The full quote continues " They seek re-entry into the realm of allegory, history and myth that the dominant styles of the modern period so decisively discarded"
Baker, Elizabeth C. Editorial: How Expressionist Is It? Dec 1982 Art in America **5**

[390] see Section 2.1

[391] Cooke, Nigel. "Painting's Perverse Body" The Ambivalence of the Undead 2004 Goldsmiths College **9**

[392] Derrida formulated Deconstruction: he argues that the 'self' is a construct of language, and language is an endless play of signifiers that lack ultimate meaning – in other words meaning is deferred. His axiom was to interrogate the meaning of a text to the point whereby the foundations of the meaning became unstable. The device is used in art criticism. First identify the obvious meaning of a work of art and then pit this against more marginal interpretations, aiming to prove the marginal more significant, thereby calling into question the manifest meaning the work appeared to convey. This was important in providing a rationale for conceptual art.

[393] Barthes proclaimed the "Death of the Author (or Artist)" attacking the conception of creation centred on the author of the work arguing instead that all work was just an appropriation with added gloss or a commentary on an earlier work. Consequently if criticism was not about deciphering the artist's intentions then the work was open to multiple interpretations. As Barthes puts it "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author".
Barthes, Roland "The Death of the Author" Image – Music – Text 1977 Fontana **148**

[394] "The appropriation artist is not at all influenced by what he appropriates, in the traditional sense of the term, for what he appropriates is not an inspiration and catalyst to him. Rather, he denies its value as a creative resource, indeed, denies it as a creative achievement. It is viewed, with pseudo-sophistication, as simply a visual construction. As such, the feeling and intention in it are neutralised and discarded."
Kuspit, Donald. "Cloning and Coding the Avant-Garde" The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist 1993 Cambridge University Press **107**

followed and although image manipulation and reproduction may be involved, the painting is unique and authentic.[395]

I have already discussed how Glenn Brown[396] engages with the history of painting through using manipulated versions of earlier paintings taken from photographic reproductions as his subject. His approach denies (deletes) the expressive associations of the original brush marks by painstakingly reproducing them in a flat photorealist manner and then uses this idea (device) and other signifiers to carry the meaning. Clearly he is a perfect example of an artist working in a 'death style' but as I concluded his underlying project is to invoke a sentimental reaction, and one might question if this is a purely ironical intention rather than a heartfelt one. Michaël Borremans and John Currin also engage with the same forgotten genres ('still lives' and 'portraiture') of painting but unlike Brown they base their method of painting on the style and actual techniques of earlier painters. A third approach to engaging with the history of art and one that directly references Neo-expressionism and consequently the Death of Painting is collage. As an example of this method of 'subject generation' I have selected the work of Dexter Dalwood whose work revives another traditional genre of painting ('history' painting) by combining fragments from earlier paintings to develop new meaning.

These examples show that it is possible to use context as a way of adding to the melancholic content of a contemporary painting, but there is a risk of invoking a nostalgic narrative and the sentimental emotions associated with kitsch even if this is not the artist's intention.

5.1 Perplexing Realities

"In the realm of emotion, the real is indistinguishable from the imaginary" [397]

André Gide, 1925

5.1.1 Nihilist Visions - Michaël Borremans

The paintings of Michaël Borremans are all about what is not represented and through his dialogue with the great paintings of the past, I believe his work is an example of a 'death style' of painting. His work is concerned with the possibilities in painting, in particular whether painting can have meaning today, and if so how much and what kind of meaning.

Borremans studied graphic arts and was trained in drawing and etching. He only began painting in 1995 and is self-taught. He gives his reasons for taking up painting as a belief that it can, as a

---

[395] In other words the subject is usually based on photographs. I realise that 'unique' and 'authentic' carry special meaning in the dialogue surrounding appropriation, here I just mean that there is one painting painted by the artist not by a machine.
[396] See **Section 4.2.2.3**
[397] Gide, André The Counterfeiters (1925) pt. 1, ch. 8 cited in de Weck Ardalan, Ziba "Puzzling Realities" The Performance 2005 Hatje Cantze, Germany **86**

medium, have a greater impact than drawing despite its ability to carry meaning today being heavily contested.[398] He feels it is a cliché of art itself and as paintings are still the most reproduced images the power of the myths surrounding painting continue to grow. He refuses to look in a linear way, insisting that one cannot chose to paint without relating to its history including the death of painting. He sees himself as a painter of his time in dialogue with Velázquez, Goya, and Manet and his work makes reference to their paintings, both through composition and in his method of painting. He gives Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin as his favourite painter, which probably explains his obsession with absorption in his painting.[399]

The paintings generally show imaginary worlds[400] as reality with a figure or group of figures usually absorbed[401] in a task that is often difficult to fathom. His figures are endlessly waiting, as are the protagonists in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* painted frozen in a gesture, but the purpose or object of the gesture is often missing.[402] This makes them unsettling images and difficult to understand, an enigma Reust describes as forming "an atmosphere of unspeakable threat emanating from the ceased action".[403] The eyes are either closed or the gazes of the figures are lowered in concentration or the faces concealed entirely in a view from the rear. Were the figures to look up or turn around the pictures would cease to exist – they would become portraits.[404] The spaces the figures inhabit are not usually articulated, with the background sparingly painted to ensure the figure stands out. He also keeps his palette muted so that the language of colour is restrained and doesn't overpower the image. With few exceptions his canvases are very modestly sized and in a film made about his working practice he describes wanting to make "small paintings that hold their own on a large wall".[405]

---

[398] "I make paintings because my subject matter, to a large extent, is painting. The medium is not free from that—it's very loaded." Coggins, David Interview: Michaël Borremans Jan 2009 Art in America **92-93**

[399] This paragraph is largely paraphrased from Michaël Borremans in conversation with Mario Rossi as part of UAL's series of online videos discussing "Tableau". UAL Paint Club video of Michaël Borremans in conversation available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO1HXwKtO3g. Last Accessed 3 Dec 2012

[400] Borremans describes his parallel worlds in which the animate is in constant tension with the inanimate as "thought models". Gioni, Massimilliano "A Doll's House" Weight 2007 Hatje Cantze, Germany **19**

[401] The fact that it is a staged absorptive undertaking promotes the philosophical reflection on the larger import of the picture. In other words, the image becomes not an image of the protagonists mind, his fantasy, his world, his private vision of reality; it is a picture of a shared world, inflected individually. Fried, Michael Why Photography Matters As Art As Never Before 2008 Yale UP, London **50**

[402] "The actions are often senseless. But the work switches between an aspect of the absurd and a romantic connotation, like a *vanitas*. That the human being is a victim of his situation and is not free is a conviction of mine". Coggins, David Interview: Michaël Borremans Jan 2009 Art in America **91**

[403] Reust, Hans Rudolf "Opaque Gestures" The Performance 2005 Hatje Cantze, Germany **49**

[404] Borremans: "The direct gaze is useless, then the painting would become a portrait". And that would mean that what is being depicted was no longer just in the picture but also a substitute for something with an authority of its own outside the painting that maintains the illusion that the picture depicts something that existed beyond the painting. Christ, Hans D. "Man Looking Down at His Hand" Eating the Bread 2011 Hatje Cantze, Germany **18**

[405] Michaël Borremans: A Knife in the Eye - A documentary by Guido de Bruyn made for canvas.be available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhhUmwmlMtc. Last accessed 28 Nov 2012.

At first he used 1930s and 40s photographs and stills from television programmes[406] as source images, but now uses models so that the nostalgia associated with the old photographs doesn't mask his meaning.[407] He has clothes made specifically for the models to wear to avoid both obvious contemporary and specific historical references. His project is concerned with the archetypes of painting not the specifics of fashion.[408] He then manipulates the photographic material for a period of time to get an idea of what to do with it.

In my Practical Study[409] I explore the process by which Borrëmans constructs the early painting *One*, 2003. I was keen to replicate his use of paint to fill the interstices of the canvas weave and his use of thin glazes to make exaggerated gestural marks. These marks signal that the image is a painting and in particular references the work of Velázquez. This method of working relieves paint of its materiality to a certain extent but emphasises the time involved; not only the time in the making and the frozen time depicted[410] but it also slows down the time for its reception.[411] According to Jeffrey Grove, Borremans actually "envisions the applying of paint as slowing time" and that "each of the single strokes in a series of veneers he places on a canvas is inflected by the time in its making."

In an essay published with the catalogue for the exhibition at the Parasol Unit in London that contained many of his important early works, including *One*, Ziba de Weck Ardalan makes a key observation: "Even when they depict unusual subjects, Borremans's paintings engender in us feelings of melancholy and nostalgia reminiscent of 19th Century Romantic paintings".[412]

Yet whilst painters like Caspar David Friedrich used the immense and awesome landscapes as metaphors for their inner feelings, Borremans seems to achieve this through referencing the history of painting. Like Dürer's angel in *Melencholia I* his figures are lost in contemplation, unable to find any focus for their thoughts. Reust observes succinctly that in Borremans' paintings "a void emerges in the midst of the figurative, realistically clear presentation, a void that wants to be filled

---

[406] The television stills are from "scenes that aren't important to the action". From these he isolated gestures from and displaced the aura of the original by re-photographing it. Borremans felt this strategy allowed him to "get closer by getting further away" eroding the signification of the original.
Grove, Jeffrey "Ventilating a Nihilist Vision" Michaël Borremans: Paintings 2009 Hatje Cantze, Germany **10**

[407] "I try to show figures—I don't want to use the word 'individuals'; they're not individuals. I try to place them in a space that is familiar yet undefined. It's very strange. I used to make images that were based on photographs from the 1930s or '40s, but that was too recognizable. I heard that the work was nostalgic, and that was absolutely not the idea. So I try to avoid that, and now I usually work with models who pose for me."
Coggins, David Interview: Michaël Borremans Jan 2009 Art in America **92**

[408] UAL Paint Club video of Michaël Borremans in conversation with Mario Rossi available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO1HXwKtO3g. Last accessed 3 Dec 2012

[409] See Appendix A2.1.1

[410] "The most seductive form of spectacle resides in an act of suspension, a kind of inaction."
Gioni, Massimilliano "A Doll's House" Weight 2007 Hatje Cantze, Germany **19**

[411] This slowness is symbiotic with a sense of melancholy – see section 1.1.3.

[412] de Weck Ardalan, Ziba "Puzzling Realities" The Performance 2005 Hatje Cantze, Germany **89**

by the imagination."[413]   Consequently the viewer is entering a collaborative relationship with the painter, the realism invites us to identify and empathise with the subject but our emotional engagement is thwarted by the absurd scenario that they are in and we are reminded that it is a painting not of reality but of an idea. In conversation with Mario Rossi he is clear that his paintings are just illusions – just paint on canvas open to multiple associations. "There is no meaning until we add to it as a spectator."[414]   Grove asserts that Borremans is trying to create a space between the physical and the metaphysical. "This space simultaneously present and intangible must be provoked by the painting and constructed in the mind of the viewer."[415]

In 2006 Borremans exhibited a series of paintings at David Zwirner in New York collectively titled *Horse Hunting*: a metaphor for the attempt to achieve something that is just short of attainable, referring to both an artist's creative process as well as that of human nature as a whole. In this exhibition all the paintings featured male subjects, some portraits cropped in a non-conventional manner to reveal just the head, neck and shoulders, as in passport photographs[416] others full length either standing or lying on the floor with eyes closed, we are left to wonder if they are dead or merely asleep. The show was a focus on the male archetype with implicit rather than direct references to Velázquez, Goya, Courbet and Manet.

The painting I would like to consider is a full length portrait of a man: he looks like a bum but he stands like a king. With a pastoral background one would be able to define the image, but instead it is a very nihilist image – that of an actor without a setting. At a monumental 3.6m high *The Avoider*, 2006 [Fig. 17] is the largest painting Borremans has made to date by a long way, yet it has the same qualities as his smaller studies. There is an obvious visual reference to Courbet's *The Meeting'* or *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet*, 1854 in the way the model is posed and an implicit reference to the lack of background in Manet paintings such as *The Tragic Actor (Rouvière as Hamlet)*, 1866[417] and *The Philosopher (Beggar with Oysters)*, 1867 which in turn reference the Velázquez paintings *The Jester (Portrait of Pablo de Valladolid)*, 1632 and *Aesop*, 1638. Here, as in the Manet and Velázquez paintings, only the angular shadows cast anchor him in the space.

---

[413] Reust, Hans Rudolf "Opaque Gestures" <u>The Performance</u> 2005 Hatje Cantze, Germany **49**

[414] UAL Paint Club video of Michaël Borremans in conversation with Mario Rossi available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO1HXwKtO3g. Last accessed 3 Dec 2012

[415] Borremans sees the relationship with the viewer as similar to that between a writer and a reader.
Grove, Jeffrey "Ventilating a Nihilist Vision" <u>Michaël Borremans: Paintings</u> 2009 Hatje Cantze, Germany **18**

[416] The David Zwirner press release points out their similarity to political portraits in which the sitter's ideology is embedded (one thinks of Mao Tse-Tung as a historical example).
Press release at David Zwirner website http://www.davidzwirner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/MB_PR.pdf
Last accessed 12 Dec 2012

[417] I too have an interest in this painting by Manet; it can be read not as a portrait of Rouvière or of Hamlet, but a self-portrait of the artist becoming a martyr for his art facing his public as a manifestation of Baudelaire's death in life and melancholy. A full argument for this reading of the painting can be found in Larry Ligo's exploration of Manet's melancholia.
Ligo, Larry <u>Manet, Baudelaire and Photography</u> 2006 Edward Mellon Press, **375-384**

The painting tells us nothing of the personality of his subject; it is a mystifying illustration that could almost be of one of the porcelain Commedia dell'arte figures that he is also fond of painting. Nor is the meaning clear, the figure just gazes beyond us into space. The image is open to multiple interpretations, a piece of theatre whereby the subject being depicted has been transferred into an object with an existence of its own.[418] As Jeffrey Grove points out "the subjects in Borremans dramas do not think or decide, they wait or proceed through actions that define their futility. The nihilist conception is abject and impractical, but deeply Romantic…and Borremans agrees that the Romantic position states his conviction that painting cannot be seen as purely conceptual: *'There is always in some way an emotional and personal quality involved'*. "[419]

For me the subjects in Borremans' paintings are like the murder victims in TV detective plots, rarely more than the clues which surround their bodies: they exist only to be dead. The art historical references are an essential component of these visual clues to interpretation, since evincing the use of old photographs as source material to avoid associations of nostalgia. Indeed the emotional quality I have always felt in Borremans' paintings is one of futility, whether the subject is gazing into the void as in *The Avoider* or working on some pointless/endless Sisyphean task such as in *One*. The melancholy associated with powerlessness, a degree of introspection coupled with a feeling of incomprehension underlying the brooding detachment of Dürer's *Melencholia I*, but also the theme of melancholy as a substitute for action.[420] In a footnote Grove indicates that Borremans is familiar with the myth of Sisyphus and the notion that futility is connected to Camus's existential conception of lack of reason, his figures are "proscribed social actions of utility that enforce their uselessness."[421]

His work seems the perfect example of the 'death style', purposely engaging with art history to reinforce the meaning behind his paintings to those who can read the clues yet engaging with the future through the use of his own photography to avoid the resultant paintings slipping into nostalgic kitsch through associations with appropriated photographs.[422] It is perhaps significant that

---

[418] "Borremans paints the gaps between visual perception and concept without getting bogged down over what could be in the emptiness between the representation in the medium of painting and what is conceivable beyond the picture."
Christ, Hans D. "Man Looking Down at His Hand" Eating the Bread 2011 Hatje Cantze, Germany **18**

[419] Grove, Jeffrey "Ventilating a Nihilist Vision" Michaël Borremans: Paintings 2009 Hatje Cantze, Germany **8**

[420] Günter Grass delivered a lecture in 1971 where he described melancholy as a 'substitute for action' and the summation is very apt to the paradox in his paintings of whether the subjects are flesh and blood or porcelain. "What is dangerous about the gaze of the Melancholic is that it causes life (time) to flow out of objects – it petrifies them…one of the forgotten symbols of melancholy Walter Benjamin…reminds us, is stone."
Cited in Bowring, Jackie A Field Guide to Melancholy 2008 Oldcastle Books **40-41**

[421] Grove, Jeffrey "Ventilating a Nihilist Vision" Michaël Borremans: Paintings 2009 Hatje Cantze, Germany **34**

[422] "A difficulty with appropriated photographs is that no matter the reality of the scene at the instant the image is taken, it both documents and transforms that moment into fiction." Ibid. **8**

when he paints his porcelain figurines he restricts himself to a fragment, a device that allows him the freedom to paint shiny glazes yet avoid accusations of kitsch. There is also an ambiguity about his subjects looking like 'still lives', suggesting he is "addressing the situation of mortality through a process of reification in which he transforms objects through the process of painting."[423] A 'Still life' or 'Vanitas' painting is an illusion bearing a resemblance to the reality of the things it refers to by virtue of its deadness, hence the French term *'nature morte'* for this genre of painting. The relationship between what is living and what is dead. The painting is a presence representing absence, often a physical manifestation of a psychological state. The humble object is transformed into something that stands in for our dread of dying.[424] Borremans' denial of any quotient of subjectivity for his characters has led him to embed meaning in a similar way to these depictions of dead things. He has invoked what was traditionally thought of as the least consequential genre of painting to pose the existentialist question, why are we here?

5.1.2 Inappropriate Idiom - John Currin

Having started with what I believe is a positive example of a "death style" contributing to a melancholy reading of a painting, I would like to give a negative. Like Michaël Borremans, John Currin paints in a style reminiscent of old masters, but his intent couldn't be more different. In the 1990s Currin used supposedly 'outmoded' painting styles and techniques from art history with idiosyncratic and 'inappropriate' idioms as his strategy[425] to challenge the proscribed notions of 'good' painting.

His canvases are first coated with warm tones and on this traditional surface preparation he varies his handling, shifting from smooth, invisible brushwork to thick impasto. He gives his colours depth and dimension by applying paint in semi-transparent layers and often allows the warm under-painting to show through the flesh tones. His skilful brushwork displays a material attraction to paint that ranges from the recent realism of glowing flesh back to the crude impasto facial complexions of his earlier work.

In his work high and low culture are lovingly mixed with a disregard for political correctness that has attracted praise and criticism in equal measure. More recently it seems to be the case that as his skill has improved the criticism of his subject matter has faded. This is no doubt due to the skill and

---

[423] Grove, Jeffrey "Ventilating a Nihilist Vision" <u>Michaël Borremans: Paintings</u> 2009 Hatje Cantze, Germany **18**
[424] Siri Husvedt is particularly lucid on the psychological meanings behind Still Life painting, in particular the work of Juan Sánchez Cotán, Cezanne and even Philip Guston. The chapter is engagingly titled "Ghosts at the table"
Hustvedt, Siri <u>Mysteries of the Rectangle</u> 2005 Princeton Architectural Press **44-59**
[425] See **Section 2.3.2**

the prevalence of art historical references as Alison Gingeras maintains,[426] but it is also the changing attitudes to what is socially acceptable.

The elements of "death style" are there in his work, but despite the continued use of subject matter rooted in the contemporary, the paintings seem to be getting less melancholy as the engagement with art history in his work increases. I believe this is due to three contributing factors:

His early work based on photographs has a sadness that probably has more to do with the photographic referent than with the way it is painted. Currin started by painting young girls from high school yearbook pictures in a deadpan manner referencing the cheap pathos and photographic tropes of this typically American publication. He followed this up with paintings of older women, middle aged socialites both famous (Nobel Prize-winner *Nadine Gordimer*, 1992; Actress *Bea Arthur Naked, 1991*) and anonymous (Shakespearean Actress, 1991; *The Moved Over Lady*, 1991; *Skinny Woman*, 1992; *Mrs. Omni*, 1993). As with the teenage portraits, the placement of these middle-aged socialites against a plain background is as Robert Rosenblum points out "usually awry (off-centre, too high, or too low), adding new dimensions to the disparity between their efforts at stylish grace and the actual facts of flesh and clothing… a contrast that can recall the way Goya subtly undermined so many of his fashionable sitters."[427]

Photographs have certainly provided source material for these portraits but coupled with Currin's imagination the original has been deformed by what would become Currin's trademark mannerist distortions to exaggerate body types and social postures. The head of *Mrs. Omni* is too large for her body, while the head of the *Skinny Woman* is too small. In *Standing Nude* (1993) a gaunt head of a fifty year old is painted on a lithe young body. The subject's gaze is often off-canvas and as Robert Storr points out "most of these mature women have a look of proud but desperate, if not hysterical intelligence".[428] Nonetheless, the portraits "radiate an uncomfortable aura of stopped time, even of death,"[429] because we know that they are ultimately based on a photograph of a real person.

The use of photographs to make synthetic portraits continued through the 1990s when he added ailing girls in bed with the covers pulled up, crippled beautiful young women, women with unnaturally large breasts and miserably unconfident men to his repertoire of menopausal women engaged in a pitiful quest for youthfulness.   Thereafter he started working from a live model and

---

[426] According to Gingeras, Currin has made the journey from bad painting to good painting and "pushed his engagement with history of painting to virtuoso extremes over the course of the late 1990s." Gingeras, Alison M. ed, 'Dear Painter, paint me…': Painting the Figure since late Picabia, interview by Alison M. Gingeras, Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou; Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien; and Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2002, **74**

[427] Rosenblum, Robert "John Currin and the American Grotesque" John Currin 2003 Harry N. Abrahams Inc. New York **12**

[428] Storr, Robert John Currin: Master of Grotesque 2002 Art Press **49**

[429] Rosenblum, Robert "John Currin and the American Grotesque" John Currin 2003 Harry N. Abrahams Inc. New York **12**

although the model might be posed to reference an image in a magazine it was much more likely to be a pose based on an old master painting.

Secondly it could be that his selection of art historical references becomes less melancholic and therefore the resulting paintings follow suit. His early work with a "flat, precise, linear style recalls Otto Dix or Christian Schad, with intimations of Holbein and Dürer"[430] which changes towards the end of the 1990s. Staci Boris reviewed his work for the catalogue of the mid-career exhibition Currin had at the Serpentine Gallery in London, 2005 and remarked on the shift in style as a reflection of "his changing interests and his maturation as a person and as an artist" and singles out *Heartless*, 1997 [Fig 24][431] as providing a technical breakthrough. For the first time he uses a grisaille as an under-painting[432] which then becomes the norm for his subsequent work. The reliance on found photography is supplanted by ever increasing subtle art historical references that "leave subliminal memories"[433] with those having an informed eye. This shift challenges my assumptions about a 'death style' and begs the question why these anachronistic references are not conferring a melancholy halo on his work after *Heartless*?

Interviewed by Alison Gingeras, Currin refuses to acknowledge the "Death of Painting" preferring instead to term painting's periodic 'fall from grace' to be the death of the 'culture' of painting. Gingeras believes his work from this period seems "suspended in a constant state of imbalance in terms of the agglomeration of historical references and a range of subject matter rooted in the present tense…Currin uses this seamless layering as a strategy to affirm the vitality of the practice of painting today, while simultaneously acknowledging the death of the culture of painting at large. That may well be true, but in Currin's case his use of irony[434] swamps the associations and formal properties that the referenced works bring to his paintings.

For example if we look at *Nude on a Table*, 2001 [Fig. 18] which many think is based on Mantegna's *Lamentation of Dead Christ*, c1480 but the source is actually Annibale Carracci's *Corpse of Christ*, 1584. Along with the references to the Virgin Mary[435] there are references to death (snuffed out

---

[430] Kimmelman, Michael <u>With Barbed Wit Aforethought</u> 21 Nov 2003 The New York Times <u>http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/21/arts/art-review-with-barbed-wit-aforethought.html</u> Last Accessed 11 Mar 2013

[431] This picture of a girl gesturing to her shirt, which has a large heart-shaped cut-out is also the last of Currin's paintings I find melancholy. It is one of my 100 paintings and I review it Appendix 1.

[432] "Separating form and colour hides the mechanics of the painting's structure and allows for a bravura performance to occur on the surface."
Staci, Boris "The Lovers, the Invalids and the Socialites" <u>John Currin</u> 2003 Harry N. Abrahams Inc. New York **51**

[433]Rosenblum, Robert "John Currin and the American Grotesque" <u>John Currin</u> 2003 Harry N. Abrahams Inc. New York **18**

[434]Irony is usually defined as a form of expression whose meaning contradicts what the words seem to say. Quintilian says that when using this rhetoric tool it is "necessary to signal that it is being used and when listeners should once again stick to literal meanings". I believe Currin uses cartoon caricature in the faces of his subjects to signal its use.
Marcus Fabius Quitilianus cited in Neuner, Stefan "Picabia's Concept of Irony" <u>Bad Painting Good Art</u> 2008 DuMont Buchverlag Köln **126**

[435] Lemons in Christian iconography signify the Virgin Mary as well as salvation and fidelity in love.
Impelluso, Lucia <u>La Natura e I Suoi Simboli</u> 2003 Mondadori Electra SpA Milano **37**

candles) but any melancholy interpretation is shattered by the gaze of the model leering at the viewer from behind her foreshortened body. It could be read as a comment on the use of the nude in Western Art and her look an ironical one saying "what am I doing here?" Compare this with Borremans' large-format painting *The Nude*, 2010 which also comments on figurative painting in Western Art.[436] The foreshortened figure is so immobilised by the image that it resembles an anatomical corpse, an atmosphere of melancholy pervades even though the reference is generic rather than specific. So it isn't the referent or its formal properties (although these do have a bearing) that is the factor but the meaning that the artist (user of the reference) wishes to convey. In interview with Alison Gingeras Currin has even declared that "There is no deeper meaning to be found …there may be references but I am referring to them because I like them, I am not using them for content."[437]

Which brings me to the third contributing factor – what does Currin want to say with his paintings? The men and women he paints in his work up to 2000 are figures from the same urban middle and upper classes which, among other things, constitute the supporting strata of the art world - the museum and gallery visitors, the trustees and patrons, and not least the buyers. For Currin as an outcast from this world at the time, they came to embody his own misery: "These women mirrored my situation as a painter and the political problem of being a painter...when I was making these paintings my validity as an artist was challenged. People would say why do you paint? Is painting possible?"[438] In her review of Currin's work for the 2008 exhibition *Bad Painting Good Art*, Eva Badura-Triska notes this change in emphasis "around 1998/1999 after art's evolution had brought forth a....renewed acceptance of figurative painting, robbing Currin of his outer enemy so to speak…"[439] I think the paintings of the menopausal women were a metaphor for painting itself, painting left behind as art went in search of younger models. He even titles one of the last ones *Minerva*, 2000 the patron goddess of craft[440] amongst other things.

Success put him in a position where he could paint what he wanted and didn't need to worry about justifying his position as a 'contemporary artist' – the only question that remained was what to do

---

[436] "There is more than a hint of a corpse on a table awaiting an autopsy, nevertheless it remains an image of a living breathing person posed by the artist. So we are still in the scope of an artistic conceit, but one that succeeds much better than Borremans' more overtly 'creative' pseudo-allegories. … The Nude … tackles its clichés (meaning Manet and Richter in particular and the European tradition of the nude in general) head on, embraces its thorough conventionality and thereby arrives at something subtly unfamiliar. It seems to me a convincingly 21st C painting."
Chilver, John Borremans: Eating the Beard Issue 11 Turps Banana **76**
[437] Alison M Gingeras, ed, 'Dear Painter, paint me…': Painting the Figure since late Picabia, interview by Alison M. Gingeras, Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou; Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien; and Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2002, **75**
[438] Alison M Gingeras, ed, 'Dear Painter, paint me…': Painting the Figure since late Picabia, interview by Alison M. Gingeras, Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou; Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien; and Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2002, **76**
[439] Badura-Triska, Eva "Who becomes a Bad Painter" Bad Painting Good Art 2008 DuMont Buchverlag Köln **88**
[440] Ovid called her the "*goddess of a thousand works.*"

with the skill? Instead of biting the hand that feeds[441] he focussed instead on the potential of the medium itself and became inspired by "the formal principles of artists who like the Mannerists opposed the classical canon of beauty."[442] He has continued to paint nudes calculated to appeal to the viewers' scopic desires but the cartoon smiles that could be either the grin of a predator or a cry of anguish, remain a barrier to entry.

Like Currin, Lisa Yuskavage uses the 'body' as reflection of cultural values but with a different approach; more sympathy and pathos, but light on meaning. Her cartoon caricatures are produced in candy coloured pastels etc. and are very kitsch – signalling that the emotion is totally false. In his early work Currin was also accused of kitsch and although this may be misplaced criticism and his early work classed as an example of a 'death style', any vestiges of melancholy associated with his work have gone. He now only engages in a perversion of his subject, the distortions deflecting from the central issue of meaning in his paintings.

5.2 Collage

"The surface isn't really the surface, but rather a manifestation of the depths."

Doulgas Sirk[443]

This technique was developed by the Cubists and then employed in the Dada movement by Berlin based artists such as John Heartfelt, George Grosz, and Hannah Hoch to make photo-montages that could combine the "grip of a dream with the documentary 'truth' of photography." Subsequently this idea was adopted by Max Ernst (presided over by Giorgio de Chirico) and the Surrealists as a way of simulating on the painted surface a mental space where chance encounters could take place. Later in the 20th Century onset of a mass-culture environment, this concept of mixing together source material developed some very British roots. Early Pop artists, such as Richard Hamilton and Peter Blake, began to use collages of 'filtered' material to express how the 'self' could be defined through identification with objects of desire and in Blake's case with the identity of one's heroes.[444] It was also a technique used by Neo-Expressionists to incorporate images from existing art and the mass media, sometimes attaching real objects to the canvas (e.g. Julian Schnabel and David Salle). These were not illustrations of other images but often improvised in the free-associational,

---

[441] "I was fighting the art society much more early on …I felt really antagonistic towards it. But ….I have been rewarded richly in the last 5 years, so the idea that I'm not accepted or that I'm an outsider is ridiculous." He also acknowledges feeling depressed in the earlier period with nostalgia for his childhood and Northern California.
John Currin in interview with Steiner, Rochelle John Currin 2003 Harry N. Abrahams Inc. New York **83-85**
[442] Badura-Triska, Eva "Who becomes a Bad Painter" Bad Painting Good Art 2008 DuMont Buchverlag Köln **90**
[443] Cited in Anfan, David When history collapses Into the present Spring 2010 Tate Etc. **48**
[444] Peter Blake was to paint *On the Balcony,* which contained all kinds of collaged artefacts from childhood, between 1955-57 and famously used collage to design the cover for The Beatles' 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper* album.
Stevens, Chris & Stout, Katherine "This Was Tomorrow" Art & the 60's 2004 Tate Publishing, London **11**

additive/subtractive, direct process of painting (e.g. Eric Fischl and David Salle). This notion of 'self-expression' through a collage of styles and signifiers was very much of its time and despite being loved by the art market it was derided by the critics as pandering to the vulgar uneducated tastes of collectors.[445] It is a technique that has become associated with Post-Modernism and is synonymous with the practice of assembling new songs from purloined elements of other tracks known as 'mash-ups' or 'samples'.

5.2.1 Dexter Dalwood

Dalwood has made several series of paintings derived from his own collages, a process that may have been influenced by the work of Henri Rousseau,[446] an early proponent of the use of portions of photographs, engravings and newspaper clippings to construct a new image. He uses the collage technique in a similar way to the Surrealists, to generate an image from which to paint imaginary spaces, only his are a 'deliberate' rather than an 'accidental' juxtaposition. Since 1997-98 he has been using fictional content in the 'mix' and like Hamilton and especially Blake the subsequent paintings represent a kind of wish fulfilment.[447] Spaces he has not been to but has heard of such as *Sharon Tate's House* 1998, *Room 100 Chelsea Hotel* 1999, *Kurt Cobain's Greenhouse* 2000, and *Hendrix's Last Basement* 2001. The subjects are absent in these empty rooms but all kinds of clues are included to appeal to our voyeurism, not only from photographic sources but also from fragments or allusions to paintings by other artists. This engagement with the processes and history of painting led him to develop an interest in revamping the genres of painting and in particular 'History Painting'.[448] For his next body of work, Dalwood began to fuse world-historical events with art-historical references.

His painting of *Ceauşescu's Execution*, [Fig. 19] is a typical example, extending that recreation of time and space to summon forth the atmosphere and implications of an historical event resulting in a post-modern version of the traditional history painting. I chose this piece for my "survey" of 100 paintings and quote from my observations and subsequent research below.

The starting point for the painting is the size; this is exactly the same dimensions as Francisco Goya's historical painting *Third May,* 1808 which depicts the execution by firing squad of a group of Spanish

---

[445] see Section 2.3.3

[446] Dalwood had a reproduction of 'A Carnival Evening' (1885-1886) on his bedroom wall as a child. In interview with Nancy Ireson Dalwood describes knowing it as a painting before he knew painting generally and that he did not relate to it as a world he knew, rather one full of the mysteries of adulthood.
Dalwood, Dexter & Ireson, Nancy <u>A Stubborn Cornerstone at the Onset of Modernism</u> Autumn 2005 Tate Etc. **65**

[447] Michael Andrews is another possible influence particularly The Lights series of paintings as might be RB Kitaj (*The Murder of Rosa Luxembourg* a collaged work that may have inspired Dalwood's 1999 painting *Rosa Luxembourg*).

[448] "However, he (Dalwood) soon revealed that in this process he was resurrecting, as it were, a body of memory that included the history of painting itself."
Anfan, David <u>When history collapses Into the present</u> Spring 2010 Tate Etc. **48**

patriots by Napoleon's Imperial Guard. The Ceauşescus were also executed by a firing squad, elite paratroop regiment soldiers, who shot them with AK-47 assault rifles. At first I thought this was also the source for the triangle of table top in the foreground, as there is an area of illuminated foreground in Goya's masterpiece, but the shape is identical to the foreground in Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Mönk Am Meer*, 1808-1810. The effect of the light under the gloom above is similar to bleakness and desolation invoked by Friedrich's painting. Given that the splinters on the table top resemble the shards of ice in another Friedrich painting *The Sea of Ice*, I think the later interpretation is more likely. The hard part was the background which I thought looked like the work of Abstract Expressionist Franz Kline, yet I could see no connection with the title or the late 1980's. Fortunately the exhibition catalogue[449] came to the rescue and the source for the "curtains" dripping with blood is a painting by Georg Baselitz titled *Der Krug,* 1989 which was completed only months before the execution of the Ceauşescus was broadcast on television

Dalwood talks about having to try and get into the mind-set of the original artist in order to paint convincingly in the same style and although it is a fragment of the painting and Baselitz might have had his own agenda Dalwood appropriates the marks and puts them to his own use.

> "De Kooning—the energy you need to paint like him is incredible. You have to get buckets of paint and go like a bull. The idea that that would be your working practice, that you would go into your studio and paint like that, is amazing. You have to be like an actor: I had to run at the canvas and fight with it. I was not going to be able to replicate it without getting into that physical frame of mind."

> "My natural style is probably an early '80s sub-expressionistic painting which has no more relevance than anything else. I've tried on so many different ways of painting—you find a path through that. I've managed to find a style that's genuinely mine."[450]

For him the depiction of historical moments is a playful thing but also about personal and collective memory. His quoted passages from extant paintings are chosen for compositional fit; but as Terry Meyers asserts he makes his selections more for the belief systems that contribute to their original production. In interview he talks about the correspondences between the fragments and his chosen subject. "Through using bits of other peoples painting in my painting I am saying to the viewer think about what that was happening then, this was simultaneously happening, does it make you feel differently about that event?"[451] Thomas Crowe raises this need for the viewer to bring knowledge

[449] Tufnel, Ben Days Like These Catalogue Tate Publishing 2003 pp64-69
[450] Coggins, David & Dalwood, Dexter In the Studio – An Interview January 2010 Art in America **64-69**
[451] Dalwood, Dexter in interview with Liberty Patterson for Kobenhagen Online Magazine (no longer available) Last Accessed May 2009

of the source of the quotations and also the fact that to a viewer who has seen the referent, the difference between the two is palpable.[452]

This is hardly surprising as Dalwood favours a flat surface to his paintings and likes to prevent build-up of pigment on the canvas.[453] In Crowe's opinion the 'liquid gesture' has ceased to belong to itself anymore, instead being a trope, a "retrospective token of exhaustion… a remnant left over from form giving expression."[454] And as Dalwood admits the expressive marks are rehearsed before painting on the canvas, so although the gestural mark making is, or appears to be, a trace of a performed action and embodied state, it is deliberately simulated.

The expressive language is there but the meaning of the marks has been incorporated in the same way as the other references such as size, colour and title.

I believe that this process of looking back to painting's history and quoting it in combination with snippets of photographs and reproductions and then painting the tableaux in a cool, flat detached way to revive a dead genre of painting has the hallmarks of what I have termed a "Death Style". His subject, invariably involving death or disaster, is typically absent from the paintings and this desire to depict the loss as an imaginary mise en scene but without the corpse is reinforced by what David Anfam calls Dalwood's "clinical distaste for the old fashioned equation between pigment and corporeality."[455] These depictions of memory and loss, these shrines to celebrity, sepulchres of modern myth and sites of trauma, are certainly melancholic and I believe that his style supports this reading. The titles provide the clue and the cool treatment leaves room for the viewer's imagination and interpretation, but this experience will be much richer for those viewers who can make the associations between the historical event and the quotations from painting's history.

The use of direct quotation of other painters and art works collage has recently become a way of working for a number of artists. Ged Quinn, Adrian Ghenie and Justin Mortimer[456] are all skilled craftsmen with paint and the way they paint with collage quotations from the past could be argued as in the "death style". Also more graphic artists such as Neo Rauch and Muntean & Rosenblum use the past styles or the mise en scene of old paintings to create tableaux that address contemporary

---

[452] Crowe, Thomas "Invisible Man" Dexter Dalwood – Recent History 2006 Gagosian Gallery, London 14

[453] "When paintings start to look like painting – the worked surface, time and energy spent – I feel sick, and want to get away from it." Dalwood, Dexter & Green, Alison The Unbearable Lightness of Being Autumn/Winter 2000 Untitled 22 cited in Crowe, Thomas "Invisible Man" Dexter Dalwood – Recent History 2006 Gagosian Gallery, London 22

[454] Crowe, Thomas "Invisible Man" Dexter Dalwood – Recent History 2006 Gagosian Gallery, London 21

[455] Anfan, David When history collapses Into the present Spring 2010 Tate Etc. 48

[456] Naturally being taught at the Slade, Mortimer cites English painter Michael Andrews as a big influence on his use of collage.

issues[457] and all are trying to make the art of the past relevant to today's issues with varying degrees of success.

[457] Neo Rauch uses a Social Realist style combined with Communist graphic design in his collages that often contain a central figure enacting the artistic struggle between modernism and realism. Muntean & Rosenblum use settings/groupings of figures culled from art historical sources ranging from Piero della Francesca to Manet and populate them with teenage figures sourced from fashion magazines that gaze out of the canvas at trying the viewer with bored indifference.

6.0 PRACTICAL STUDY

6.1 Introduction & Aims

I started my research project by drawing up an initial list of 100 paintings that I considered melancholy based on my own previous experience and studies. Further desk research into these works and the artists provided a foundation for the written and practical study. My visual observation of the actual paintings was at the heart of this analysis, wherever possible.

I linked my own practical study to an examination of the attributes of those works that I considered contributing to the melancholy sensation felt as a spectator. Through probing the more promising groupings through a detailed examination of 10 key contemporary painters I wanted to explore the idioms and methods that these have used in this field. My aim is to unpack why I consider them successful in this respect through copying a number of extant works to the best of my ability. Wherever possible I wanted to go beyond experiencing, reading and decoding the paintings and have a material response to compliment the research.

I will then test hypotheses through my own chosen melancholy metaphors and then incorporate this knowledge into my existing practice to find a language for the representation of melancholia in my own painting. The challenge was to avoid using the practice as an illustration of the theory but to provide additional insight through the handling of materials (praxis). This would be tested in an exhibition of my completed paintings that use as a basis the analysis, ideas and practical study described above and engage with the future.

6.2 Final Works & Conclusion

The conclusion to the Practical Research is my response to the challenge to complete a body of work that incorporates the analysis and ideas from my research and also engages with the depiction of melancholia in the contemporary world rather than just looking backwards. Although the conclusion is a material response rather than a written summary of the individual works, I would like to summarise and clarify a number of points that have had a bearing on my approach.

Throughout, the practical work has been predominantly based in experimenting though painting completed images rather than making samples. Although these images have embodied the attributes discussed in Section 3.1.2 they are not intended solely to illustrate a theoretical point but to increase my understanding through handling the materials. Consequently this practical element

has involved making paintings as "samples" and carefully documenting and recording the materials, methods, procedures, results and conclusions. This work has encompassed the following areas:

Supports / Surface preparations / Brushes and applicators / Mediums / Paints (scumbles/glazes/thick/thin etc) / Colour / Composition / Scale / Contrast / Gesture and speed of mark / Erasures / Overlaying / Scoring.

As the work progressed it became clear that there were a number of problems arising from my attempts to make these experiments conform to a scientific research model. A major hindrance was my own level of skill and capability with a style of painting, what might be successful and meaningful in the hands of another painter proved elusive to me. Secondly, I could not divorce my personality from how I painted. I found it particularly difficult to sustain any empathy with a painting that required a protracted number of sessions to complete. Although I did manage this in the course of the work, it isn't a way of painting that I am comfortable with and this is reflected in the approach adopted to the paintings I offer by way of conclusion. Clearly one needs to know oneself and this insight tallies with Richard Wollheim's thoughts on the painter re-presenting[458] his feelings as marks on the canvas. Consequently all but one of the final works are painted quickly, albeit with some element of testing and rehearsal by way of preparation before commitment to the final marks on canvas. This is contradictory to Borremans' approach for example whereby he paints slowly aiming to slow down the time for reception and contemplation of meaning.

Finally as part of the practical research I experimented with making paintings that engaged with the future by evoking the thin brightness of photographic or video images seen on the ubiquitous flat screen monitor. The rectangular surface that is the most common medium used to transmit images today. I developed two key areas of my practice to try and emulate this hard, light filled surface. First was a stable hard white surface[459] that offered maximum reflection of incident light and the second was a way of adding and subtracting thin coloured glazes that allowed simulated the brilliance of the screen yet held the brush mark without a build-up of thick paint. I was not concerned with referencing either the size of proportions of the screen, but let these be determined by the subject of the painting.

---

[458] See Section 4.2

[459] Although it is relatively easy to produce a flat white ground on board or aluminium these are not practical (weight) for large paintings. Consequently the challenge was to try and achieve the characteristics of this support on the flexible surface of a stretched canvas. Early in the project the biggest problem was stress cracking but I think I have managed to develop a process that arrives at a stable primed canvas that has the surface quality of a gesso panel albeit not rigid. I then concentrated on refining what is a very labour intensive approach to make it as efficient as possible. As I am operating outside the recommended parameters of the materials only time will tell how their long term stability has been affected by my process.

My concern is that despite the success of creating paintings with an authentic melancholic content the process I have used detracts from their longevity as images and they flicker through the viewer's consciousness with all the speed of scrolled images on a screen. Recognising that there is a problematic relationship between writing and images with different information held in each, I hope that the experiential aspect of seeing the work will convey the relationship between the handling of materials and my subject matter and give an insight into how the Practical Research has complimented the theory.

6.3 Practical Material

In this précis of the Practical Study the images and notes of the practical work undertaken and described in 6.1 and 6.2 above have been excluded but are presented in four sections as Appendix 2 as follows:

Appendix 2.1 Learning from Others: This section comprises the images from 16 of my own paintings; five copied from an extant work by a contemporary artist and 11 based on the style in which 10 contemporary artists work. Each image is paired with my objectives for the individual study and the conclusions I drew from the work. For two of the paintings I have also given additional notes taken whilst working in the studio. They are collated from a number of sources including my journals, slips of paper, sketch books and latterly typed directly into my laptop.

Appendix 2.2 Caravan Paintings I: This section is in two parts. This first is an initial exploration of the use of the Caravan as an appropriate metaphor for melancholy. Images of 50 small works on paper are presented together with an analysis of the themes that emerged and which seemed most successful in support of a melancholy narrative. The second part is images of 20 Caravans painted on a variety of different canvas supports together with a conclusion suggesting further study was required to focus the research.

Appendix 2.3 Caravan Paintings II: Also in two parts. The first section comprises images of 100 monochrome compositions of a solitary caravan in the landscape together with an analysis of the results and summary conclusions. These paintings on wooden panel were completed in 10 sessions of 10 paintings each, the majority being erased once a photographic record was made. Those that were considered most successful were kept and provided the basis for a series of larger works on canvas. Images of 8 of these works are included in the second section along with individual observations and summary conclusions.

Appendix 2.4 A New Dawn Fades: The final part of the practical research was to complete and exhibit a body of works using a bright palette to explore a number of different motifs as metaphors for an authentic melancholy emotion. After a brief introduction this section is split in three parts each containing images of paintings. The first section 2.4.1 is the seven images of my paintings that I selected for my final exhibition. The second 2.4.2 contains images of 22 works that were completed as part of the process and although contenders for inclusion were not selected. Finally section 2.4.3 has images of 44 works on paper that were done as studies in preparation for the final body of work.

These Appendices are currently available as pdfs on a supplementary CD_ROM. They have been prepared in such a way as to make them available for viewing online or as a printed book.

CONCLUSIONS

Research Question:

What are the elements that support a melancholic narrative in painting and in particular can they be harnessed to heighten feeling and create an 'authentic' melancholic painting of simple and natural motifs?

Opening Assumption:

Like other forms of art media I believe painting still has a capacity to **engage an audience, convey emotion, invoke sentiment** and/or **retain critical validity** by undertaking a self-referential scrutiny of its own rhetorical forms and engaging with new technological developments.

Key points from research:

There is a problematic relationship between writing and images, especially when images are used to illustrate a text, as different information is held in each. However, through a combination of research and practical study I confirmed that feeling or meaning is grounded in the formal properties of a painting. For example the paintings considered in Section 4.1 demonstrated that an attribute such as colour can be used to enhance the depiction of a melancholy mood, implying that given the complexity of melancholia it has chromatic correlates beyond the symbolic use of black or sombre earth tones. The use of colour was explored further in the practical research[460] to test these findings, as were other formal properties such as the size, weight and spatial relationships within the painting.

The research was then focused on the experiential aspect of coming across an art work and how painterly mark making may be used by artists to express emotion. From the time of the Renaissance mark making became a key signifier of the artist's intentions for a painting and is now part of visual language understood by an informed spectator especially in today's mediated environment. However, this absorption of expressive painterly marks into the language of painting means that they can be simulated to convey emotion. As part of the attack on the viability of painting as art, the authenticity of such expression was questioned in the 1980s by critics such as Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster,[461] Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens.

---

[460] See Appendix sections A2.1.1, A2.1.2 & A2.1.3 Warm Earth tones, A2.1.4 & A2.2.2 Strong acidic colour, A2.3.1 & A2.3.2 Monochrome, A2.1.5, A2.1.7 & A2.3.1 Spatial relationships.

[461] "Neo-expressionism is a 'gestuary' of self-aware acts that… asserts the presence of the artist by proxy… by the brushstrokes, by the indexical traces… and is a belated attempt to re-centre the self in art."
Foster, Hal The Expressive Fallacy 1983 <u>Art in America</u> **80-83 & 137**

"In neo-expressionism… expressionism is reduced to convention, to a standard repertoire of abstract, strictly codified signs for expressionism… The pseudo-expressionists retreat to the pre-Expressionist simulation of passion; they create illusions of spontaneity and immediacy or rather, expose the spontaneity and immediacy sought by the Expressionists as illusions, as a construct of pre-existing forms."[462]

In Section 4.2 I demonstrated through an examination of paintings that expressive mark making was used initially to establish artistic individuality, then to express heartfelt (authentic) emotion and finally that these marks could be appropriated and re-presented and may still carry authentic meaning, but in a different way to the spontaneous painting at the end of the 19th Century and start of 20th Century.

In fact, especially now that the vogue for ironical distance in painting has diminished, this "synthetic expression" seems totally appropriate for today's mediated, multiple, fractured notions of 'self' and of emotions such as melancholy. Painting retains relevance by combining multiple sources of imagery with conceptual strategies and the painterly marks become more a way of supporting the melancholy narrative for the viewer rather than portraying the artist's inner feelings. Although I am averse to using the practice solely as an illustration of the theory I found my attempt at a painting based on Jenny Saville's 'Pause'[463] gave me an insight that I would have missed through desk research alone.

The same critics who had dismissed neo-expressionism as inauthentic also asserted that painting was retrogressive, no longer believable and venal.[464] Leaving aside the political and social attack on painting as vehicle for bourgeois ideology, their attack on art-theoretical grounds was that painting lacked originality and consequently as a means of expression it was dead.

My research into the arguments for this "death of painting" led to the possibility that this 'death' may now be one of painting's components[465] and my hypothesis that painting that referred to its own 'death' may be inherently melancholic. Research indicated that this wasn't such an original idea as I had hoped and as part of Hal Foster's criticism of Neo-expressionism he considers painting that refers to its own history as kitsch, a nostalgic melancholic longing for the lost authenticity of the original.

---

[462] Owens, Craig <u>Issues & Commentary: Honour, Power and the Love of Women</u> January 1983 Art in America **9,11**

[463] I found it surprising that despite this being the most 'expressive' piece I chose to copy, the end result was the closest facsimile to the original. See Section A2.1.13 *Pause* (Copy of work by Jenny Saville) for a description of my process.

[464] Having established her art-theoretical premises for artists who employed mechanical media, Rosalind Krauss dismissed most other art as retrograde – the revival of traditional tendencies – or venal - "the production of luxury objects for consumption and investment, often… by multinational corporations"
Krauss, Rosalind co-ed "Introduction" <u>October: The First Decade 1976-1986</u> 1987 Cambridge Mass. MIT Press **xi** cited in Sandler, Irving. "Postmodernist Art Theory" <u>Art of the Postmodern Era </u>1998 Westview Press, **341**

[465] See Nigel Cooke's thesis for his search for the intrinsic (essential) characteristic of painting.
Cooke, Nigel. "Painting's Perverse Body" <u>The Ambivalence of the Undead</u> Goldsmiths College

"Neo-expressionism appears then as a problematic response to this loss – of the historical, the real, and of the subject. By and large, the Neo-expressionists would reclaim these entities as substances; the work however, reveals them to be signs – and Expressionism to be a language. This finally is the pathos of such art: it denies what its practitioners would assert. For the very gestures that insist on the presence of the historical, the real and the subject testify to nothing so much as desperation at their loss."[466]

Nevertheless in answer to the question "What would a painting styled on its own death look like?"[467] I determined that it would reference the history of painting and looked at the work of a number of artists who do this either through direct quotation or allusion to the style and/or marks of earlier painters or to the use of an outmoded genre of painting. I was particularly interested in those that do so in a 'knowing' way through acknowledging the theoretical arguments that surrounded the 'death of painting' as declared by Foster, Crimp and others in the 1980s. I believe the artists Michaël Borremans, Cecily Brown (Black paintings only), Glenn Brown, Nigel Cooke, Dexter Dalwood, Gillian Carnegie, Adrian Ghenie, Ged Quinn, Daniel Richter, and Wilhelm Sasnal amongst others listed in Appendix 1 have made paintings that demonstrate this 'death style'. On the other hand, Jenny Saville[468] incorporates the styles and/or marks of earlier painters such that her seemingly abstract marks resolve themselves into a representation from a distance. Whilst this aspect of her work supports and conveys emotion and feeling,[469] invoking an uneasy sense of anxiety associated with the loss of self, it lacks the engagement with the theoretical arguments connected to the 'death of painting'.

In section 4.2.2.3 I examined how the work of Glenn Brown references the 'death of painting' in a multitude of cool ironical ways and demonstrated how these and his method of working contribute to the melancholic 'aura' of his work. However, he openly associates his work with kitsch – raising the question of whether kitsch can be a vehicle for genuine emotion? Section 5.0 concluded that it is possible to invoke the history of painting and reference the 'death of painting' as a way of adding to the meaning of a contemporary painting and that this can bring melancholic content without becoming kitsch, but how it does this isn't straightforward. The problem is rooted in whether painting is an intentional activity or not. Maybe 'death' is indeed a component (or essence) of painting in the mind of the viewer, a connection with the past that may not be nostalgic in the way

---

[466] Foster, Hal The Expressive Fallacy Art in America **137**
[467] **Section 2.3**
[468] **Section 4.2.1.3**
[469] Darian Leader makes a connection between the non-representational element in a figurative image and our sensing of the lost object. What Lacan calls *objet a* – a point of emptiness and loss that eludes ready visualisation.
Leader, Darian <u>The New Black</u> 2008 Hamish Hamilton **133**

that photography[470] is concerned with memories and forgetting, but an association with loss nonetheless.

When Roland Barthes proclaimed 'the death of the Author' he was implying that the meaning of a text could no longer be fixed and was open to interpretation by the reader. The creative intentions of the individual were replaced with language and "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author".[471] Art theorists applied this linguistic concept to the visual arts and placed themselves in the position of privileged viewers able to interpret meaning from the visual language as they saw fit. On the other hand, Richard Wollheim thinks that, very broadly speaking, linguistic meaning can be explained within some such set of terms as rules, codes, conventions, symbol systems, but pictures and their meaning cannot.

This leaves the thorny problem of whether the emotion expressed is authentic[472] or not. Whilst I think that this is possible without authenticity being germane to the intention of the artist it is also possible to simulate expressionist marks that carry meaning for the viewer and hence the research is inconclusive on this point.

In my early practical work I had made copies of works by other artists that supported a melancholic reading despite utilising inauthentic marks. In the final section of my practical work I wanted to explore making authentically felt images. I utilised direct and indirect references to the history of art and the dialogue surrounding the death of painting and maintained a contemporary relevance by evoking the thin brightness of photographic or video images seen on the ubiquitous flat screen monitor.[473]

I concentrated my efforts on developing a stable process that simulated the brilliance of the screen yet held the brush mark without a build-up of thick paint so that I could incorporate spontaneous marks to give expression to my own melancholic motifs. As part of the process it was necessary to rehearse marks and I did repeat images, nevertheless I felt emotionally engaged with each of the final works. I believe I have succeeded in creating paintings with an authentic melancholic content incorporating both the theoretical and practical research and trust that the handmade facture will keep the viewer aware of their physical presence unlike the scrolled images on a screen.

---

[470] Christian Metz wrote that the photograph, like death, "is an instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time... One piece of time is indefinitely pushed backwards by the next; this is what we call forgetting."
Metz, Christian Photography and Fetish October Fall 1985 **84**
[471] Barthes, Roland "The Death of the Author" Image – Music – Text 1977 Fontana **148**
[472] Whilst experience helps it cannot be considered essential to making melancholic paintings and in any case the outcome doesn't always correlate to the intention
[473] This back lit rectangular surface has become the most common medium for seeing images today.

IMAGES

Fig. 1

***Black Square*, 2002**

Oil on canvas 193 x 193 cm

Collection of Rena Conti and Ivan Moskowitz, Brookline, Massachusetts

Image courtesy of Tate

Fig. 2

***Dead (Tote)*, 1988**

Oil on Canvas 35 x 40

Museum of Modern Art

Image Courtesy of Gerhard Richter (CR:667-3)

Fig. 3

***Chalk*, 2000**

Oil on Canvas 72.5 x 61.5cm

Private Collection

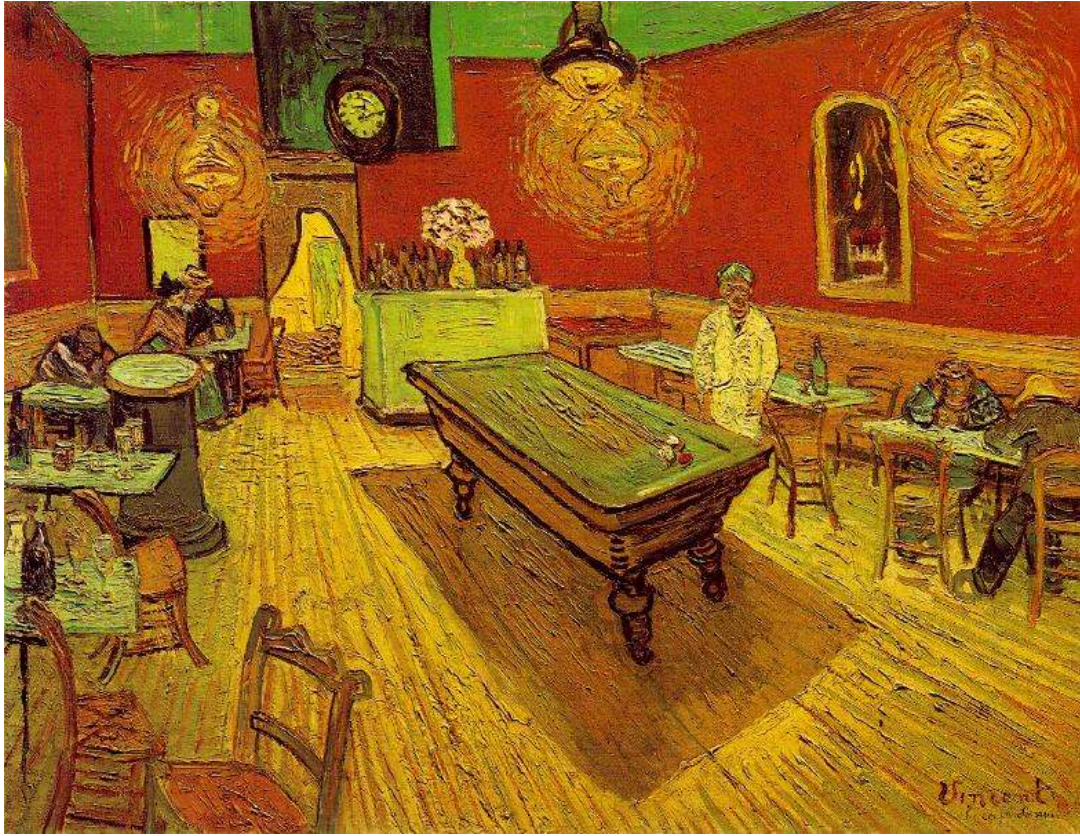**Image courtesy of Felix Tirry**

Fig. 4
The Night Café, 1888
Oil on Canvas 72 x 92cm
Yale University Art Gallery

Fig. 5

The Flaying of the Marsyas, 1570-76

213 x 207cm (present size) Oil on Canvas

National Gallery, Kroměříž

Fig. 6

The Romans during the Decadence, 1847

Oil on Canvas 472 x 772cm
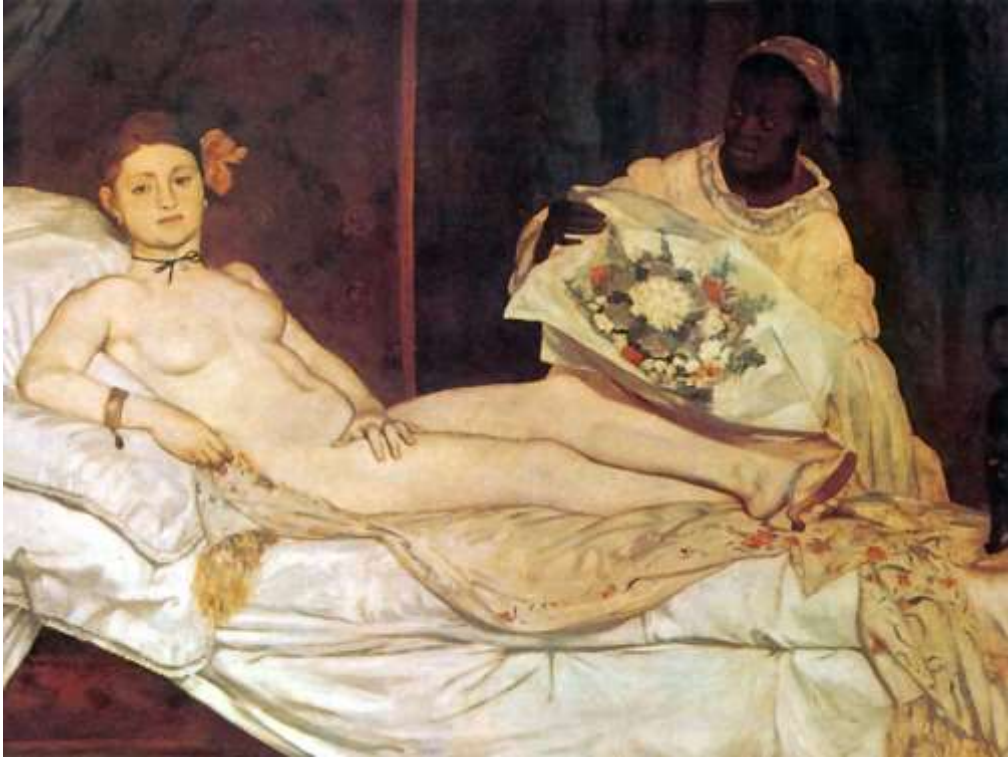
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Fig. 7

Olympia, 1863

Oil on Canvas 130 x 190cm

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Fig. 8

Branch of White Peonies and Pruning Shears, 1864

Oil on Canvas 57 x 46cm

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Fig. 9

Pause, **2002-3**

Oil on Canvas 120 x 84 in.

Private Collection

Image Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery

Fig. 10

The Sick Child, 1885-6

Oil on Canvas 121 x 118cm

National Galley, Oslo

Fig. 11

The Sick Girl, 1880-1

Oil on Canvas, 102 x 58cm

National Galley, Oslo

Fig. 12

Melancholy, 1891-92

Oil on Canvas 72 x 98cm

National Galley, Oslo

Fig. 13

***By The Window*, 1969**

Oil on Canvas 198 x 206cm

Private Collection

Image courtesy of the Estate of Philip Guston

Fig. 14

The Gustons' kitchen in Woodstock, 1975

Image courtesy of Denise Hare

Fig. 15

The Pit, **1976**

Oil on Canvas 19 x 295cm

Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Image courtesy of the Estate of Philip Guston

Fig. 16

***Death Disco*, 2004**

Oil on Canvas 134 x 89cm

Private Collection

Image Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery

Fig. 17

***The Avoider*, 2006**

Oil on Canvas 360 x 180cm

The High Museum of Art, Atlanta

Image courtesy of Ruth Dussealt

Fig. 18

***Heartless*, 1997**

Oil on Canvas 117 x 91cm

Collection of Nina & Frank Moore, New York

Fig. 19

***Nude on a Table*, 2001**

Oil on Canvas 102 x 81cm

The Art Institute of Chicago

Fig. 20

Ceauşescu's Execution, 2002

Oil on Canvas 268 x 347cm

Private Collection

Image Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott, Denise.

"Nothing Like the Real Thing." *Frieze Magazine* 60 (2001): p69.

Aliaga, Juan Vincente.

"Interview." *Luc Tuymans.* London: Phaidon, 2007 .

Alloway, Lawrence.

"The paintings of Malcolm Morley." *Art Press* (May 1993): pp16-19.

Anfan, David.

"When history collapses Into the present." *Tate Etc* (Spring 2010): p48.

Ashton, Dore.

Yes, but... a critical study of Philip Guston. New York: Viking Press, 1976.

Auping, Michael.

"Introduction." *Philip Guston Retrospective*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003.

Badura-Triska, Eva.

"Who becomes a Bad Painter." *Bad Painting good art*. Koln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2008.

Baker, Elizabeth C.

"Editorial: How Expressionist Is It?" *Art in America* (Dec. 1982): p5.

Barthes, Roland.

Camera Lucida. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 2000.

"The Death of the Author." *Image – Music – Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana, 1977.

Bataille, Georges.

Manet: A Biographical and Critical Study. Trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons. New York: Skira, 1955.

Benesch, Otto.

Edvard Munch. Trans. Joan Spencer. London: Phaidon, 1960.

Benjamin, Walter.

"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Harrison C, Fascina, F & Paul D ed. *Modern Art and Modernism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: Harpers and Row Ltd, 1986.

Berkson, Bill.

"Philip Guston and the Funnies." *Philip Guston Retrospective.* New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003 .

Bischoff, Ulrich.

Munch. Trans. Michael Hulse. Germany: Taschen, 2000.

Bois, Yves-Alain.

Painting as Model. Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990.

Bomford, David et al.

Art in the Making: Impressionism. London: Yale UP, 1990.

Bowring, Jackie.

A Field Guide to Melancholy. Harpenden, UK: Oldcastle Books, 2008.

Bracewell, Michael.

"Concerning the Art of Glenn Brown." *Glenn Brown 3 Exhibitions.* New York: Gagosian Gallery Publications, 2009.

Braun, Emily.

"Skinning the Paint." *Paint Made Flesh.* Nashville TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009.

Bucharton, Dieter ed.

Edvard Munch: Signs of Modern Art. Basel: Fondation Beyeler, 2007.

Burton, Robert.

The Anatomy of Melancholy. New York: NYRB Classics, 2001.

Chilver, John.

"Borremans: Eating the Beard." *Turps Banana* 11 (2012): p76.

Christ, Hans D.

"Man Looking Down at His Hand." *Eating the Bread.* Germany: Hatje Cantze, 2011.

Coggins, David.

"In the Studio – An Interview with Dexter Dalwood." *Art in America* (Jan. 2010): pp64-69.

"Interview: Michaël Borremans." *Art in America* (Jan. 2009): pp91-93.

Cohen, David.

"Three Young Artists." *Modern Painters* (1994): pp88-90.

Cooke, Nigel.

Painting's Perverse Body - The Ambivalence of the Undead. London: Goldsmiths College, 2004.

Cooper, Harry.

"Recognizing Guston (in four slips)." *October* 99 (2002): pp115-128.

Corbett, William.

Philip Guston's Late Work: A Memoir. Cambridge MA: Zoland Books, 1994.

Crimp, Douglas.

On the Museums Ruins. Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993.

"The End of Painting." *October* 16 (1981): p75.

Crowe, Thomas.

"Invisible Man." *Dexter Dalwood – Recent History*. London: Gagosian Gallery, 2006.

Dalwood, Dexter & Ireson, Nancy.

"A Stubborn Cornerstone at the Onset of Modernism." *Tate Etc.* (Autumn 2005): p65.

Danto, Arthur C.

After the End of Art. Chichester NJ: Princeton UP, 1997.

"The Mourning After." *Artforum 2003* (March 2003): p208.

de Bruyn, Guido.

Michaël Borremans: A Knife in the Eye - A documentary made for canvas.be. n.d. 28 November 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhhUmwmlMtc>.

de Duve, Thierry.

Kant after Duchamp. Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996.

de Leeuw, Ronald, ed.

The Letters of Vincent van Gogh. Trans. Arnold Pomerans. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

de Weck Ardalan, Ziba.

"Puzzling Realities." *The Performance.* Germany: Hatje Cantze, 2005.

"Recurring Disillusionment Lonely long meaningless way home." *Johannes Kahrs.* Zurich: jrp Ringier, 2006.

Diski, Jenny.

Skating to Antarctica. London: Virago Press, 2005.

Dorra, Henri.

Symbolist Art Theories. London: University of California Press, 1995.

Douglas, Charlotte.

Malevich. London: Thames & Hudson, 1994.

"The New Russian Art and Italian Futurism." *Art Journal* 34.3 (1975): p234.

Dumas, Marlene.

"The Private Versus the Public." *Marlene Dumas: Miss Interpreted*. Eindehoven: Van Abbesmuseum, 1992.

Eco, Umberto.

"The Ugliness of Others: Kitsch & Camp." *On Ugliness.* London: Harvill Secker, 2007.

Eggum, Arne.

Munch and Photography. London: Yale University Press, 1989.

Elkins, James.

What Painting Is. London: Routledge, 1999.

Foster, Hal.

"The Expressive Fallacy." *Art in America* (Jan. 1983): pp80-83, 137.

Freedberg, David.

"Against Cliché: Glenn Brown and the Possibilities of Painting." *Glenn Brown 3 Exhibitions.* New York: Gagosian Gallery Publications, 2009.

Fried, Michael.

Why Photography Matters As Art As Never Before. London: Yale UP, 2008.

Freud, Sigmund.

"Mourning and Melancholia." In *Sigmund Freud Volume 11 On Metapsychology*, translated by James Strachey. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

Fry, Roger.

   "The French Post-Impressionists." Harrison, ed. Fascina &. *Modern Art and Modernism*. London: Harpers and Row Ltd, 1986.

G., Berman Patricia.

   The Modern Life of the Soul. New York: MoMA, 2006.

Gablik, Suzi.

   "Minimalism" *Concepts of Modern Art*. Stangos N ed.London: Thames & Hudson, 2001.

Gibson, Michael.

   Symbolism. Cologne: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1995.

Gilman, Clare.

   "Catalogue of Plates." *The Modern Life of the Soul.* New York: MoMA, 2006.

Gingeras, Alison and Steiner, Rochelle (in conversation).

   "A Careful Concoction of Push and Pull." *Tate Etc.* 15 (2009): p42.

Gingeras, Alison M ed,.

   'Dear Painter, paint me...': Painting the Figure since late Picabia. Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2002.

Gioni, Massimilliano.

   "A Doll's House." *Weight*. London: Hatje Cantze, 2007.

Gombrich, EH.

   Art & Illusion. London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2002.

Graham-Dixon, Andrew.

   "A Maker of Worlds." *Philip Guston Retrospective*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003.

Greenberg, Clement.

   "Avant Garde and Kitsch." *Art & Culture*. Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1989.

   "Modernist Painting." Harrison C, Fascina, F & Paul D ed.*Modern Art and Modernism*. London: Harpers and Row Ltd, 1986.

   "After Abstract Expressionism." Geldzahler, Henry. *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970 1969.* London: Pall Mall Press, 1969.

   "Surrealist Painting." ed. O'Brian, John. *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Perceptions and judgments, 1939-1944.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986.

Grove, Jeffrey.

"Ventilating a Nihilist Vision." *Michaël Borremans: Paintings.* Germany: Hatje Cantze, 2009.

Grunenberg, Christopher.

"Capability Brown." *Glenn Brown*. London: Tate Publishing, 2009.

Harrison, Clark.

Concepts of Modern Art. London: Thames and Hudson, 2001.

Hodin, JP.

Edvard Munch. London: Thames & Hudson, 1972.

Hoptman, Laura.

"Mirrorman." *Parkett* 60 (2000): p124.

Hughes, Robert.

The Shock of the New. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1996.

Hustvedt, Siri.

Mysteries of the Rectangle. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005.

Hutchinson, Mark.

"The Art of Melancholy." 20 December 2005. *Times Literary Supplement.* 28 October 2008. <http://www.the-tls.co.uk>.

Impelluso, Lucia.

La Natura e I Suoi Simboli. Milano: Mondadori Electra SpA, 2003.

Iversen, Margaret.

"Hopper's Melancholic Gaze." *Edward Hopper*. London: Tate Publishing, 2004.

Kandinsky, Wassily.

"The Language of Form and Colour." *The Art of Spiritual Harmony,*. Trans. Michael Sadler. Whitefish MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1914.

Kant, Immanuel.

"Essay: What is Enlightenment?" 1784. 02 January 2013. <http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/KantOnElightenment.htm>.

Kantor, Jordan.

"The Tuymans Effect." *Artforum International* (Nov. 2004): pp164-171.

Kent, Sarah.

Shark Infested Waters. The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90s. London: Zwemmer Books, 1994.

Kiblansk, Panofski and Saxl.

Saturn & Melancholy. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964.

Kimmelman, Michael.

"With Barbed Wit Aforethought." 21 November 2003. *New York Times.* 11 March 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/21/arts/art-review-with-barbed-wit-aforethought.html>.

Kramer, Hilton.

"The Art Scene of the '80s." *New Art Examiner* (Oct. 1985): pp24-25.

Krauss, Nicole.

"The First Painter After the Last." *Modern Painters* (Winter 2003): pp88-89.

Krauss, Rosalind E.

The originality of the avant-garde and other modern myths. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1984.

October: The First Decade 1976-1986. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1987.

Kristeva, Julia.

Black Sun. Trans. Leon S Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

Kuspit, Donald.

Philip Guston's Self-Doubt. n.d. 19 December 2011.
< http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit12-4-03.asp >.
"Cloning and Coding the Avant-Garde." *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

"Jenny Saville's Tragic Women." *Art New England* 24.5 (2003): p13.

Lacan, Jacques.

The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. London: Penguin Books, 1994.

Lampe, Angela.

"Dislocated Motifs: Munch's Tendency Towards Repetition." *Edvard Munch: The Modern Eye*. London: Tate Publishing, 2012.

Leader, Darian.

The New Black. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008.

Ligo, Larry.

    Manet, Baudelaire and Photography. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006.

Linda, Nochlin.

    "Migrants." *Saville*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc, 2005.

Loock, Ulrich.

    "On layers of sign relatons…." *Luc Tuymans*. London: Phaidon, 2007.

Lynton, Norbert.

    "Expressionism." *Concepts of Modern Art.* London: Thames & Hudson, 2001.

Mackenzie, Suzie.

    Under the Skin. 2005 October 22. 27 May 2011.
    <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/oct/22/art.friezeartfair2005/print>.

Magnani, Gregor.

    "Gerhard Richter: For me it is Absolutely Necessary that the Baader-Meinhof is a Subject for Art." *Flash Art, International edition* (May-June 1989): p69.

McEvilley, Thomas.

    Art & Discontent. New York: McPherson & Co, 1993.

Meagher, Michelle.

    "Jenny Saville and a Feminist Aesthetics of Disgust." *Hypatia* 18.4 (2003): p25.

Metz, Christian.

    "Photography and Fetish." *October* (Autumn 1985): p84.

Meyer, Musa.

    Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston. London: Thames & Hudson, 1991.

Meyers, Terry.

    "Breaking and Entering." *Dexter Dalwood.* London: Tate Publishing, 2010.

Michelson, Annette.

    "The Prospect Before Us." *October* 16 (1981): p119.

Moorhouse, Paul.

    Gerhard Richter: Portraits. London: National Portrait Gallery, 2009.

Mosquera, Gerard.

    "Painting on the Edge." *Parkett* 60 (2000): p134-136.

Mueller, Conrad G.

    Light and Vision. New York : Time-Life Books, 1969.

Muller-Westermann, Iris.

    Munch by Himself. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005.

Myers, Terry R and Paul, Frederick.

    Glenn Brown interview with Stephen Hepworth. Bignan: Centre d'Art du Domaine de Kerguehennec, 2000.

Neuberger, Susan.

    "The first and the last painting." *Bad Painting good art*. Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2008.

Neuner, Stefan.

    "Picabia's Concept of Irony." *Bad Painting Good Art*. Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2008.

Nochlin, Linda.

    Courbet. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007.

    "Floating in Gender Nirvana." *Art in America* (March 2000): pp94-97.

Owens, Craig.

    "Issues & Commentary: Honour, Power and the Love of Women." *Art in America* (Jan. 1983): p9.

Panofski, Erwin.

    The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer. Princeton NJ: University Press, 1955.

Poe, Edgar Allan.

    "The House of Usher." *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2000.

Prideaux, Sue.

    Edvard Munch: Behind the Scream. London: Yale University Press, 2005.

Radden, Jennifer.

    The Nature of Melancholy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Reust, Hans Rudolf.

"In the dark regions of the World." *Parkett* 60 (2000): p154.

"Opaque Gestures." *The Performance.* Germany: Hatje Cantze, 2005.

Richardson, Jonathan.

An essay on the Theory of Painting, 1725. London: Scolar Press, 1971.

Richter, Gerhard.

The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993. London: Thames & Hudson, 1995.

Rosenblum, Robert.

"John Currin and the American Grotesque." *John Currin*. New York: Harry N. Abrahams Inc., 2003.

Rothko, Mark.

The Artists Reality: Philosophies of Art. Dexter MI: Thomas Shore, 2004.

Rubin, James.

Manet. Paris: Flamarrion, 2010.

Rugoff, Ralph.

The Painting of Modern Life. London: Hayward Publishing, 2007.

Sandler, Irving.

Art of the Postmodern Era. Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1998.

Sarafianos, Aris.

"The many colours of black bile: the melancholies of knowing and feeling." *Papers of Surrealism Issue 4*. 2005. pp5-6.

Scala, Mark.

"Fragmentation and Reconstitution." *Paint Made Flesh.* Nashville TN: Vanderbilt UP, 2009.

Scharma, Simon.

"Interview with Jenny Saville." *Saville.* New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc, 2005.

Schopenhauer, Arthur.

"Full Text of The World as Will and Idea." n.d. *Internet Archive.* 07 January 2012. <http://www.archive.org/stream/theworldaswillan01schouoft/theworldaswillan01schouoft_djvu.txt>.

Schwabsky, Barry.

"Critics vs. Gillian Carnegie." *Afterall* 16 (2007): pp81-88.

"Jenny Saville: Unapologetic." *Jenny Saville.* Rome: Macro Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 2005.

Shakespeare, William.

"Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will." *The Complete Works*. London: Odhams Press, n.d.

Shapiro, Michael E.

"The Early Years." *Philip Guston Retrospective.* New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003.

Shaw, Philip.

The Sublime. Abingdon: Routledge, 2008.

Smith, Roberta.

"So Typecast You Could Scream." 13 February 2009. *New York Times.* 2 March 2013. < http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/13/arts/design/13munc.html>.

Sontag, Susan.

Regarding the Pain of Others. London: Penguin Books, 2004.

On Photography. London: Penguin Books, 1979.

Spector, Nancy.

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. n.d. 02 March 2011. <http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/date_work_md_133A_1.html>.

"The Unforgiving Trace." *Luc Tuymans*. London: Phaidon, 2007.

Staci, Boris.

"The Lovers, the Invalids and the Socialites." *John Currin*. New York: Harry N. Abrahams Inc., 2003.

Steinberg, Leo.

"Reflections on the State of Criticism." *Artforum* March 1972: pp37-49.

Steiner, Rochelle.

Glenn Brown: Catalogue. London: Serpentine Gallery Publishing, 2004.

Stevens, Chris & Stout, Katherine.

"This Was Tomorrow." *Art & the 60's.* London: Tate Publishing, 2004.

Storr, Robert.

Gerhard Richter: Doubt & Belief in Painting. New York: MOMA, 2003.

Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977. New York: MOMA, 2000.

"John Currin: Master of Grotesque." *Art Press 280* (June 2002): p49.

Stubbs, Michael.

"Glenn Brown: No Visible Means of Support." *Glenn Brown*. London: Tate Publishing, 2009.

Sylvester, David.

Interviews with Francis Bacon. Oxford: Alden Press, 1975.

Looking Back at Francis Bacon. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

Szewczyk, Monika.

"Her Pornographic Imagination." *Afterall* 16 (2007): p77.

Taylor, Mark C.

The Picture in Question. London: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Tormey, Alan.

The Concept of Expression. Chichester NJ: Princeton University, 1971.

Tufnell, Ben.

Days Like These. London: Tate Publishing, 2003.

Unattributed Web Pages.

"Borremans - Press Release." n.d. *David Zwirner.* 12 December 2012. <http://www.davidzwirner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/MB_PR.pdf>.

Gillian Carneigie - Black Square. n.d. <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=104064&tabview=text>.

National Gallery of Australia. n.d. 16 December 2011. <http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail-LRG.cfm?IRN=169422&View=LRG>.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). n.d. 24 November 2011. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/kierkega/>.

"Spur Manifesto 1958." n.d. *Not Bored!* 03 November 2012. <http://www.notbored.org/spur-manifesto1958.html>.

Tate Modern. n.d. <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/tuymans/room10.htm>.

UAL Paint Club - Borremans in conversation with Mario Rossi. n.d. 3 December 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO1HXwKtO3g>.

Van Gogh Letters. n.d. 02 March 2011. <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let677/letter.html#translation>.

Vasari, Giorgio

The Lives of the Artists. Trans. Julia Bondandella. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.

Vermeiren, Gerrit.

Luc Tuymans: I Don't Get It. Ghent: Luidon, 2007.

Voss, Angela, ed.

Marsilio Ficino. Berkley CA: North Atlantic Books, 2006.

Wollheim, Richard.

Painting as an Art. London: Thames & Hudson, 1987.

Zhadova, Larissa A.

Malevich: Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art 1910-1930. London: Thames and Hudson, 1982.

Zwikker, Roelie.

"Colour and Japonisme." *The Real Van Gogh.* London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2010.