Can a moment of time exist on a two – dimensional surface?

DOCUMENTATION

In partial fulfilment
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Honours) in Fine Art
submitted to the University of Western Sydney

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December 2007

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this exegesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

………………………………………..

Mary Donnelly
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors for their continuous guidance, friendship and generosity with their time during the course of this research process. In particular I would like to thank Dr Peter Dallow, my Chair Supervisor, for his ongoing advice, humour and encouragement; Terry Hayes, my Co-Supervisor who came on board this year and who with his quiet guidance brought another dimension to the table; and also to my initial Co-Supervisor Rhett Brewer who gave me the encouragement to undertake this research.

I would also like to thank my husband Joe for his ever-lasting love, patience and belief; and to my family for their continuous support and understanding during this project, for which I am deeply indebted.
Abstract

This exegesis forms part of an ongoing enquiry on the concept of time. Artist, Barnett Newman sought the ‘physical sensation of time’ in his painting. My research questions, through a program of creative work, whether a moment in time can be represented in a two dimensional art work; or if we only experience the sensation of time passing, as we are viewing it. A key issue within this creative practice-based approach, is to examine if empty visible space within an artwork ‘ignites’ a sense of time; if a visualisation of empty space can capture an event, an awareness of the immediacy of a moment experienced in the studio.
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Introduction

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past

The premise underlying my Master of Art (Honours) has been the investigation of time on a two dimensional surface. This investigation has been a practice-based approach to Fine Art and has focused on the medium of painting. My research questioned, through a program of creative work, whether a moment in time could be represented on a two dimensional artwork; or if we only experience the sensation of time passing, as we are viewing it. A key issue within the creative practice-based approach, was to examine if empty visible space within an artwork ‘ignites’ a sense of time; if a visualisation of empty space could capture an event, an awareness of the immediacy of a moment experienced in the studio. The question within this investigative practice-based approach became; how does one achieve a stillness, without it forever remaining a ‘still life’; how does one achieve the presence of time, but within that space; that void; that silence, making it (time) expressive and felt; and lastly, how could a work of art bring about the awareness of a moment in endless time and create an intimate relationship between the viewer and the artwork.

1 T.S. Eliot – The Four Quartets
The first writing of my Masters Exegesis, which was presented to the Confirmation of Candidature Panel, was in many ways an investigation into several research directions that I felt could advance my understanding of the concept of time. These research activities became my entry points and contributed much to the approach of the line of enquiry; exploratory questions regarding the concept of time and space. I have revisited those directional shifts of the early focus, as I feel that they form the basis and contribute a great deal to a deeper understanding; approaching a more informative insight of the subject concerning a moment of time. This early line of enquiry looked at works that referred to a specific moment portrayed on the surface of the canvas. Not so much the instant snapshot of that specific time frozen forever, but a slowing down of the ongoing movement of that particular moment. Time suspended subconsciously as in the work of Giotto’s *The Mourning of Christ*[^2] in that we have no way of knowing how long the bereaved looked down upon the dead Christ. The viewer is able to understand the sentiment which emerges from it and becomes part of the drama unfolding. The compositional structure of the work allows the viewer to engage on an emotional level. How can one begin to describe a momentary experience, for to attempt to articulate those feelings and emotions experienced at that particular moment, is to recall the memory of an experience felt; the experience of which is in the past. We experience in the present, but the memory of that experience is in the past. The following chapters of this Exegesis begin firstly, with the initial direction that I had undertaken in trying to grasp the subject; and continuing from that initial understanding to the current line of thought, allowing modification and adjustment to be added.

[^2]: Giotto di Bondone 1267-1337 *The Mourning of Christ* c.1305 Fresco Cappella dell’ Arena, Padua
The moments of the past do not remain still, they retain in our memory the motion which drew them toward the future, towards a future which has become the past, and draw us on in their train.  

This Exegesis has been divided into two sections; Part One begins with an overview of the knowledge gathering focus, providing historical and recent examples of works of art that contributed to my understanding of the concept of time. Part Two is a documentation of the methodology used to develop my practical work; a reflective and analytical account of the creative process in the studio, a ‘reflection-in-action’ of the studio work; trying to get ‘inside’ the conversation of the decision making options and choices of processes that I have employed; and the various influences on my work and the development of ideas. In the beginning I began with the questions, what is meant when we speak of ‘time’, and can the abstract concept of what we call ‘time’ be represented in a work of art? Can the physical act of participation in the duration of time, the ‘instant’, occur within a work of art? The artists that I have included in my research produced works of art which sought to convey the experience of time and the experience of existence. Aspects of the past, present and the future are constantly alluded to within
their body of work. To momentarily experience time; time as no longer being something thought but something lived. Artists such as photographer, Henri Cartier Bresson and his image, ‘Behind the Gare St, Lazare, Paris’, ⁴ whose photograph, is of a moment suspended in time. Bresson armed with his camera captures the moment that the man jumped. He presents that specific frame, ‘that’ specific moment to us. Juan Sanchez Cotan, working in oil, meticulously renders the organic contents of his larder in his ‘Still Life with Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber’ ⁵ presenting many of his moments in his time of production, under the many layers of pigment and oil. The image is ambiguous in nature. The viewer’s gaze moves into the frame by the upward movement of the composition, from right to left; the suspended objects state of motionlessness is the mark of human absence. The underlying tension emulates from the suspended quince or cabbage, the viewer wanting to touch, wanting to release the suspended action.

By giving us drama, Giotto ‘The Mourning of Christ’ ⁶ and Goya ‘The Third of May 1808’ ⁷ express the human emotion of sacrifice and the insanity, the brutality

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⁴ French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, pioneered the art of street photography and said of this picture: There was a plank fence around some repairs behind the Gare Saint-Lazare train station. I happened to be peeking through a gap in the fence with my camera at the moment the man jumped. (taken from Wikipedia )

⁵ Juan Sanchez Cotan, ‘Still Life with Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber’ All of Cotan’s still lifes are rooted in the outlook of monasticism, specifically the monasticism of the Carthusians, whose order Cotan joined as a lay brother in Toledo in 1603. The setting of the painting is the cantarero, a cooling-space for preservation of food, which were often hung on strings.


⁷ Francisco Jose de Goya (1746 – 1828) ‘The Third of May 1808’ p.48
of war. Mark Rothko\(^8\) and Barnett Newman\(^9\); whose works cannot be truly appreciated when viewed as reproductions, present works that have the capacity to envelop the viewer because of their sheer scale and emotive response. Another artist that embodies an inner composure and response is Caspar David Friedrich.\(^{10}\) In Friedrich’s paintings, the figure with it’s back turned to us, symbolises or identifies with all of humanity.

In examining the works of these artists, artists who I feel have incorporated the ‘infinite moment’; works that have opened up onto the moment of awareness, for me embody the concept of communication with consciousness and the duration of time. My foremost aim in researching these artists was for a better understanding of the element of time that these artists had interwoven into their artwork, with the aim of producing a body of work in which an element of time is presented.

As outlined earlier, the creative context of my Masters has focused on the medium of painting on stretch canvas. My research problem attempted the question of, “Can the visible aspect of space on a two dimensional surface ignite the notion of time?” A quote from Gaston Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space* was the catalyst for this investigation. “In its countless alveoli, space contains compressed time. That is what space is for”\(^{11}\). In my research I began to explore within my ‘time of production’, several areas of enquiry. Primarily it was the question of scale, if in fact size mattered; and also the question of Renaissance perspective, versus a multi-layering of perspectives to achieve

\(^8\) Mark Rothko, ‘*White and Black on Wine #9*’, p 129
\(^9\) Barnett Newman ‘*Voice of Fire*’ 1967, acrylic on canvas, 543.6x243.8cm  p 80
\(^{10}\) Caspar David Friedrich (1774 – 1840) was a 19\(^{th}\) century German Romantic painter, considered by many to be one of the finest representatives of the movement.
\(^{11}\) Gaston Bachelard. *Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, Boston. 1966 p.8
the desired aim. The art of photography was also to be examined but in a limited capacity and only as a research tool, firstly to isolate the subject matter within the studio and secondly within the context of the research, in order to differentiate the aspect of time captured on the medium’s surface.

My art practice sits within the genre of ‘still life’, and I have purposely centred the subject matter on the mundane, everyday objects and events; much of which are generally overlooked as our lives continuously move at an increasing pace. To counteract this pace and establish an awareness of the moment in time, the investigation initially sought out the philosophy of Zen and in particular Zen Art. In Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen*\(^{12}\) he writes of life’s journey and of the need for lay-bys\(^{13}\) along the way to our final destination.

\[A \text{ world which increasingly consists of destinations without journeys between them; a world which values only getting somewhere as fast as possible, becomes a world without substance.\(^{14}\)}\]

Zen strongly emphasizes the practice of moment-by-moment awareness and of seeing deeply into the nature of things by direct experience. Just by the simple act of concentrating on one’s own breathing and paying attention to the pauses or short intermissions in the action of inhaling and exhaling, we find that it is possible to slow down this movement and stop the constant shifts between the past or the future, thus making us more aware of the present moment. The Art of Zen in all phases has a double function in that “it is a form of active

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\(^{13}\) English/UK term meaning a stopping place at the edge of the road, a short strip of ground alongside a main road where vehicles can stop for a short time.

meditation for the creators of the works and a method of visual instruction for those who receive them”.\textsuperscript{15} Zen paintings play with the relationship between form and emptiness, between a representation and the empty space that surrounds it. The ‘empty’ space within Zen Art becomes the aesthetic key to the work of art.

The aspect of timelessness, the eternal present was of special interest and became the focus, in trying to answer the question of momentary awareness and a sense of time. In the beginning I took my inspiration from the Zen Garden of Ryoanji in Kyoto, renowned for its simplicity of materials and abstract expression. Referred to as the ‘garden of emptiness’, it [Ryoanji] juxtaposes the stillness of the garden against the constant flux of the living environment in the world beyond the garden wall. There is a term in Zen Buddhism “seishintouistu”, which refers to the concentration of the mind and spirit on just one activity, allowing for a disconnection from linear time to an “indefinite continuous duration.”\textsuperscript{16} It is this aspect of the garden, this duration or interval of time, this meditation, that the creative output had concentrated on and its transference onto a two dimensional surface.

The subject of the project has been my studio and what it represents, a world of silence and solitude, to use the Zen term, my \textit{satori}\textsuperscript{17}. In my studio are the objects that surround me; objects and tools that any visual artist would use. These wait in ‘compositions’ as

\textsuperscript{16} Macquarie Essential Dictionary p.844
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Satori} – The Japanese term for the experience of enlightenment, i.e. self-realization, opening the Mind’s eye
other compositions of ‘still life’ wait. Wait for the painter to wander back to retrieve that which was abandoned. Thus, the works remain forever within the present moment, yet incorporated within are moments of the present past and moments of the future present.

During my ‘time of production’ I began to use some of the Zen qualities of the ‘dry landscape’ garden within my work, qualities such as a simplification of form, silence and a prevailing stillness. The stillness is strongly emphasised by the use of horizontals throughout the work, which has a stabilizing effect; and the use of the rectangular format when considering the canvas dimensions. I also began to use the camera to record components of my studio, elements that make up a working studio and to then eliminate the non-essential elements of the photographed scene. This action has been necessary, in order to reach the point where the concentrated focus is simplified. This process relates back to the dry-landscape gardens and the Japanese term ‘kire-tsuzuki’ or ‘cut-continuance’, which is covered in a later chapter, that refers to the severing of objects from their everydayness, in order for their essence of existence to materialize.

My work attempts to make the viewer aware of their presence within the painting’s space “thought must be disarmed”,\(^\text{18}\) if only for a brief moment. The works attempt to present a perceptual space to be engaged by the viewer for that transient moment. By the momentary isolation of a moment, for the viewer to enter into a relationship with the artwork; slowing time down for the viewer to visually soak in that moment in the studio.

The works themselves hold no narrative, for they are the representation of objects on a shelf within a space; at a particular time – which time? It has been a conscious undertaking, that within the images, all semblance of time has been removed or subdued, so as, there can be no linear time in which the viewer can slot them into.

The works are endeavouring to offer the experience of awareness; engendering to offer the infinitesimal hairline to accept them in the present before allowing them to slip into the past – between the past and present that divides them. To quote, Jean-Francois Lyotard when he writes on the present instant, “as one that tries to hold itself between the future and the past, and becomes devoured by them”.

To again quote T.S. Eliot,

*Time present and time past,*

*Are both perhaps present in time future,*

*And time future contained in time past*

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19 M Donnelly, *Waiting II Dec ’06*, oil on canvas, signed and titled verso.
21 T.S. Eliot *The Four Quarters.*
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
Mary Donnelly #15242365

Gallery of Images
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
Mary Donnelly #15242365

Gallery of Images

PLATE 1, Waiting I Nov ‘06
oil on canvas, 50x80.5cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
Mary Donnelly #15242365
Gallery of Images

PLATE 2, Waiting II Nov ‘06
oil on canvas, 50x80.5cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
Mary Donnelly #15242365

Gallery of Images

PLATE 3, Waiting I Dec '06
oil on canvas, 51.5x70.5cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
Mary Donnelly #15242365

PLATE 4, Waiting II Dec ‘06
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oil on canvas, 51.5x70.5cm
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PLATE 5, Waiting J1’07
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oil on canvas, 33.5x100.0cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
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PLATE 6, Waiting '07
oil on canvas, 51x92cm
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PLATE 7, F1 2007
oil on canvas, 60x133cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface

Mary Donnelly #15242365

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PLATE 8, F3 2007

oil on canvas, 60x101cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
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PLATE 9, MJ 2007
oil on canvas, 46x121.5cm
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PLATE 10, M2 2007
oil on canvas, 46.5x127.0cm
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PLATE 11, M3 2007
oil on canvas, 50.5x137.5cm
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PLATE 12, J1 2007
oil on canvas, 51.0x91.5cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
Mary Donnelly #15242365

Gallery of Images

PLATE 13, M4A 2007
oil on canvas, 50.5x137.5cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface

Mary Donnelly #15242365

Gallery of Images

PLATE 14, J3 2007

oil on canvas, 51.0x91.5cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
Mary Donnelly #15242365
Gallery of Images

PLATE 15, J2 2007
oil on canvas, 51.0x91.5cm
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface
Mary Donnelly #15242365

Gallery of Images

PLATE 16, F2 2007
oil on canvas, 60.5x81.5cm
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What is meant by ‘time’ and ‘space’ – the experience of time is at the core of human nature

Time is not recognizable by a concept, … but is a special kind of accident

Epicurus

What is meant when we speak of time \(^{22}\), and how can time be presented in a work of art, has been the underpinning of this research. It is a fact that time has become so much a part of our daily lives and experience, that we habitually use spatial imagery to quantify time. For example, we measure distance by time; it takes us ‘x’ number of hours and minutes to get to our destination; and also our productive duration is also measured and rewarded by the amount of time spent on a particular activity. Time becomes this structural framework that we do acknowledge and accept. In order for me to attempt to depict time on a two dimensional surface, there needed to be a concerted effort in my research in the fundamental understanding of what time is. There is no object called space, nor an object called time. Time and space are not objects of perception, but “modes of perceiving objects, instinctive habits, inhering in the thinking subject”. \(^{23}\) However, time, or what is referred to in the abstract, is eternally present; the past, present and future are all happening at the same time. Our human consciousness, however, experience this in linear form. I began to look at the literature of Immanuel Kant, Henri Bergson and later the writings of Jean Francois Lyotard. Immanuel Kant provided a good start with his declaration that the best way to view time and space is a feature of the mind which we use to comprehend reality. Kant claims: “That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt … but … it by no

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\(^{22}\) The earliest reference to the concept of the perception of time occurs in the autobiographical “Confessions” of St Augustine. (born 354AD, died 430) In Book XI of Confessions, Augustine writes – When we say that an event or interval of time is short or long, what is it that is being described as of short or long duration? It cannot be what is past, since that has ceased to be, and what is non-existent cannot presently have any properties, such as being long. But neither can it be what is present, for the present has no duration.

means follows that all arises out of experience.” According to Kant, *a priori* knowledge is transcendental, or based on the form of all possible experience. Transcendental: independent of human experience of phenomena but within the range of knowledge. So, do we call this faculty of knowledge – intuition?

The Macquarie Dictionary defines ‘time’ as an “indefinite continuous duration,” where events succeed one another. As well as a “limited extent of time,” where the interval or duration between two successive events become what we would refer to as that time, and lastly for the purpose of this exegesis “the particular moment at which something takes place.” We do not recognize the concept of time, but we do recognize changes or events in time. We acknowledge experienced time is in the present; it [time] is presented to our consciousness as an experience, an experience of the moment, not as something abstract but as something felt or experienced. At this point it needs to be noted that I see experience (time) referring to ‘in the present’ and memories (of time) ‘in the past.’ In *Time and Free Will* (1889), Bergson makes the distinction between the concept and experience of time. Time is presented to consciousness as duration, in other words the interval or “time” is compartmentalized. Henri Bergson offered the following experiment to illustrate an example of experiencing:

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25 Macquarie Essential Dictionary p.844
26 Ibid p.844
27 Ibid p. 844
If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy-nilly, wait until the sugar melts. This little fact is big with meaning. For here the time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world ... ... It [time] coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It [time] is no longer something thought, it is something lived.  

Bergson concluded that to experience the immediacy of duration; the event, it is only possible in a state of complete mental absorption. Bergson likened it to “a melody to which we listen with our eyes closed, heeding it alone”. 

A “state of complete mental absorption” could only be possible if we let the experience happen, in the act of letting go. For me, this insight has only become possible through the philosophy of Zen and the Buddhist concept of mindfulness. Mindfulness, practiced through meditation; its sole purpose is about being attentive to the experience of the moment. From Alan Watts a quote – “Zen is the liberation from time.” In practicing the art of Zen, artists take on the hallmarks of simplicity, emptiness, directness and naturalness within their art practice. Minimalism and silent meditation are important ways through Zen, to achieve enlightenment. This thinking remained with me in this constant search for an entry point into the depiction of time on a two dimensional surface. Giotto in his “Mourning of Christ” and Goya’s “The Third of May, 1808” are examined in a later chapter of this exegesis. Both of these artists, convey the experience of time and the experience of existence; but can an artist capture the infinite moment, a view that may seem somewhat paradoxical for a 2-Dimensional medium. To continue, can the

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31 Giotto di Bondone (1267 – 1337)
32 Francisco Jose de Goya 1746 – 1828
physical act of participation in the duration of time, the ‘instant’, occur within a work of art; and to be more precise within the vehicle of painting.

My practice has always concerned itself with the perception that ‘space’ informs and encloses the present moment; and it is only through a “state of complete mental absorption”\(^{33}\) that it is possible for the work to open onto and within that of a temporal nature. For the work to achieve this complete absorption, this intense protracted scrutiny, the image-frame through the use of composition, is geometrically divided by cropping, transitions and architectural elements. Elements such as windows, doors, walls, light and shadow. This persistent focus and intense protracted scrutiny brings about a tension, which comes from the feeling of a detached, outsider perspective, co-existing with the intensity of observation and charges the space. My work has previously explored the perception imagery and the inclusion of the out-of-field.\(^{34}\) The viewer’s interest/focus was directed to what was alluded to outside the frame. ‘Lead me to Pergamon’ \(^{35}\) is an example. The work is empty of movement; it permeates with a burden of silence, nothing seemingly is happening; time has stood still and yet the geometric nature of the work invites the viewer into the work, to examine more closely. The use of composition as a visual force is operating within Pergamon. The weight, the visual weight, is


\(^{34}\) Out-of-field, this by its very nature brings into the work ‘open’ or ‘closed’ systems. An explanation of a ‘closed’ system is one which includes everything that is present in the frame: all characters, locations, durations, special effects, scenery, props, background shades and colours; all contributing to the saturation of information within the frame. This by its very exclusivity and limitation constitutes the ‘in-field’; framing, isolating and closing the set by the very act of this saturation.

\(^{35}\) M Donnelly, ‘*Lead Me to Pergamon*’, 2004, oil on canvas, 97 x 81.5cm
occurring on the left side embodied by the ‘heavy’ closed door. Distance also increases the visual weight when perception is focused upon the centre of attraction, which in *Pergamon* is the closed door. With the aid of the oblique nature of the composition, the viewer’s glance slides unhampered into the pictorial space and out again as the exit-point exists in left side of the canvas. The viewer is invited to explore the depth of the space, but is discouraged to remain. There is no interaction to speak of as the event is being played outside of the frame.

Whereas in previous works with my art practice, the compositional nature asked of the viewer to look, to imagine, beyond the frame, around the corner as it [the pictorial space], alluded to an ‘activity’ that one could not see but ‘sense’, to a space which extended beyond the physical frame. For the Masters the aim is to have the focus remain within the pictorial plane and to extend the depth of the ‘in-field’, both physically and psychologically and to create within a two dimensional framework, a pictorial space holding the past, future and the present, which becomes nothing more than the “infinitesimal hairline” 36 which divides them. It is hoped that the present works will allow visual space to operate as an opening onto a pictorial space of linear time; a creation of our human consciousness. To again cite Gaston Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space* “In its countless alveoli, space contains compressed time. That is what space is for”. 37

For a work of art to operate on a level that brings about a viewer’s visual perception there has to be, “connections of elements, configurations, meaning and value”\textsuperscript{38}. This is provided by forms visually arranged in an aesthetically pleasing composition or visual statement, which when deployed can contribute to elements of a subjective “force of gravity and influence on the viewer”\textsuperscript{39}. Artistic expression together with the visual statement that is based on composition, opens the viewer to the experience of art. When an artist makes use of composition; a deployment of an arrangement in a special way, the visual information is intended to extort a response from the viewer. Because of its special arrangement of shapes that are presented as incoming information, this visual language has the ability to upset the equilibrium and/or configuration of forces. “Visual form is not simply the product of inner dynamic fields, but instead vision contains tensions, balance and momentum”\textsuperscript{40}.

Arnheim delves into the potentials of line and outline, shading and contrast, turns to organization, coherence and composition, points to principles and paradox, centres and infinities and finds symbols and signification in the smallest and the largest things, allowing one to understand how a means for depicting space can be a vehicle for a comment on time and how both may touch on aloneness and community at an artist’s command.\textsuperscript{41}

As an artist there have been constant struggles within the studio working with compositions; ‘centres of energy’ is what Arnheim refers to them as, attempting to engage in conversation with the work in a reflection-in-action and also bearing in mind the original conceptional intent of the artist, working together with the intention of the work.

\textsuperscript{40} John M. Kennedy. “A Commentary on Rudolf Arnheim’s Approach to Art and Visual Perception”, \textit{Leonardo}, Vol 13, No. 2 (Spring, 1980) p.117
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 118
The studio space has become a space where there is an ongoing dialogue with the artist and the creative process. It ultimately becomes a space where there is an unrelenting ritual of give-and-take with works-in-progress that is continually ongoing. All the works presented within this investigation, attempt to present time in the sense or the sensation of a moment on a two dimensional surface. I became aware that this assertion could only be accomplished by the creation of a framework; a framework in which this containment of compressed time, an alveolate space, is able to hold the past and the future and the present. They [the images] attempt to make the viewer aware of their presence within the painting’s space by the disablement of conscious thought, if only for a brief moment. The works attempt to present a perceptual space to be occupied by the viewer for that transient moment and by the momentary isolation of a moment, for the viewer to enter into a relationship with the artwork; slowing time down for the viewer to visually soak in that moment in the studio. Most of the investigation has centred on the creation of works, which represent a closed entity or a closed system on the pictorial plane. This then becomes a detached representation of a view of a ‘slice of space’ from the artist’s studio. The strong horizontal composition within the works, although they inform to a stabilizing, silent environment; can also indicate to a realm of activity in which the viewer can become involved. Scanning in a horizontal direction generally occurs more readily than in an up or down direction. Thus the viewer is able to ‘roam’ within the pictorial space, to scan across the canvas from left to right. “The depicted space reaches out from inside the frame and involves the viewer in its continuity”.

'M2 2007', together with many of the works presented in this investigational approach, recognize their horizontal composition as “realms of activity”.44 In these compositions, viewers feel that they can freely roam through these uncharted spaces unabated. “Horizontally oriented paintings tend to be centrically composed” 45; and this is true in ‘M2 2007’ as the ‘foci of visual energy’ is situated at the centre, but in using a composed compositional structure, the complete focus is withheld from the objects on the shelf and distributed across the canvas. Although the space is compressed, the partitioning of the space has permitted a layering of depth of space to occur; this depth can also come about from the viewers’ perception as he / she looks into the work itself. As mentioned previously, there has been an ongoing dialogue to resolve certain parts of the composition and also to resolve the question of a weight / balance distribution, which has presented itself time and time again. Ongoing ‘conversations’ have concentrated on the removal of the focus, which at most times seems to be solely governed by the

43 M. Donnelly, ‘M2 2007’, oil on canvas, signed and titled verso. 46.5 x 127cm
45 Ibid. p.39
composition of still life objects on the shelf, and in turn, to project, portion and distribute that focus, that attention, onto and together with the surrounding space and the objects that inhabit it.

Photography also involves the viewer by the very act of looking. It has the ability to bring forward and blend the past reality into the present. In the field of visual arts, it is photography, which comes closest to the expression of capturing the moment. “Of all the means of expression, photography is the only one that fixes forever the precise and transitory instant.” The camera’s lens is opened, allowing the light patterns, which have been reflected or emitted from objects to reach the film or sensor within the camera and forever capture the image. Photography is considered part of the avant-garde movements of the early Twentieth Century and, can also be regarded as emblematic of the dawning of the age of mechanical reproduction of images. Photographs, like our society, tend towards an ultimate reduction of the dimensionality of time. It [photography] has the unique ability to appear to freeze time; to capture moments in an instant, be it a fleeting emotion or more often, tragedy, elation or drama. Through photography the past blends into the present, flattening into an omni-present ‘now’.

In contemplating, photography as the science of observation, photography .. .. .. augments vision itself by bringing into focus details too numerous for the eye to capture in an instant, it [photography] .. .. ..instead it slows time down just enough to capture the myriad visual nuances that one can only experience through sustained examination.47

46 Henri Cartier-Bresson
The camera records the transitory image and establishes within the pictorial space a relationship to time; to a particular time, bringing the past into the present. In looking at a photograph we regain connection with an axis of time; we see a moment frozen in time; a time recalled; a memory from the past. “Such images are indeed able to usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real, it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask.”

Photographs will always contain these remnants, residues of the past, as a trace of reality that was, thus providing an instantly retroactive view of the experience. In the photograph of my studio, the viewer, by the very act of looking, gives the image ‘depth’ and brings, blends the past reality into the present; the viewer may experience the general condition of an artist’s space, but having an outsider’s perspective would generally feel disconnected from it [the studio]. Photographs normally give no indication of the experience within the pictorial space, emulating from the surface of the photograph; as it is a flat-surface record, a documentation of that particular ‘time’.

The point of taking photographs was a vast departure from the aims of painters. The subsequent industrialization of camera technology only carried out a promise inherent to photography from its very beginning: to democratize all experiences by translating them into images.  

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49 Ibid., p.7
Immanuel Kant, 18\textsuperscript{th} century philosopher, suggests that there is a subtle relationship between our subconscious and the passage of time. In his \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, Kant described space and time as an \textit{a priori} notion, which allows us to comprehend sense experience; both space and time are converted into inherent elements within a perceptual framework. This framework enables a progression of thought process; a means in which to recall, relive past experiences. “Time and space are forms that the mind projects upon the external things-in-themselves . . . that time is a form of apprehending phenomena is probably best taken as suggesting that we have no direct perception of time but only the ability to experience things and events in time.”\textsuperscript{50} The experience or \textit{a priori} notion is recalled time and time again, making ‘time’ a fixed axis upon which all experience must be charted. In this way, we are only able to experience because the mind organises experience in both time and space. “Time is not something we perceive in experience, it is a precondition of having any experience at all”.\textsuperscript{51} Visual space can now become the framework for the continuance in time to exist. This concept of ‘space’ cannot be thought of as merely a set of dimensions, a system of coordinates; but that ‘space’ is loaded with significant meanings and memories as well as having the potential for creativity and spirituality. In Gaston Bachelard’s \textit{The Poetics of Space}, space is regarded as a vessel for the imagination.

In Paul Guyer’s essay on Immanuel Kant, Guyer wrote that both space and time become elements within a framework that is used by us to structure our experience; this has become the cornerstone of my conceptual and empirical study. It has always been my belief that ‘space’ has the ability to instil mystery and drama within an artwork, but could it have the ability to instil the passage of time. On a two-

\textsuperscript{51} Julian Baggini, “Stop all the clocks: Julian Baggini on the tyranny of time.” \textit{The Independent}. 2007
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface

What is meant by ‘time’ and ‘space’ – the experience of time is at the core of human nature

dimensional surface the image is regarded as a single act of framing where the image is fixed. In my work I am moving towards the representation of a ‘slice of space’; presenting a ‘framework’ – holding the past, future and present moment; the countless alveoli, space containing compressed time.

Within my investigation, there has been a constant search for an artistic device or compositional aid that could be incorporated to bring about this awareness; discovering that, as much as possible, there needed to be a distancing in regards to the composing of the studio ‘still life’ arrangements. This is where it was felt that, aspects of scale, the pictorial field, the perceptual field and transitory zones, that, which lie in between a state of consciousness and/or awareness, needed to be understood and utilized. In bringing about this awareness, my works must at least attempt to operate within the transitory zone. As you will see in the following chapter in the works of Giotto’s ‘Mourning of Christ’ and Goya’s ‘The Third of May, 1808’ the perceived audience reaction, from the perceptual field, is one of an ‘onlooker’; a witness to the scene unfolding in the pictorial space. In the work of Diti Almog\(^\text{52}\), on the following page, the work immediately places the viewer within the transitory zone; within ‘Library October 11\(^{th}\)’, aspects of inner/outer, flat/depth, near/far are somewhat blurred. Almog’s works allow the viewer, invite the viewer to enter her space, a space in which the viewer becomes an enigmatic presence. In her works there is a sense of acceptance, rather than resolve. The works function from within the pictorial space; and have a habit of exhibiting themselves, one another and sometimes even their own exhibition. To quote Irad Kimhi from an essay he wrote to accompany Almog’s work at the 2004 Biennale of

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\(^{52}\) Dita Almog’s work comprises of small abstract paintings, painted in acrylic on aircraft plywood.
Sydney “the pictorial field must also determine the perceptual field of the beholder in a unique way”. Could any other mediums bring about this aspect?

In the medium of photography, which initially I had generally felt had this inability in which to bring the viewer into the transitory space, I now discover the work of German photographer Thomas Struth. Covered in a later chapter, his body of work is in photographing the gallery environment and the ‘experience’, the dialogue between the viewer and the art work. A collection of “transitory moments of transitory people, caught in the aspic of photography”.

The approach in my own work is to bring about a physical confirmation of awareness; achieved by situating the viewer quickly within the transitory zone, thus disarming conscious thought and foregoing any need for interpretation. To accomplish this aim there was a need to remove the focus from the representational objects that situated themselves within this studio space and to distribute it; that is the focus, onto

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53 Dr Irad Kimhi, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design Jerusalem. Born 1958 Jerusalem. Studied Mathematics and Philosophy at Tel Aviv University and at the University of Pittsburgh, PA
54 Thomas Struth (born 1954) is a German photographer whose wide-ranging work covers detailed cityscapes, Asian jungles and family portraits. Along with Andreas Gursky, he is one of Germany's most noted modern-day photographers
56 Dita Almog, *Library October 11th*, acrylic on aircraft plywood, 45.7 x 53.3 cm 2003
and together with the surrounding space and the objects that inhabit it. In the work titled ‘M3 2007’, it became apparent early within the creative process that there was no equilibrium between the objects themselves on the shelf and the space that they occupied. The viewer’s focus, the viewer’s ‘prior’ knowledge and collective familiarity of the objects on the shelf would always take ascendance in their vision. It was not until the introduction of a dark horizontal ‘line’ that a sense of balance returned. The intensity of scrutiny on behalf of the viewer was now subjected to another visual force; another centric force within the work. The eye darts about trying to establish a point to hold on to. Both centric forces within the work are struggling for domination.

In ‘M3 2007’, by the compositional means of strong horizontals, verticals and diagonals, convey an atmosphere of ambiguity and uncertainty in reference to time and place. There is also awareness of a sense of balance and equilibrium within the composition; needed to

57 M Donnelly, ‘M3 2007’, oil on canvas, signed and titled verso, 50.5 x 137.5cm
convey an atmosphere of non-narrative, rather than to simply “stimulate the viewer to embark on some shaping of their own”. The work also establishes the need for ‘breathing spaces’, ‘countless alveoli’ to ignite a sense of time; breathing spaces, for a balance and a sense of harmony and ‘stillness’ to exist; ‘breathing spaces’ for the creation of a framework of perceptual space. For a time I would also have added that there exists a sense of loneliness and solitude within my work, but I do not believe that this is the case any more. The compositions do not bring with them any sense of narrative, any sense of tension or discourse. The partitioning of space or spaces permit a layering of depth of space to occur; yet the space is compressed: one is forced to read it from left to right or right to left and it thus becomes the long interval, the single present moment, the gap, the wait. The physical duration of time becomes ‘felt’ when you wait.

The ‘infinite moment’ – All moments past and future are experienced primarily as the present

Time is experienced in one direction only, always in the present, but never totally disconnected from the past or future for more than fleeting moments. The Buddhist concept of mindfulness is practiced through meditation; this is about the bringing forth or of being attentive to the experience of the moment. Time itself is a conscious awareness of change. Immanuel Kant and Henri Bergson suggest a subtle relationship between our subconscious and the passage of time. To Kant both space and time, become elements within a framework that is used by us to structure our experience. For Bergson, time is presented to consciousness as duration; a length, an interval of time “he defines the immediate data of consciousness as being temporal, in other words, as the duration (la duree) .. .. .. continuity of progress”.\footnote{Henri Bergson, \url{http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bergson/#4} accessed October 2004} To better understand his terminology he gives the example of two spools of recording tape.

\textit{The first of these two spools feeds into the other with a tape running between them; one spool unwinding the tape, the other winding it up .. .. .. duration resembles this image, because if we consider conscious thought and our memories, as we grow older, our future grows smaller and our past larger. If we go back and mentally visualize this image of the two spools, one feeding the other, we can then begin to relate it to a representation of a continuity of experiences.}\footnote{Ibid.}
The temporal experience for Bergson is not so much that of a memory, but a recognition relating to past experiences; a feeling of sympathy or elation, in effect putting ourselves in the place of others, feeling their pain or their joys.

To help illustrate Bergson, I have included the following works of art. These artworks have the ability to bring space and time together within a viewer’s consciousness; to elicit emotions; feelings that we ourselves have felt and can relate to, in that we are able to sense, to feel pain and joy. The viewer is in a sense within the image, they are placed within a transitory zone and become a presence within the painting. The figures with their back turned to us can represent the viewer, but the viewer can also become an extension of the image. The moment of recognition becomes the present; relating to Kant and the notion of time as a prior which allows us to comprehend sense experience. If we look at Giotto’s ‘The Mourning of Christ’, the image is all about involvement; involvement by the subjects themselves in the scene that is unfolding and by the viewers who become a spectator in the emotional drama of the scene. Giotto brings the action down to our human eye-level. Human emotions and human drama is expressed by the sorrowful facial
expressions, the direction of the eyes, looking down and focusing on the body of the dead Christ; the body language expressed by his mother and his disciples are bent and broken with the pain of anguish and sorrow.

Goya’s ‘The Third of May, 1808’ is yet another work where the spectator is pulled into the transitory zone to once again bear witness to the experience of pain and sorrow. The viewer is given distance to acknowledge the full impact of the scene. The horizontals are thrust forward, formed by the row of soldiers aiming their bayoneted rifles, focusing on the target, the mark; and form the ‘cut’ severing the life-force; the line between life and death. The condemned man holds out his arms in a gesture of the crucifixion forming the letter ‘X’, the sacrifice, ‘the slaughtered lamb’, the mark. This also gives rise to the centrical force within the painting. The symbol, the ‘X’ is repeated by the dead man lying in a pool of blood in the foreground. In both of the works represented the viewer is drawn into the event and becomes momentary aware of the drama unfolding. The experiential knowledge of pain and loss is recalled to fully participate in the experience of the moment; Kant’s ‘a priori’ notion. It is interesting to note that in both works: Giotto’s ‘The Mourning of Christ’, and Goya’s ‘The Third of May, 1808’ the same device has been used;

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61 Goya ‘The Third of May 1808’, oil on canvas, 266x345cm. Museo Nacional del Prado
the ‘cut’ between life and death. In the ‘Mourning of Christ’ it is the rock formation which slices the image in half, coming to rest on the dead Christ. With Goya’s ‘The Third of May1808’ it is the juxtaposition of light and dark. Time in the present is nothing more than the “infinitesimal hairline” 62 that divides the present moment into the past.

Caspar David Friedrich, “Monk by the Sea”, 1809, oil on canvas, 110x172 cm. National galerie, Berlin 63

In the work of Caspar David Friedrich there is also a ‘centric’ element that reaches out to an corresponding centre within us; an element of human experience and points to a spiritual purity within the work. In Friedrich’s work, ‘Monk by the Sea’, the work is composed within the simple structure of three great bands stretching across it: sky, sea, land, with the one vertical element of the human being,

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63 Caspar David Friedrich, The Monk by the Sea The theme: the tiny figure of a man set against a natural landscape divided into three horizontal zones of colour. Its composition breaks with all traditions. There is no longer any perspective depth whatsoever. At the bottom of the picture, the whitish sand dunes making up the narrow strip of shoreline rise at an obtuse angle towards the left. At their apex, the tiny figure of a man robed in black is visible from behind - the only vertical in the picture. The oppressively dark zone of the sea meets an extremely low horizon. Some five-sixths of the canvas is given over to the diffuse structure of the cloudy sky. Because all lines lead out of the picture, infinity becomes the true subject of the painting. In the awareness of the monk’s human scale, the human presence, in whose place the viewer is meant to imagine themselves, reflects upon the power of the universe.
who gathers the muteness of nature into himself and gives it a voice. The word ‘monk’ is derived from the Greek monos, which translates to ‘alone’;\textsuperscript{64} and it is this loneliness that Friedrich shares with us. In the sense of this picture we are all represented as we stand in contemplation before that of, the overwhelming forces of Nature. Closely associated with Romanticism, the majority of his best-known paintings are expressions of a religious mysticism. Friedrich’s landscapes seek not just the blissful enjoyment, but an instant of sublimity, a reunion with the spiritual self through lonely contemplation.

\textsuperscript{64} The word “monk” from Wikipedia. In modern parlance also referred to as a ‘monastic’, is a person who practices religious asceticism (the conditioning of mind and body in favour of the spirit. From early Church times there has been a lively discussion of the meaning of the term monk (derived from Greek: monos, alone), namely whether it denotes someone living alone; away from the rest of society, or someone celebrate; focused on God alone.
Investigating Temporality and Spatiality

German philosopher Martin Heidegger once noted, we cannot directly represent time, though we feel it passing. In my work the aim is to depict/imply the sensory experience of time on a two dimensional space; visibly bringing forth the concept of time passing. In many of the works I have played around with the perception of visible space. Zen paintings also engage with the relationship between form and emptiness, between a representation and the empty space that surrounds it. This ‘empty’ space with Zen Art becomes the aesthetic key to the work of art. One of the influences upon my work has been the Zen Garden of Ryoanji in Kyoto and the ancient art of the Tea Ceremony. These two art forms within the Art of Zen allude to, an ‘awareness’ of the present moment or of the coming into presence of the moment. Representing a ‘world within a world’ the Zen Garden of Ryoanji was created by Zen monks between 1480 and 1525. Thought by many to be the quintessence of Zen Art, the garden is in the dry landscape style called karesansui, which translated to mean ‘withered landscape’. The traditional interpretations in the composition and placement of the rocks and white gravel have long been regarded as the representation of the ocean and islands of Japan. Another interpretation of the garden design is that they form the representation of a mother tiger and her cubs swimming in

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65 The garden is not ascribed to one designer, although common belief is that Soami, a leading artist of the age who was also associated with Daisen-in made the garden.
the river of white sand toward a fearful dragon, and lastly it is that the rocks represent the Chinese symbol for ‘heart’ or ‘mind’. However, it is the empty space created by the placement of the rocks and the void created by the white gravel that has always had the ability to ignite debate.

_Scholars, such as Nitschke see the garden as the epitome of the art of void. He describes how the garden, representing the minimal, is able to celebrate the void in enabling viewers to turn inward towards one’s interior. ... the ability of the garden to fill in the imagination of the viewers with its bare landscape._

The rocks and gravel are used to evoke and create the illusion of mountains and rivers. Ryoanji is physically ‘cut-off’ from the outside natural world by a wall that runs the length of the garden. This cut-off from the surrounding nature has the effect of drying up its organic life, in much the same way as does the art of Ikebana, which by cutting off the root of life, allows for the true nature of that object to display itself. The garden wall at Ryoanji also exemplifies a technique known in Japanese aesthetic discourse as _kire-tsuzuki_, or “cut-continuance”. The wall cuts the garden off from the outside surrounding nature drying up its organic life; thus the garden now no longer decays and weathers in the usual manner. The ‘mountain and waters’ of the garden at Ryoanji appear less temporary than their counterparts outside, which manifest the changing cycles to a greater degree. The rocks themselves are not mere copies of the world that exists outside the garden wall, but are originals on their own – alluding to an environment where life is impermanent. Our own lives are not in a state of

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67 Ikebana – Japanese art of flower arrangements, the term means literally ‘making flowers live’
68 The cut derives from Zen Buddhist thinking. The Rinzai master Hakuin urged his students to cut off the root of life through giving up the idea that the self is real, so that they can then return to life with renewed energies. There is a minor instance of this cut in the life-sustaining process of breathing: the moment between exhalation and inhalation, between contraction and expansion, is a moment of ‘cut-continuance’
continuous flow and therefore in order to remind us of this fact, there is a need for timeless moments in order to achieve a “moment-by-moment discontinuous continuity, representing the finitude and mortality of life.”\textsuperscript{70}

As in the Zen Art of Ikebana where the natural being is severed in order to allow its true nature to come to the fore, this same principle of ‘cutting off’ also applies to the rocks and gravel in the garden at Ryoanji. Although they are originals in themselves, they maintain a relationship to the ‘outside’ natural environment beyond the garden wall, in order to instigate the cut-continuance and offer an awareness of life’s impermanence. If one looks at the rocks, of which there are 15, these exist within their own space. They do not dominate it but adhere and reside comfortably within it. There is separation and an awareness of this separation, an awareness generated in part by empty ‘breathing’ spaces. This ‘empty’ space or void does not in fact relate to barrenness and blankness but signals an internal opening for contemplation, a distancing away from a conscious time. The space, the void, acknowledges time in that it reconnects with compressed time. Space assumes primacy, becoming the content of the painting.\textsuperscript{71} In Zen Art, particularly in the landscapes paintings, empty space often gives the feeling of both timelessness and change. In Zen art landscape paintings (sumi-e),\textsuperscript{72} one of the most striking features is the relative emptiness of the picture – an emptiness which gives the work a feeling of endless space from which the event suddenly appears. Kant has

\textsuperscript{72} Sumi-e landscape paintings, especially in the Sung dynasty (959-1279). The Sung masters were pre-eminently landscape painters, creators of a tradition of ‘nature painting’. It shows us the life of nature – of mountains, waters, mist, rocks, trees, and birds. A world in which man belongs but which he does not dominate; it is sufficient to itself, for it was not ‘made for’ anyone and has no purpose of its own.
connected space and time as *a priori* intuitions, “developed through reason and conditioning everything experienced through the senses”.  

The concept of separation and an awareness of that separation became the key to unlocking compositional ‘breathing spaces’ that would ignite a sense of time. In the creation of a framework of ‘alveolate space’, space (breathing spaces) need to be perceived as a collection of small cavities, cells containing compressed time; time as duration. Perceived in this context there is then the opportunity to reconnect with that compressed time, as perceptual-space has within it the ability to ‘hold’ time or to release a sense of time onto the pictorial surface and for it to remain within the present moment.

Although the eyes of the viewer are free to scan a work of art, there is a sense of ‘tension’ operating within. A work of art is an image whose centre is charged with visual energy emanating out to the viewer, and it is this centric force that dictates the position of the viewer. The compositional battle between the centric force, the objects and the void has been ongoing as each tries to enforce their dominance onto the pictorial space. The viewer by concentrating, focusing attention on any given area / subject makes it the primary centre within the work and in doing so can “confirm or disturbs the composition’s intrinsic structure”. The question of visual weight and balance are also operating here. Arnheim notes that any pictorial object looks heavier at the right side of the picture and that the viewer subjectively identifies with the left; whatever appears there assumes greater importance. The task then became paramount to acquire a balance, an equilibrium operating within the work. In ‘M1 2007’ the image is generating three areas seeking domination; the dark horizontal ‘line’ at the

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bottom of the canvas; the luminosity of the top horizontal compressed space, and the objects on the right. The ‘luminous’ left by its position and luminosity acquires the vectorial centre, the left where more perceptual weight is tolerated.

*The left side is endowed with special weight; it assumes the function of a strong centre with which the viewer tends to identify. This perceptual asymmetry is likely to have a physiological cause related to the different functions of the cerebral hemispheres of the brain. The right hemisphere normally favours perceptual organization, and since by the optical action of the eye lenses the information from the left side is projected onto the right brain, the left side of the visual field is likely to be favoured, to be perceived as more weighty, more important, more “central” in some respects.*

It is a sense of awareness of the present moment that I seek within my work, the infinitesimal hairline which blends the present into past. In ‘M1 2007’, the ‘weightedness’ of the void on the left, is counterbalanced by the objects and their weight distribution on the right. The composition has been further balanced by the impact of the dark horizontal ‘line’; the size of which has been determined by the visual

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weights operating within the compressed space above. In my work ‘space’ informs the present moment, expanding the linear succession of time by stretching the space to become the long interval or duration. My work invites the viewer into my space; my time spent in the studio. The canvases and assortment of boxes, jars and brushes on the shelves wait; wait for attention on behalf of the painter; wait in anticipation for the painter to again approach the ‘still life’ and retrieve that which was abandoned. In the work I have tried to avoid shadows, for the inclusion of shadows locks the image into a light, a time of day, a moment past. As the work does not tell a story and is only concerned with a form of depiction, it has also become important not to arrange the ‘still life’ so as not to form a pictorial grouping. I want the depicted objects to be as though ‘found’; having arranged themselves like that. There is a certain amount of graphic simplification that has occurred to allow the ‘subjects’ to exist within their own space, but once the viewpoint is established, the subjects become a cornerstone of stability and permanence, ready to be observed after weeks and months of absence.

_I think that when I focus my attention on something it goes dead, but when I place it in a space that includes things that are not it, then it comes alive_ - John Cage

John Cage argued that in essence spontaneity is killed when an image has been overworked as the artist tries to impose their own discipline; at times overly composing and thus losing the ‘freshness’, the notion of ‘chance by accident upon’. ‘Waiting II Nov., 2006’ is one of the early works and for a considerable length of time continued to pose problems in regards to its composed arrangement. A more detailed account is presented in the Research Methodology Section of this Exegesis. The problems encountered were that for a time, the work
itself presented as a ‘still life’; objects found in the studio, the focus steadfastly remained on the objects themselves. Conversations within the creative process continued to stress that the objects themselves dominated the space; the work presented very much like a photograph, which as a flat-surface record documents and records everything in focus.

77 In ‘Waiting II Nov., 2006’ the aim was to compress space in order to create the framework for the continuance in time to exist. The final composition placed the ‘weight’ on the left side of the canvas, creating a perceptual asymmetry. The visual weight now dominating on the left side of the canvas falls in line with what Arnheim noted, which is that as the right cerebral hemisphere perceived that the left side of the visual field “as more weighty, more important, more ‘central’.” 78 Although the left side of the work assumes this position, the proportional weight of the ‘void’ provides the counter balance that is needed. When visual ‘space’ is treated as an entity, it can transpire on a temporal level. The ‘empty’ space becomes the aesthetic key to the work.

77 M. Donnelly, ‘Waiting II Nov. 2006’, oil on canvas, signed and titled verso. 50 x 80.5cm
In terms of subject matter, there is a link between my work and the ‘still lifes’ in the work of Giorgio Morandi. I acknowledge the influence of Morandi on my earlier works, which attempted to convey narratives within their compositional structure. One example from the “Making the Invisible Visible” series, is the work titled ‘Senza Titolo SIII’ 2005. Within the structural arrangement of the objects, the work’s intent is the visual interpretation of perceived conversations, in regards to consumers’ continuous search for individual happiness; as well as questioning the belief that happiness can be defined in purely materialistic terms.

It is now a sense of time; a visual expression of a ‘time interval’ within my work, bringing in the ‘space’ and acknowledging this ‘space’ as a fundamental element of the composition; the directional push that the work is striving for. My work attempts to make the viewer aware of their presence within the painting’s space “thought must be disarmed”, and to present a perceptual space to be occupied by the viewer for a transient moment. This momentary experience enables the viewer to enter into a relationship with the artwork; slowing time down for the viewer to visually soak in that moment in the studio. How is it possible to be in the momentary present tense? A moment of

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79 Donnelly, ‘Senza Titolo SIII’ 2005. Egg tempera on canvas 70.5x51.0cm. Body of work titled “Making the Invisible Visible in the Art of Egg Tempera”

time suspended, a moment of time between inaction and action, a moment of time between life and death, a moment of time between ignorance and knowledge. Recently I watched as a young boy made several attempts to get his kite airborne as he ran along the beach. The kite struggles to catch the wind and finally took flight as the air passes underneath. It ascends higher and higher and stays there leaning towards the wind and only occasionally does it turn right or left as I watch it from the ground. I am mesmerized and become transfixed by the struggle. I stay with the kite as it suddenly dips and loses altitude, and then is once again upright and begins a further ascent climbing higher. I am caught in time momentarily, and so it is with my work which seeks an awareness of the subject being within that space.

In the work of Giorgio Morandi, through the persistent arranging and re-arranging of elements within the composition the focus centres on the subjects; bottles and jars which appear to be united together through the unity and combinations of shapes. He orchestrates the elements coaxing them into offering up the narrative that he is after. In my work there is no sense of narrative, the ‘still lifes’ wait. The focus of the work is divided between the objects and even more onto the space that surrounds them; and also onto the weight of the numerous thin layers of paint as they [the objects] struggle to keep in touch with the real. With Morandi the objects were always the focus. In my work it is more about the habitual space that they exist in; as it is with the ‘alveoli’ within this space where the experience of time exists. Morandi keeps the viewer at a close distance, in a shallow space in front of a wall. I extend the depth and attempt to place the viewer within this transitory zone. Morandi’s subjects are usually depicted quite alone in their surrounding space, alone in their solitude, and
yet he allows the viewer into the confidence of the object’s narrative. My objects offer no narrative. As a photograph is an interpretation of the real, a trace stencilled off the real, so my work allows for a visual conversion to elements on a two dimensional space.

Morandi’s arrangements present as poignantly clustered ‘families’ gathering together for mutual support. In *Natura morta*, 1955 the dominant vase is the protector of the cup, which appears to lean on and be supported by it; or perhaps it is the cup and not the vase; although the cup is smaller, it appears to be a much stronger, a more solid object because of the verticals, inherent within the painterly structure. The painting’s visual and emotional centre, is the point where the two objects touch. The centric force is the ‘light’ on the white vase. Opposing dark and light forms within the work define each other. The ‘grounding’ of the objects is tied to the compositional ‘horizon’ which is behind them. The space on the left and right side of the painting adds to the ambiguity and sense of the theatrical; in that it acts as a backdrop to the story being performed in front of an audience. Morandi received much “criticism and dismissal for painting

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81 Giorgio Morandi. *Natura morta*, 1955, oil on canvas. p.60
Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface

Exegesis for Degree of Masters (Hons) Fine Art

Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface

Investigating Temporality and Spatiality

Mary DONNELLY # 15242365

Descriptively, for ‘turning his back’ on 20th century modernism”. 82 But in looking closely at his paintings, his portrayal of ‘realism’ raises many questions. In Morandi’s later works, it is said that he was influenced by Cezanne’s experiential approach, influenced by Cezanne and his perceptual sensation in the moment, to the internal necessities of the artwork he was making; trying to discover the “work’s inherent pattern”. 83

Morandi was a patient arranger, who stood back in utter anxiety and dedication to watch the slow development of his things. 84 In viewing the photograph 85 of his studio, his “theatre of reality” 86, the portion of life frozen in time; Morandi’s constant reviewing of his arrangements become evident.

moving them here and there (not without first marking their exact position on the shelf, in case the move turned out to be a mistake). He shifted them slightly forward and slightly back to adjust the texture of spatial distances, and even in terms of their height he sought out the most persuasive relationships offered by the items, he activated the dynamic impulses inherent in their shape, the interaction of which finally led to the rhythmic arabesque of their infinitive placement. 87

82 Museo Morandi – http://www.museomorandi.it/index_net.htm
85 Photograph by Luigi Ghirri The Atelier. Accessed from Morandi site www.museomorandi.it/index_net.htm
86 www.museomorandi.it/index_net.htm
87 Werner Haftmann, Morandi, Excerpt can be found at http://www.museomorandi.it/index_net.htm
Morandi sought to portray elements of the real on a two dimensional surface. In my work it is the intention to render what is experienced, and to capture momentary and transient effects happening within the studio. How does a painter seek to record the most subtle sensations of reflected light; for in capturing a specific kind of light, this very act of painting style conveys the notion of a specific and fleeting moment of time. The Impressionist Movement presented visual events, that which were seen from a given position in a location at a certain moment in time. The theory of Impressionism is described as predominantly “positivistic”88 in its interpretation of space and time.

My work also operates from this aspect; a position in space at an ambiguous moment in time. The work removes itself from the Impressionistic Movement, which strives to capture the instantaneous light and mood at a fixed particular place and a fixed particular time relating to a past experience; aligning itself more with American Abstract Expressionist Barnett Newman, to whom the ‘instantaneous’ moment is one of recognition. The physical act of time in the making according to Newman is investigated in a later chapter. The Impressionists were to record as quickly as possible the appearance of the subject at one particular moment. The purpose of a painting by Barnett Newman is that the ‘instant’, the moment, has become the subject “the moment which has arrived”.89 For me it is the ongoing collectiveness of cumulative visual experiences recorded at successive but different moments or periods in time. French philosopher, Jean-

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Francois Lyotard expresses the notion of “different sites of time”. He writes of the time it takes the painter to paint the picture (time of ‘production’), the time required to look at and understand the work (time of ‘consumption’), the time to which the work refers (a moment, a scene, a situation, a sequence of events: the time of the diegetic referent, of the story told by the picture), the time it takes to reach the viewer once it has been ‘created’ (the time of circulation) and finally, perhaps, the time the painting is.

The time the painting is. Within my work I have attempted to eliminate the structure of ‘time’ and not to offer them [the works] into a linear time. They are the representations of objects on a shelf within a space; at a particular time. But which time? It has been a conscious undertaking, that within the images, all semblance of time has been removed or subdued.

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90 Ibid. p 78
91 Ibid. p.78
92 M. Donnelly, *J3 2007*, oil on canvas, signed and titled verso. 51 x 91.5cm
To unlock/release the present moment .. .. ..

In a work of art, how is the present moment encountered? Is the moment experienced? Are we aware of this moment? Is the viewer’s sense of time – an embodied sense of time? In a painting, sculpture or video installation the changes in time are usually illustrated; they present a captured moment within the frame or the idea of progression through the piece. For the viewer, these are senses of time; time is given to our consciousness in the reading or viewing of the work. In the case of photographs and works of art that have an underlying narrative, they [the works] are slotted into their own linear time. If we look at what is a viewer’s sense of time – the embodiment of a sense of time in the medium of film; time, both real and abstract, is in motion. It moves in a given direction with each frame and as this ‘time’ moves, the centric vector, which is the structure of the story and the dynamic force also moves and changes. This alters the visual dynamics as they are caught in the “flow of transformations”\textsuperscript{93}, during which its centre moves from frame to frame or from place to place. The viewer is possibly unaware of the compositional highpoints that punctuate each scene to achieve the maximum visual dynamics; that in a way operate in a tandem experience with the viewer; “the dynamics operating in the pertinent projection areas of the brain may be assumed to be isomorphic to the dynamics observed in perception”.\textsuperscript{94} Visual highlights and compositional organization are the underlying structure to the story as it unfolds. They contribute to the framework, the sequence of actions and motions that make up the viewer’s perceptual experience.


\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. p218
In the Chinese and Japanese landscape scroll paintings⁹⁵, the viewer becomes aware of a pre existing entity as they unroll the scroll. Much like a cinematic film story develops sequence frames, so too the scroll paintings reveal their narrative. The experience for the viewer is an expansion of perceptual experience through the gradual visual build-up as the story unfolds; a sense of anticipation of what will visually reveal itself.

*In works of art the deepest significance is transmitted to the eye with powerful directness by the perceptual characteristics of the compositional pattern.*⁹⁶

In the statement above, Arnheim refers to compositional patterns, which while producing the visual dynamics within a work, contrary to misunderstanding and suspicion by some artists, can also be the indispensable carrier of artistic expression. Outlining artists’ suspicions, Rosalind Krauss in an essay titled “The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths”, describes what happened when artists of our century began to structurally compose or use formats within their work; as an example she used the painting of grids. To paint such diagrams, she says, amounted to the most thorough break with the pictorial tradition. The grid erected a barrier that walled the visual arts into ‘a realm of exclusive visuality.’ It was a fortress turning into a ghetto: ‘never,’ she says, “could exploration have chosen less

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⁹⁵ An art form practiced primarily in the Far East. The two dominant types are the Chinese landscape scroll and the Japanese narrative scroll, which developed the storytelling potential of painting. Hand scrolls, are ink paintings on continuous lengths of paper or silk. They are unrolled at arm’s length and viewed from right to left. These generally represent panoramic views of rivers, mountain and urban landscapes, and domestic interiors. They also illustrate romantic novels, Taoist and Buddhist themes, and historical and genre subjects.

The question then to be considered is in regards an artist’s natural expression and intuitiveness. Need these qualities be restrained and subdued by compositional orders such as ‘schematic patterns’, which have become indispensable for the order and meaning of the work? I believe the latter, which is to say that the structural skeleton of the work contains within it the concise visual statement as to the work’s essence and does, because of the compositional patterning, have more of an opportunity to reveal the work’s full range of meaning.

Intuitive application is entirely possible when we assume that centric and eccentric structure is inherent in all perception. Learned rules are known to be risky in studio work; they may tend to dim the intuitive visual judgement of the artist. As long as this risk is avoided – that is, when intuitive judgement is in ultimate control of the composition and uses general principles as mere tools of artistic creation – it does not matter much whether these principles operate below the level of consciousness in direct and immediate interaction with the other components of perceptual organization or whether the relationship is more mediated and more indirect.

My work attempts to create a subjective experience for the viewer within the painting’s space, for conscious “thought to be disarmed”, if only for a brief moment. In order to achieve the means to accomplish this, that is, to bring the viewer into the work’s transitory zone has meant that spatial placements and compositional arrangements which are operating on the pictorial surface needed modification. From the work’s inception there has been a strong reliance on a structural compositional base on which the work ‘hinged’. Elements such as visual weight and balance that come under the heading of perceptual forces, had to be re-evaluated time and time again in the ongoing

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creative process. To reiterate, in the beginning there was a strong underlying compositional structure running through the works, but I was only acting on purely intuitive, aesthetic judgement. Ongoing dialogue between the work and myself and the so called ‘compositional patterning’ did not present itself formally until much later. The works themselves are endeavouring to offer the experience of awareness; engendering to offer the infinitesimal hairline to accept them in the present before allowing them to slip into the past – between the past and present that divides them. A quote from Jean-Francois Lyotard, when he writes on the present instant, “as one that tries to hold itself between the future and the past, and becomes devoured by them”.  

The key concept in my work has been to determine if in fact space, empty visible space within an artwork can ignite a sensation of time. The question in the creative process is whether or not this visible aspect of empty space can bring about the notion of experienced time, that is, a duration of time; time no longer something thought but something lived. It has been an ongoing process to acquire the knowledge on how to balance form with emptiness in order to bring about this awareness. An awareness which comes about by, not so much the visual concentration of emptiness but by what Bachelard termed an ‘alveoli’ space; a subsequent area consisting of time compressed.

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‘F1 2007’ is made up of two panels. The panel on the right denotes the objects themselves, and allows them complete freedom to inhabit their space. The visible ‘gap’, which I feel is the visual centre, brings with it complete separation between the two occupied areas, allowing for the acceptable introduction of the left panel; that of ‘compressed time’. This now brings balance to the composition.

It was a quote from Gaston Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space* that for me became the catalyst, “in its countless alveoli, space contains compressed time. That is what space is for”. Throughout this practice-based investigation the concentration has become, on how to unlock space, to release time to remain within the present moment if only for an instantaneous response.

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102 M. Donnelly, *F1 2007 Diptych*, oil on canvas, signed and titled verso, 60 x 133cm
The objects in my studio wait. They wait in ‘compositions’ as other compositions of ‘still life’ wait. Wait for the painter to wander back to retrieve that which was abandoned. Thus, the works remain forever within the present moment, yet incorporated within are moments of the present past and moments of the future present.

The studio has also become a space where there is an ongoing dialogue with the practitioner and the creative process. It has become a space where the unrelenting ritual of give-and-take with works-in-progress is continually ongoing; a space that encapsulates the emotions; the ongoing considerations and thoughts which a painter needs to give the work direction.

104 Morandi’s Studio in Grizzana.
Becoming a part of the experience

Every aspect of a visual experience has its physiological counterpart in the nervous system.105

How does the viewer become part of the occurrence? How can an artwork bring about the viewer’s awareness of their presence within the painting’s space, “the interaction between viewer and viewed work of art is purely in terms of their relative positions in space”.106

As part of the human genetic makeup, individuals are possessed with impulses and motivations that arise from our inner sense; our central core, and are channelled by and in experience. This then translates to individual action or maybe for a better word human interplay, which is then understood to be directed towards us or away from us. Our actions are influenced by our needs and wishes, our pleasures and our fears. At some point in their existence, each individual is compelled to realize that their own centre is only one centre among others “the spread of action from the generating core of the self and the interaction with other such centres in the social field”.107 This awareness needs to happen if we are to co-exist in an amicable society.

The eccentric tendency stands for any action of the primary centre directed towards an outer goal or several such goals or targets. The primary centre attracts or repels these outer centres, and the outer centres, in turn, affect the primary one.108

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107 Ibid p.vii
108 Ibid p.2
How does an artist interpret this statement and bring about within their work the power to attract, the power to engage with the spectator? How can this become visible and how can the artist open the viewer up to the experience of the artwork? My sense of this is that an organized compositional visual statement plays a fundamental role in bringing about a visual language that conveys a meaningful dialogue, that is, an interactive dialogue between that of the viewer and the work of art. In *The Power of the Centre*, Arnheim refers to these dialogues as “the interaction of two visual principles”109, which he calls “the centric and the eccentric systems”110. Artistic language which is aided by the use of composition results in the establishment of a framework in which such subjective systems or directional ‘targets’ are able to operate.

This set of systems or influential force operating within the work directs itself towards the viewer, who in turn responds with empathy because of these directional underlying compositions. Arnheim has initiated the term ‘vector’ to describe these forces in his writing. Vectors so called because of their inherit connotation as “primary groupings or centres of energy”111. To Arnheim, vectors operate as “active goal directed aimings”112, which if this concept is applied to a work of art, any work of art translates to mean the subjective power of an artwork and also the ‘striving to approach’ on behalf of the viewer or at best an intent to understand its narrative.

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110 Ibid. p. vii The term centricity, coming from the core of the centre, eccentricity is used to differentiate between compositional forces related to an internal centre and others acting in response to an external centre. The interaction of centricity and eccentricity directly reflect the twofold task of human beings, namely, the spread of action from the generating core of the self and the interaction with other such centres in the social field. Another term that Arnheim uses is the word ‘vector’, meaning a directional force or action deriving from the central core. A ‘vector’ is described as a centre of energy. A vector cannot be regarded as a mere passive emanation of energy released into empty space but rather, as an active goal-directed aiming – at a target; a striving to approach - that which may be friendly, as like a longing; or hostile, like an attack.
111 Ibid. p.viii
112 Ibid. p5
In the media of film and music, audiences become immersed in the story; immersed in the language of music; resulting in an inner/outer experience, whereby they become oblivious of their own space and existence within that space. The visual arts also have the ability to engage with their audience on this level, but in order to do so, there needs to be an interaction between the viewer and the viewed work. If we keep in mind the idea of the vectors, as central forces of energy emanating from the work of art and also out of the viewer; this can then be the starting point on which to base the subjective viewpoint of the artist and the nature of the work. In order to create these vectors, of which the sole purpose is to attract and affect the viewer can be as simple as the offer of an invitation. Certain aspects of this are easily discernable, that of the subject matter, which attracts the attention of the viewer and rewards them by paying attention to them; much of this is in the form of eye contact. Then there is the invitation to enter from the open door, the window left slightly ajar or a road leading into a landscape. Viewers need only to give themselves over; thought is disarmed, for them to become part of the story. The use of eye contact especially from the pictorial space, makes the viewer feel that they are being looked at; resulting in the creation of suggestive tension. The viewer by the act of looking back; breathes life into the subject within the painting. The viewer almost feels personally addressed as the subject matter imposes its will upon them, the viewer. Arnheim notes that visual form is not simply the product of inner dynamic fields, but instead vision contains tensions, balance and momentum. The interplay of physical action, the dynamic effect and the tension that the work arouses is due in part, because of the ‘eye contact’ between the viewer and a work of art. An example can be seen in the work titled Olympia by Edouard Manet. In Olympia,\(^{113}\) Manet has taken an essentially classical composition and placed it in a contemporary setting, using a contemporary

\(^{113}\) Manet’s Olympia was inspired by Titian’s Venus of Urbino, which in turn refers to Giorgione’s Sleeping Venus. In the painting Olympia, Manet does not depict a
woman. This brought about the dynamic effect that the work itself was positioned in the present time of Parisian society and that it was
operating in the ‘here and now’. Taken in this context we can then begin to understand the dynamic effect and inner tension that such an image
would have caused. The force, the tension at the centre of the work is emulating from the direct ‘eye contact’ from the subject herself and in
turn is directed towards the spectator, looking at her. The viewer is an external participant within the work and that is enveloped by the
moment.

Edouard Manet. *Olympia*. Oil on canvas, 130.5 x 190cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris 1863

In Manet’s *Olympia* an event is unfolding; the event of a naked woman looking
out, questioning our gaze. She does not recede behind geometric visual shapes
and forms, but remains defiant, reclining upon silken pillows; her eyes
demanding attention, her gaze steady, unflinching.¹¹⁴

In acknowledging Olympia’s gaze, there is a sense of awareness, an inner connection between the work of art and the viewer.

The viewer is an external participant that has been brought into the art work, participating and contributing to the story. In Rudolf Arnheim’s
goddess or an odalisque, but a high-class prostitute waiting for a client.
¹¹⁴ What shocked contemporary Parisian audiences was not the nudity, nor even the presence of the fully clothed maid, but Olympia’s confrontational gaze and a number of
details identifying her as a demi-mondaine or courtesan. These include the orchid in her hair, her bracelet, pearl earrings and the oriental shawl on which she lies, symbols of
wealth and sensuality. The black ribbon around her neck, in stark contrast with her pale flesh, and her cast-off slipper underline the voluptuous atmosphere. Whereas Titian's
Venus delicately covers her sex from the male gaze, Olympia's hand firmly covers hers, as if to emphasize her independence, sexual power and sexual dominance. Manet
replaced the little dog (symbol of fidelity) in Titian's painting with a black cat, which symbolized prostitution. In *Olympia*, Manet has painted a real woman, whose
nakedness is revealed in all its brutality by the harsh light.
The Power of the Center: A Study of Composition in the Visual Arts, this exchange or dialogue is likened to a force that is sent out like an arrow from a centre, in this case the visual centre of the painting. If you begin to dissect Manet’s *Olympia* into pictorial elements, it becomes apparent that he has visually split the canvas into two by the use of the strong vertical of the curtain and the wooden architrave. This in turn becomes a directional arrow pointing to Olympia’s genitalia. There is a tension here in the visual centre of the work; between the ‘eye contact’ of the subject and the viewer as their gaze moves up her body to be met by this unflinching, steady intent look. In looking at the artwork; within this optical exchange the viewer or spectator unknowingly responds to this “eccentricity of compositional force”115. In Manet’s *Olympia* the exchange between the internal centres is occurring within the work’s pictorial space and the viewer’s perceptual zone. The physical space between the two directed forces, that is, the exchange between the viewer and the work of art, becomes a realm for active vectors. It enables these exchanges to occur. It is the transitory zone and must remain intact for the ‘vectors’ to thus remain in operation.

How can the artist bring the viewer closer in; into the transitory zone where their presence is perceived as contributing to the narrative or segregated from what is occurring? The power of the work “takes over the primary centre, seemingly governing its own structure, independent of the viewer, who becomes immersed in the object, oblivious of their own outer existence”.116

116 Ibid., p.37
Another more contemporary example of this dynamic interaction of visual forces in regards to the engagement of the viewer is to be found in the work of Thomas Struth. Struth takes up the theme of the picture within the picture, and also that of the space within a space. Struth examines the gallery environment and how it contributes to the viewer’s experience of the painting; in that he attempts to create an intimate relationship between the viewer and the artwork. Struth does not attempt to freeze a fleeting moment but rather time is allowed movement or continuation. This thus enables the viewer to experience fully in this visual and psychological moment.

From the title the artist acknowledges that it is he with his back to us, his arm and shoulder in the blue jacket. The subject within the work is the ‘conversation’ between the two artists across time and the visual force within the work is the Durer self-portrait. The Durer by its very

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presence and situation, and also the ‘eye contact’ within the Durer self-portrait becomes the visual force at the centre of Struth’s self-portrait which seeks to connect with the gallery viewer. The composition in regard to Struth’s turning his back to us is not a mere coincidence, but an attempt on behalf of the artist to place the viewer within the transitory zone. This composition is not a coincidental pose as the figure seen from behind has been considered to be the representative of the viewer ever since Caspar David Friedrich painted his landscapes. In Friedrich’s paintings, the figure with its back turned to us symbolises an inner composure and embodies the romantic response on behalf of all of humanity.

In another of Struth’s work; ‘National Gallery 2 (Vermeer), London’, Struth has composed his photographic image with the Vermeer painting to the upper right of the composition, isolated against a dark grey wall. The work is different to most of Struth’s museum photographs in that it contains no individuals, only the chair; an indication of a human presence or the possibility of a human presence. Taken at the London National Gallery’s 2001 Vermeer exhibition it shows the Metropolitan Museum’s Vermeer ‘Woman with a Lute’ 1663 alone, just as Vermeer’s woman is alone. In Struth’s

118 Thomas Struth, “National Gallery 2 (Vermeer) London”, 2001 Photograph type C photograph 110.0 x 143.6cm image; 152.5 x 175.0 x 5.0cm frame.
museum photographs the attempt is to set up relationships between the audience and the painting and with this in mind the view tends to be rather frontal with a space parallel to the pictorial surface. This device frames the action and freezes the moment in the image. In ‘National Gallery 2 (Vermeer), London’ the space extends obliquely, which “creates a structure disagreement between the two dynamic centres, the world of the viewer and the world depicted”.119

In this work the viewer has no room to manoeuvre but accept the transitory zone as their placement in viewing the work. The viewer must accept the artist’s visual statement, the artist’s subjective positioning, which shows “what the world looks like from a particular point of view of a particular individual”.120 This statement is not dissimilar in reference to the subject matter of the work of Dutch genre painter Jan Vermeer’s121, who tended to concentrate on figures in contemplative isolation and this isolation is echoed in the isolation of the painting in the photograph and the sense that the viewer is looking at it alone. The compositional invitation in ‘National Gallery 2 (Vermeer), London’, is the corner of the gallery wall where the walls convene and create a subtle line in the photograph that points to the empty chair. It is at this point within the work, the ‘meeting’ of the two adjacent walls that a visual vertical line has been structured by the advent of light and shadows bouncing back and forth. This becomes the visible source of a vanishing point within the work and also the vectorial centre that is charged with

120 Ibid. p.48
121 Jan or Johannes Vermeer van Delft, b. October 1632, d. December 1675, a Dutch genre painter who lived and worked in Delft, created some of the most exquisite paintings in Western art. His works are rare. Of the 35 or 36 paintings generally attributed to him, most portray figures in interiors. All his works are admired for the sensitivity with which he rendered effects of light and colour and for the poetic quality of his images.
visual energy emanating out to the viewer. The tip of the chair that is visible in the lower portion of the work also has an influence on the viewer. A chair is generally regarded as a reserved space to be potentially filled with a human presence and is therefore seemingly incomplete without the body of the person intended occupying it. In addition to the ‘retinal presence’ of the chair, it is the induced presence of the sitter who adds an important visual counter-centre to the composition. The eye travels diagonally through Struth’s photograph with the aid of the wooden frame and the back of the chair, finally settling in the corner of the room.

These are my interpretations, my visual perception that suggests their meaning; for I too have become the viewer engaging with the pictorial space. In the case of my own work it is from the artist’s perspective and from the constant struggles within the studio, working with the compositions, in conversation with them and also bearing in mind the original concept that I have been striving to achieve; that is to bring about a relationship between the viewer and the artwork through the momentary isolation of a moment, slowing time down for the viewer to soak visually in that moment in the studio. It is on the pictorial space of the image that there is an opportunity to bring about this interaction with the viewer by means of a visual language that is used by the artist and that incorporates narrative and information deployed in special ways, in other words a directional aiming at the viewer.

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In the work titled ‘F3 2007’, (Plate 8 p.20), the pictorial field relating to this image has established the ‘centre’ of the painting as the vertical gap between the conjoined canvases. Arguably, this has become the tension point of visual perception within the painting. This ‘centre’ establishes the viewers ‘point of entry’, similar to that of the works of Barnet Newman and his vertical vectors, the ‘zips’, that which announce/present themselves to the viewer. In ‘F3 2007’, once the viewing point has been established, the eye then travels diagonally across the image. Pictorial movement toward the right is perceived as being easier, “there is usually a tendency for viewers to perceive pictures as organized from left to right, so that the lower-left corner appears to be the composition’s point of departure”.\(^{123}\)

In ‘F3 2007’ (Plate 8 p.20), the oblique nature of the composition tends to create tension between the two centres, the world of the viewer and the world depicted. The space is depicted from the artist’s subjective viewpoint, showing what their world, their environment looks like from their particular point of view and visual perspective; “a particular point of view of a particular individual”.\(^{124}\)


\(^{124}\) Ibid. p.48
Awareness of the ‘present moment’ – I am here now

Can the viewer’s sense of time be an embodied sensation of time? American Abstract Expressionist, Barnett Newman presents his works as a relationship between artistic presentation and time itself. In Newman’s *Selected Writings and Interviews*, he states “I insist on my experiences of sensations of time – not the sense of time but the physical sensation of time.” So can we say that Newman’s work falls within the physical act of time in the making? Do Newman’s works project the physical act of time, that instantaneous moment, the moment of recognition? Newman invites the viewer to experience a sense of their own presence within the work; the physical confirmation of awareness – the *ein Ereignis*, the event of something has happened; the discernment that something has subconsciously passed between the pictorial space and the viewer, thus disarming conscious thought and foregoing any need for interpretation.

Whereas horizontal elements are recognized as in the realm of activity as the viewer scans across the image, taking in the visual information; upright or verticals serve as

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the pre-eminent domain for visual contemplation. The viewer is able to scan the vertical as a whole, as the vertical element presents itself without distortion. We can experience it as possessing its own space and occupying a vertical compositional field on its own; “the relation is one of pure exploration across a gap of space”. Instead of facing it as being detached viewers are in it and of it as it is seen head-on and complete. The centric force that has been released from within the work as the “vectorial configuration within the plane of composition” is responded to by the centric centre within the viewer.

Newman expressed the ‘now’ within his work; presenting them as a relationship between artistic presentation and time itself, “I insist on my experiences of sensations of time – not the sense of time but the physical sensation of time.” Newman’s aim was for the presentation of the painting to exist solely as an object and not as a representation. Another objective was to force the viewer to come to the realization in regards their own scale when confronted with the scale of the canvas and to recognize their own presence within the realm of the painting. In viewing a work of Barnett Newman, the viewer’s presence in relation to the work unfolds itself and makes itself known. The work sends out its own vectors, attracting and affecting the viewer thus provoking a response from them. This interaction is due partly because of its sheer size and also the upright vertical band; the vectorial configuration to what Newman himself first termed his ‘zip’. This vectorial band or line because of its inherent structural relationship to human proportions and the upright stance, visually ‘morphasizes’ in the viewer’s subconscious. It is because of the scale and monumentality of the ‘zip’ that it takes over as the primary centre and the source of visual impact.

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128 Ibid., p.38
It defines the spatial structure of the painting and simultaneously divides the canvas vertically by large areas of flat vertical chromatic bands of colour. The works are purely optical expressions of geometric abstraction that govern their own structure and become independent of the viewer, who may at times find them difficult to relate to but nonetheless cannot ignore their existence. The influence of colour also plays a part on a temporal level as some colours approach while others recede. Blue recedes into the distance while the colour red comes forward. The colour red is ‘heavier’ than the colour blue; and upon having this ‘weightedness’ inherent in the zips, reinforces Newman’s zips presence even further, as they perceptually come forward.

_Every visible object exhibits this twofold dynamic tendency in relation to the viewer’s self: it approaches and recedes. The ration between the two tendencies varies. Some objects more readily approach, others more readily recede._\(^{129}\)

With its visual weight and ‘presence’ the ‘zip’ is in possession of its own space on the pictorial surface and imposes itself upon the viewer; “weight is perceived as an active force that presses us downward”.\(^ {130}\) Standing in front of the artwork, the viewer experiences this, and also the experience that the vectorial element projects itself forward into the viewer’s space. Similarly, the response on behalf of the viewer is to react in the same way as the two affect each other, as the dynamic action works both ways; “the vectors operate centrifugally away from their centre and centripetally toward their centre.”\(^ {131}\) Newman presents his canvas as a statement, an “intransitive object”\(^ {132}\). In viewing the work, one’s own scale in relation to the canvas is realized. This brings about awareness, in a way, a consciousness of presence on behalf of the

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\(^{130}\) Ibid., p.16  
\(^{131}\) Ibid., p.44  
\(^{132}\) Yves-Alain Bois, Lecture ‘Here I am’: On Newman’s use of laterality. August 2002
viewer, which evokes the response of “I am here. Here I am”; an experience, an awareness of the moment. Of course, any work of art is a perceptual object and as such exists only in the consciousness of the viewer. Its properties are aspects of the viewer’s percepts.\textsuperscript{133}

In \textit{The Sublime and the Avant-garde}\textsuperscript{134} Jean-François Lyotard writes that what cannot be presented or expressed directly in a work of art is the question: Is it happening? With this question Lyotard translates Heidegger’s notion of ‘\textit{ein Ereignis}’, which although it does not constitute an event in a concrete sense, it does however, gives rise to the sensation that something indeed has occurred. A sense, a sensation of an experience which acknowledges the fact that something has happened between the viewer and the work of art. That conscious thought has been disarmed; a reaction, a response from the viewing of the work. In Newman’s work it is the simplicity of his work consisting of one of two vertical lines, set onto washes of a single colour that the response is so often instantaneous. The viewer is confronted by an image that needs no time to take in or to interpret. Writing on Newman, Lyotard refers to Newman’s works, in particular his vertical lines as ‘\textit{annunications}’ for they (the zips) announce themselves. The apparent simplicity of the Newman’s works evokes the sublime feeling that something has happened without the knowledge of what it is.\textsuperscript{135}

With my own work the aim is to offer the experience of awareness; attempting to offer the ‘infinitesimal hairline’ that which is noted as being within the present tense before it slips into the past - the division of past and present. Throughout, the goal has been to examine what artistic device could be incorporated to bring about this state of consciousness and/or awareness. This phase of the work examined aspects

of scale and their relationship to other objects. At times the rules of perspective were ignored and also the creation of strong shadows was limited or discarded altogether as this would isolate and cement the time frame on the pictorial field of the artwork. Other aspects that were also examined related to the perceptual field of the viewer and the transitory zone where the viewer is ‘in or out’ of the work. These were constantly explored as this had the potential of positioning the viewer ‘in the moment’. It was felt that to bring about an awareness of the present moment, the work must at least attempt to operate within the transitory zone. It has been noted that from the perceptual field, the perceived audience reaction, is that of an ‘onlooker’; a witness to the scene unfolding in the pictorial space. In artworks, where the viewer is placed within the transitory zone, they are in a sense neither in nor out of the work “thought is disarmed”, as the “pictorial field determines the perceptual field of the beholder in a unique way”.137

In Western culture the tendency is usually to read literature from left to right. This process also occurs when viewing a work of art. Vision scans up or down in a

137 Dr Irad Kimhi, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design Jerusalem. Essay on Diti Almog, 2004 Biennale of Sydney catalogue
vertical orientated format or within a horizontal composition from left to right and then back again, so that the lower-left corner “appears to be the composition’s point of departure”. In ‘F3 2007’ the studio ‘still life’ is compositionally positioned on the left of the canvas, to reinforce the view of visual weight and visual importance. Because of the oblique nature of its visual organization, the work imposes itself upon the viewer dictating the point of entry for the viewer. The primary centricity of the work has been established as the ‘gap’ between the conjoined canvases. This gap assumes the vertical dimension within the plane of composition and its introduction and that of the second panel, has provided a counterweight to the ‘weightedness’ of the panel on the left. The vertical force imposes itself as the viewer’s first introduction to the work. The ‘weight’ on the left is counterbalanced by the volume of empty space on the right and the vectorial ‘gap’. The diagonal nature of the composition would have normally tended to catapult vision towards the left and out of the image, if it were not for the strong vertical force operating within the ‘gap’. In ‘F3 2007’ there is a tension between the horizontal, oblique composition and the strong vertical centricity.

Is materiality the key to unlock/release time onto a two dimensional surface

In attempting to answer this question, the process of analysing what has come before this point needs to be looked in much greater depth. As stated before, my practice has previously concerned itself with the perception that ‘space’ informs and encloses the present moment; and it is only through what Bergson calls a “state of complete mental absorption”\textsuperscript{139} that it would be possible for time to open onto a pictorial space. The aim with this body of work is to extend the ‘in-field’ both physically and psychologically, in which to create space that contributes to a framework; the framework of space, holding within it moments of the past, the present and future/present and not to restrict this space to a ‘place’ here and time to the ‘moment’ now. Personal space and mediative space become the subject matter, the framework to structure experience. To take from Immanuel Kant in his \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, that in order to structure our experiences, both space and time have become elements within a perceptual framework. “Time and space are forms that the mind projects upon the external things-in-themselves. ... ...that time is a form of apprehending phenomena is probably best taken as suggesting that we have no direct perception of time but only the ability to experience things and events in time.”\textsuperscript{140} A sense of time, a sensation of time; these are events or action in time and we experience these as a conscious thought. To use Kant’s statement: time is an \textit{a priori} notion that allows us to comprehend sense experience. Time becomes the element in which a systematic framework or unit operates. This framework is necessary for the structuring of experiences. To continue with Henri Bergson in \textit{Time and Free Will}; time is presented to consciousness as duration, which in later reviews of his work translates to ‘intuition’.

\textsuperscript{140} Immanuel Kant
For me it translated to the visual element of an ‘interval’/space; space became the framework for the continuance in time to exist, for the creation of a mediative space in which there could exist, a “state of complete mental absorption.”

A space is not merely a set of dimensions, a system of co-ordinates. It is a place we inhabit, in and through which we conduct both our conscious and unconscious lives. The imagination and specifically the poetic imagination lie between the conscious and the unconscious mind.

It has always been my belief that ‘space’ the great void, positioned within an artwork has the ability to instil mystery and drama. If we again look at Goya at one of his images from the Quinta del Sordo, ‘Head of a Dog’, the dog implores us with its eyes from the bottom of what seems to be a well of quicksand, is a poignant image. We do not know what it means, but its pathos moves us enough to be aware of the struggle of life. The great void, the ‘space’ takes up most of the picture surface and bears down upon us, within our consciousness and bears down also with its perceptual weight, down on the dog from which there seems no way of escape. Mentioned previously the bottom left of the canvas is considered the point of departure; now its structural meaning becomes more and more apparent as the dog slips further and further down. Goya gives us no solid footing. Even vision can only transverse a

short distance up before it too is swept down the slippery incline.

There have been other images in which the use of ‘space’ is regarded as a mediative void, images such as the work of Mark Rothko, ‘White and Black on Wine #9’ and Caspar David Friedrich ‘Monk by the Sea’ mentioned previously, that I came across within the context of this research which allowed the void to become a conduit into a spiritual dimension. Spiritual traditions have always embraced silence for its potential in the aid of quiet contemplation. It allows us to look at things from a different perspective. In silence we assume a receptive attitude. If one looks at the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, it presents us with a way of connecting with the subconscious, a way of allowing time to slip by, a way of allowing the experience of looking; the experience of subconsciously acknowledging a work. This thinking became my opening onto time as another dimension within the work. Zen is a branch of Mahayana Buddhism which strongly emphasizes the practice of moment-by-moment awareness and of seeing deeply into the nature of things by direct experience. The Art of Zen in all phases has a double function, in that, “it is a form of active meditation for the creators of the works and a method of visual instruction for those who receive them”. Zen paintings play with the relationship between form and emptiness, between a representation and the empty space that surrounds it. The ‘empty’ space becomes the aesthetic key to the painting.

As the silence between notes in music is vital, so the space provided in art should be just as expressive.

143 Mark Rothko, White and Black on Wine #9 – image on p. 129
144 Caspar David Friedrich, Monk by the Sea, 1809, oil on canvas 110x172cm image on p. 49
The values of a painter, as a painter, reside in the visible virtues and vices of form. So do those of art interpreters, as long as they limit themselves to what their eyes receive.  

The work has attempted to use the same Zen qualities; the same aesthetics qualities of the traditional Japanese gardens. These gardens create a mood appropriate to contemplation, a state of complete and mental absorption. The Zen Garden of Ryoanji in Kyoto crafted using grey gravel and stone is believed to be one of the finest examples. The most prominent qualities of this ‘dry-landscape’ garden is the extreme sparseness; the void or negative space. This space is expressed by the grey gravel which is raked daily and covers the majority of the ground, having been placed asymmetrically within a rectangular format. There is simplicity of design which results in the attainment of stillness.

147 M. Donnelly, M4A 2007, oil on canvas, 50.5x137.5cm, signed and titled verso
and tranquillity. Rhythm and harmony are achieved in the composition of the garden design, by the arrangement and placement of the rocks. In the arrangement of the rocks at alternate heights, the experience of a sense of movement has been achieved as our vision scans from left to right. Harmony is also achieved as each element in the design; each factor – position, height and colour, contributes to this overwhelming sense of calm and balance. Nitschke quoted earlier describes how the garden is able to celebrate the void in enabling viewers to turn inward towards one’s interior; it is the sense of universality that is imparted through the garden’s non-specificity of meaning. The ‘dry-landscape’ garden suggests more than it defines; the viewer becomes an active partner in the act of creating meaning from the forms. As in the action of calligraphy, using the brush to create line, the garden serves as an aid to meditation, quieting the mind and concentrating the spirit on behalf of the viewer. The mediative power of all Zen art lies in its elimination of the nonessential. Like the garden of gravel and stone, a far greater impact is achieved with the least amount of means.

Underneath an artist’s intent to make an image that corresponds to the artist’s initial feelings or vision – there must lie faith, “A real inspiration comes to mind like an image upon a mirror,” thought

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a 17th century Chinese monk. “It is never deliberately thought out.” From the moment a painter selects a canvas, she embarks on a succession of decisions that will eventuate in an image. But from the beginning there is no knowledge on how this image will evolve, only a belief and a passion that all will be overcome. Picasso used to say that ‘the painter has only one language’; a visual language, a rich vocabulary of form; that of which is imprinted into the skeletal fabric of the work. With differing levels of ambiguity, paintings transport an enigmatic transmission of meanings to their viewers, “the dynamic action works both ways: the vectors operate centrifugally away from their centre and centripetally toward their centre”. Centric forces directed towards other centric forces. At best, painters have always struggled with their awareness of an underlying probity in the act of creating; but have rarely put their intuitions into words. They can only hope that somewhere their work will be received and understood within the spirit in which it was created.

The subject of my studio and what it represents - a world of silence and solitude has become my meditative space and to use the Zen term, my satori In the early stages of the Masters, I began to use the camera to record components of the studio; elements that make it a working studio and to then eliminate the non-essential elements of the photographed scene. This became necessary in order to reach the point where the focus under observation could become simplified. This echoes the dry-landscape gardens and the Japanese Zen art of Ikebana, where a ‘cut’ is made to sever the objects from their everydayness, allowing for an awareness to materialize. The work is to be seen as accidental findings, objects and compositions that exist in my workplace. But for the objects to exist within their space, to be seen to exist, there has to be a certain

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152 Satori – The Japanese term for the experience of enlightenment, i.e. self-realization, opening the Mind’s eye
amount of simplification. The belief is that through simplification, by stripping away the non-essentials within the ‘composition’, this will allow ‘time’ to also exist within the structured space framework. Another concept of Zen principles, apart from simplification, that has transferred across into the work, is the love of asymmetry, a preference for the imperfect over the perfect form and shape, a preference for odd rather that even numbers; and the abandonment of ‘true to life’ perspective.

Another idea that has been utilized, is to express the whole; to tilt the composition so that all the components are visible at the one time. This also relates to Cezanne and his ‘multiple perspective’ where he moved away from the ‘snapshot’ approach of the Impressionists, wanting more than a moment in time, but to convey the solidity of the subject. His way of painting was not about seizing the instant moment but about the construction of the work. The paintings are records of an intense optical experience through an extended length of time. In looking at the work of Cezanne, you are aware of successive experiences of time and space; and the multiple points of view, which are “durational in the painter’s own experience”153. Cezanne’s multiple perspectives are not representational of the same experience at that particular moment, but of a process of construction. Cezanne succeeds in the pictorial realization of time as duration rather than as an instantaneous succession.154 My work is not about the construction of time from multiple viewpoints, but a representation of multiple layers of the same viewpoint.

153 They become records of changing relationships of object to object recorded by the continuous but changing consciousness of the observer.
Cezanne alters the pictorial concept of space, flattening it, and dispensing with Renaissance concepts of perspective. The intention through the work is to also achieve this; for as in the Sung landscapes paintings, the viewer scans the entire landscape; everything is revealed, every aspect is on view. In the image ‘Waiting 2007’, the table is tilted and the objects recede, but keep the same scale in relation to each other and do not follow the rules of perspective. Zen art in most of its art forms, abandons true to life perspective, and works with artificial space relations which “make one think beyond reality into the essence of reality”. Zen teachers stress a state of mind called mushin, which could be likened to a state of total absorption in a task. To quote Mark Rothko, who once said “A painting is not about experience .. . it is experience.” The work to date has been about the journey, and learning from

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155 M. Donnelly, “Waiting 2007”, oil on canvas, signed and titled verso. 51x92cm
156 Sumi-e landscape paintings from the Sung dynasty
experiences along the way. It is an ongoing process continuing to acquire knowledge on how to balance form with emptiness, how to let the works whisper about aimless moments of life.

As mentioned previously, there has been an ongoing dialogue to resolve certain parts of the composition and also to answer the question of a weight/balance distribution, which presents itself time and time again. The resolution also, to remove the focus, when it becomes the sole domain of the objects and distribute it [the focus] onto and together with the surrounding space and the objects that inhabit it. My work relates to the re-presentation of time and space within my studio, the experience of time and space within my studio, an event, an awareness of the immediacy of a moment’s experience.
Leonardo da Vinci searched clouds or stains on the walls for imagery and recommended this as a method to assist in the creative process. This project began with the words of T.S. Eliot, the opening lines of verse five of *Burnt Norton*.

Words move, music moves  
Only in time; but that which is only living  
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach  
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
Moves perpetually in its stillness

The stillness, as a Chinese jar still moves perpetually in its stillness. The visual imagery remains with me, and I return to it time and time again.

But how does one achieve this stillness; this silence, this awareness of the moment. Looking back over my early notes I ‘googled’ words such as ‘time’, ‘silence’, ‘space’, ‘mediation’ and this only confirmed what I have believed; that through silent mediation there comes about an awareness. That through our temporal sense there exists, a state of having a relationship with time. My notes through the early days continue to search for a vehicle or device, one that would allow for the participation of the viewer. For the participation of the viewer to
connect in the initial moment of recognition, the glance over, the discovery; my aim has been to allow for a disconnection from linear time to an ‘indefinite continuous duration’, to ‘halt’ an image in time. Initially, the research had concentrated on the concept of ‘an awareness of the moment’, and a ‘moment by moment’ state of consciousness through the philosophy of Zen Buddhism. Zen’s emphasis on meditation, on simplicity and the importance of the natural world allows for a connection between “centric and eccentric forces”\(^{159}\). The philosophy of Zen values and acknowledges this moment-by-moment awareness and through this interaction of consciously extending and of ‘seeing deeply into the nature of things’ brings about the essence of direct experience. By this time the emphasis of the project began to shift onto and into, the time in the studio, the journey towards enlightenment, and the metamorphous of who or what I am.

Therefore, this section of the Exegesis will situate itself within the studio and inhabit the role of practitioner. The practical research will focus on the act of painting, the genesis of the composition structure and the conversations or reflections-in-action as the works progresses. This chapter develops an ongoing dialogue with the practitioner, who becomes I, in order to gain insight into the creative experience. There has always been an underlying question in my mind as to what it is that artists seek in the desire to make art; the desire to speak in another language and communicate; to connect with an internal language with another human being, always in the hope that a universal understanding into this our visual language exists. This part of the Exegesis ‘Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface

\(^{159}\) A concentration of foci energies; the term eccentricity to differentiate between forces related to an internal centre and others acting in response to an external centre.
surface?’ reflects on the activities in my studio - the daily note-takings, thoughts and conversations in the constant search for knowledge and self fulfilment. The studio has become a space where this unrelenting ritual of give-and-take with works-in-progress is continually ongoing.

My artistic knowledge has been fashioned by many artists who have reached out through their body of work and touched, seduced my own artist’s inner state, my own centricity. It begins with line and Degas, then moving to the pure simplicity of Nicholson, the sublime majesty of Rothko, the humanity of Giacometti and finally the silence, the whispers of Morandi. My voice as did theirs, also reverberates with similar kinds of anxiety and frustrations. The studio space, my studio space, my satori, encapsulates the emotions; the ongoing considerations and thoughts which a painter needs to give the work direction.

There is pleasure in watching an idea take shape. Pencil in hand, the artist begins with random marks on a white page. There is a constant searching for something within the surface of the work to develop, an adjustment here, an increase in depth and volume of line; searching, searching for the eventual representation of an image. Degas once wrote that drawing is not form; it is a way of seeing form. David Wilson (1946 – 1998)

David Brian Wilson (1946 – 1998) lived in and worked in the Central West of New South Wales. He became an influential teacher both in his private art school and later at Charles Sturt University.
perpetual flux, moving a step closer or taking a step back, continually adjusting and re-adjusting. Questions; questions, silent voiceless questions. The image begins to take shape; small outlines of ‘narrative’ and groupings begin to form, guided by intuition and the sense of tension within the studio itself; tension within the painting as the compositional structure begins to collapse or to become agitated. There is no other “interlocutor” in painting.\textsuperscript{161} At the end of the working day, alone with thoughts and frustrations, “the need for an interlocutor arises”.\textsuperscript{162} It is then and only then that the conversations begin.

Previously, I had regarded these ‘conversations’ as intuition or aesthetic judgement and did not give voice to them. It is only through the daily note-taking and a reflection-in-action that the concept of a ‘trinity’ of self, allowed itself to be discovered. The trinity comprising of “distinct, separate, yet interrelated figures” that go by - \textit{I, you,} and \textit{she}.\textsuperscript{163} It is only when the artist attempts to remove themselves, and observe as though at a distance, that there is this give-and-take conversation with the work itself. Objective and subjective points of view come into play and it is only through the intersection of the \textit{I, you} and \textit{she} that the work moves on in conversation between “exploratory experiment”\textsuperscript{164} and its final goal. Through the creative process, the artist moves the conversation back and forth between the point of view of the painter; that of the viewer, and also engaging in differing points of view from inside the work of art itself.

\textsuperscript{161} Gao Xing Jian. \textit{Return to Painting}. Perennial, New York. 2001 p. 44
\textsuperscript{162} Gao Xing Jian. \textit{Return to Painting}. Perennial, New York. 2001 p. 44
The philosophy of Zen in the creation of art, asks of the painter to give over to the work to achieve fulfilment; and in order to release the creative process within, to be in a state of “without ‘mind’ and without blocking or choice”, it is then and only then that the work itself evolves. In regards to an artist’s imagination and creativity, a 17th century Chinese monk wrote that “real inspiration comes to mind like an image upon a mirror, it is never deliberately thought out”. The undertaking for the artist to work in a purely intuitive manner is not possible in this investigative research, as it is a requisite to question the motives of the artist, and to also question the requirement of the work itself. To continually question the work – does that not then diminish the spirit? It is my intention to engage in these ‘conversations’, to probe and investigate, but to also bear in mind the essence of the work and hopefully to leave that intact. Painters at times have been reluctant to come to terms with their awareness, their reliance of an underlying structure in the act of creating; choosing simply to act on purely artistic instinct and rarely venturing to put down their intuitions into words.

In a painting after the initial ‘inspiration’, the painter embarks on a succession of decisions and conversations that will eventuate in a work of art. The artist creates under the influence of self-analysis, at times of self-doubt; driven by their own internal intuition and perception. At times challenging their own talent and become determined to enlarge their capacity to make art and expand their visual vocabulary.

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Consciousness arises out of a subconscious it does not reject. Instead, it regulates it and sublimes its drives into creative activity. One is hard put to tell it apart from intuition.\textsuperscript{167}

If artistic intuition and inherent visual knowledge were the driving force, the painter could then as in Zen Art “immerse themselves in the music. Allow the music to enter the painting”\textsuperscript{168}. The painter could then revel in artistic flux, rejecting an internal compositional structure and be purely driven by their emotions. The artist’s aesthetic judgement would still control the elements of rhythm and harmony, but it would be the illustration of a visual experience of the interaction between the artist, the materials and the canvas. In my work, as there is a concise and fundamental involvement of artist’s intent, that is, in regards to the question of examining if empty visible space within an artwork has the capacity of ‘igniting’ a sense of time; the construction of my visual language must adhere to concepts of “elements, configuration, meaning and value”.\textsuperscript{169}

Some percepts depend on internal processes, some on incoming information, some cannot be achieved without hints or captions, some depend on attention deployed in special ways.\textsuperscript{170}

Previously my work has included a subtle compositional structural, in an effort to ‘frame’ the visual language narrative. The work has again returned to this compositional grounding in the firm belief that composition, in whatever style or medium, derived from the

\textsuperscript{167} Gao Xing Jian \textit{Return to Painting}. Nadia Benabid (trans.), Perennial / Harper Collins Publishers. NY. 2001 p.28
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., p.43
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., pp.117-122
interaction of two visual principles, allows for an interaction between viewer and the work of art. On the question regarding the benefits of compositional elements being the fundamental tools within an artist’s visual language, J.M. Kennedy reviewing Arnheim’s *The Power of the Center* in an essay titled *A Commentary on Rudolf Arnheim’s Approach to Art and Visual Perception*, wrote:

*He [Arnheim] delves into the potentials of line and outline, shading and contrast, turns to organization, coherence and composition, points to principles and paradox, centres and infinities and finds symbols and signification in the smallest and the largest things allowing one to understand how a means for depicting space can be a vehicle for a comment on time and how both may touch on aloneness and community at an artist’s command.*  

Throughout the practical research the essential focus has been on space, visible space, which is the centric force in all of the works and constitutes as the prime visible presence. Notes on several of the works required a ‘space, a compressing space’ bearing down. Daily discussions between (*I, you, she*), on many of the works continued to develop; continued as the compositional structures became stumbling blocks. The composition of many of the works seemed to uphold, that the objects themselves were the main focus of attention, the ‘centric foci’ and therefore dominated the space. The eye accepted this domination and went no further. Tension persists inside of the painting until the composition had been resolved, until it had found the equilibrium between the opposing forces within the work. When there seemed to

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be no ‘visual balance’ operating between the objects and the space, the works fundamentally reverted to a compositional ‘still-life’. At times, when this did occur, it then required the constant shifting of form, resulting in an alteration to the composition and to the scale.

Goya’s ‘Head of a Dog’\textsuperscript{172} presents a concentration of visible space on the surface of the canvas. This visual weight, of the pictorial space, is apparent in the Goya painting and gives the sensation of it bearing down; its weight becomes overwhelming and intense. To again cite Arnheim, “weight is perceived as an active force that presses us downward”\textsuperscript{173}. The space within my work also needs its situation to be made aware of and sensed; for the viewer to recognize an area of compressed time, the alveoli within this space. The realization of this assertion contributed to action being taken in order to bring about new situations within the work. Compositions were reduced in size to allow the eye to visually accept the two i.e. the ‘still-life’ and ‘compressing space’.

Morandi once said that the process of art making involved the painter’s willingness to deal with the mysteries of objects and enter into conversation with them. The intent with my work is to take it in the direction of compressing time; not so much into a narrative with the composition, but with the space, the void that ignites time, the space that surrounds the composition, the “space containing compressed time”\textsuperscript{174}.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[172] Goya, Head of a Dog, (part of the ‘Black Paintings) Quinta del Sordo Image p.87
\end{footnotes}
M Donnelly, ‘Waiting II Nov., 2006’ Oil on canvas, signed and titled verso, 50x80.5cm

What follows in the next few pages of this Exegesis, is a visual dialogue between (I, you, she) and the works themselves; ‘Waiting II – Nov., 2006’, ‘Waiting I – Nov., 2006’, ‘F3 2007’ and ‘M3 2007’. The reader becomes the silent ‘interlocutor’¹⁷⁵, situated within the conversation.

(I, you, she)

The composition for Waiting II Nov., 2006 was finally settled on, but at the moment it still feels and looks very much like a composed ‘still-life’, which in fact it is.

Why is it composed, I thought that you wanted it to be ‘discovered’ so to speak.

Yes that is true, but when you stop and look around, everything in the studio is crammed in together; brushes, paint, canvases. Visually, it is far too busy. To allow for the true nature of the object to display itself and for the work to incorporate the Zen quality of a still, meditative mood, there needs to be a degree of simplification; a ‘cut’ to be made, in order to reveal and to connect with the true essence of the objects, all non-essential elements must be eliminated. I think I have attempted to do this, but it still feels composed and the aim is to get away from that association. I begin to transfer what I see onto the canvas in charcoal. Some redrawing, regarding size and placements, has already began to take place, as the initial line drawing is in progress on the canvas. There is already a suggestion of tension as the drawing begins to settle in.
Why is that?

It just didn’t feel right. The masking tape, which originally was resting in a diagonal direction, was rubbed out and as in the original ‘still-life’ composition was placed horizontally. In the drawing, you can just make out the ghost image outline of the masking-tape; this was creating unrest and tension in the original diagonal position. Now that the change has been made, it sits horizontally to let the eye travel across the composition. Even the brush and pencil, which are in a slightly diagonal position, don’t disrupt the flow of vision, which, if I had left the composition with the masking tape in its original state, the viewers’ vision would have been directed in an upward direction and out of the image. The colours are now blocked in.
It’s still looking very much like a composed ‘still life’

Yes, I know. But what to do?

At this point I am not sure, but it lacks ambiguity and it still appears to be staged. The objects themselves just sit there, dominating the space. The focus is on the objects, very much as an instantaneous photograph would document or frame a ‘still life’; and in this particular ‘still-life’ there appears to be a drama unfolding, as the group’s configuration of objects, narrate an inner dynamism.

And you don’t want that, for it to look like a photograph, for then what’s the point.

True, I remember John Olsen saying that he only used photographs as memory aids, he would never paint from them as they ‘suffocate the poetry’. To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed, but in a painting the object of representation, is not in the way it is represented, but in the way it is re-presented within another form. It is not a copy, a duplication of what is appropriated, but is the original of the object that is re-presented. Howard Hodgkin\(^\text{176}\), when speaking on photographs went further, saying that simply to ‘mirror’ the experience was to ‘make a feeble echo’. The image in order to move us must not merely remind us of life, but must acquire a life of its own, precisely in order to reflect life.

\(^{176}\)Howard Hodgkin (1932) British painter and printmaker. Work often called ‘semi-abstract’ and is often compared to Henri Matisse. Hodgkin’s paintings often seek to convey memories of encounters with friends and frequently carry titles alluding to specific places and events. Quote from Wikipedia – Hodgkin “I paint representational pictures of emotional situations”. Hodgkin often paints over the frames of his pictures, emphasising the idea of the painting as an object.


**Back to the problem then**

The space is the key, the aesthetic key. If I deny the space that the objects inhabit then it will cease to exist. In traditional Chinese and Japanese paintings the ‘void’ functions as a kind of psychological space.

**Why is the ‘space’ so important?**

If we go back to the Zen Garden of Ryoanji, the 15 rocks exist within their own space. They do not dominate it, but adhere and reside comfortably within it. The fact that there is so much space is the reason why the rocks themselves become noticeable. If we again look into the Japanese aesthetic discourse known as ‘kire-tsuzuki’ or ‘cut-continuance’\(^\text{177}\), as it would translate to the notion of generating an awareness, through the emptying out of non-essentials. What previously existed but did not call attention to itself would now come under the spot light of our gaze.

**The odd number is pleasing to the divine**

Those few words changed everything.

**Why is that?**

It opens everything up. The white bucket in the centre of the composition was

Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface

Mary DONNELLY # 15242365 Reflective Journey

painted over, leaving a void so to speak, and yet it now allows the space to breathe, to achieve a weightlessness that it didn’t have before. The composition now takes on an asymmetrical quality and, stillness and silence descend upon it. Inner silence is understood to bring one in contact with the divine or the ultimate reality of this moment. The position that it is being viewed, now also has experienced a change.

Why did you do that?

The placement of the composition before was all wrong, as it was coming from the artist’s perspective within the confines of the studio. The standing position, that I saw the objects themselves. The lip of the mixing bowl and the inside of the tape as well as the top of the bottle and jar, was, as I was looking slightly down on them.

And I didn’t want that

No, what you wanted and needed was to be looked at face on; for as in the Zen dry landscape gardens it is a typical practice to have them viewed from a single perspective, which in this case ‘waiting’ so to speak on the shelf. The work was dictating its stance from the pictorial space.

‘Waiting I Nov., 2006’ also came under the same thinking, that of the visibility and grouping of odd numbers being more pleasing.

But as you can see the divine numbers already existed in the ‘still life’ composition, so why change?

Yes that is true, but for some reason when it was transferred onto the canvas, it still didn’t sit down ‘quietly’ so to speak.
Did you find out why and resolve the problem

It took a while, but yes it finally began to show itself.

In what way did this happen?

If you look at the number of diagonals from the very beginning they posed a problem, alluding to the group of four objects in the centre of the composition. When one of the diagonals on the right of the composition, the pen; was in effect painted over, it created a new situation, a new problem.

Which was?

The problem then existed of isolating the object on the far right and creating a narrative and tension between it and the remaining group on the left. To resolve this problem it again meant that another object in the composition would have to be taken out.

Did this then resolve the problem?

I think so, there is less tension, and it has created an odd grouping of three in the centre of the composition, instead of the even number as was before. Also if you scan the composition, what you see is an odd number of diagonals, an odd group in the centre and the single tall object on the far left.
There still remains some tension though, and if you break down the grouping even more to just add up to the odd number of five, and the single object on the right, it would ‘sit and wait’, far more than it does at the moment.

True, I can see that, but it has gone too far along the way to make changes now and I like the asymmetrical quality it contains which, in effect is stabilizing the composition bringing about the stillness and silence I seek.

As the silence between notes in music is vital, so the space provided in art should be just as expressive.178

In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time\textsuperscript{179}

The concept of ‘F3 2007’ was to present the sensation of open space and suggest infinity; but for a long time the ‘pull’ of the diagonal composition left the viewer with no ‘time’ framework to experience a sense of ‘being here, not there’.

\textit{How did you come to resolve this?}

As in the other works, there was a need to present a balance within the composition to stabilise the power of the diagonal force. In the beginning I attempted to do this, to balance what I call the ‘weight’, the visual weight of the two objects within the composition.

\textit{Did that work?}

No, because the visual force of the diagonals kept pushing you out of the image; initially you are drawn in by the very same diagonals, but the perceived sensation of speed accelerates the further into the image you get. The next action was to erase completely the object in the top right

\textsuperscript{179} Gaston Bachelard, \textit{The Poetics of Space}. Beacon Press, Boston. 1966. p.8
hand corner. This then resulted in the shelf and its occupants, on the left side of the image; their appearance seemingly to ‘float’ in space. The creation of the ‘space – the visible space’ could not overcome the dynamics of the diagonal force, which became even more forceful as it receded diagonally into the distance.

*Only when he no longer knows what he is doing does the painter do good things”* - Edgar Degas

An artist looks for guidance from those who have gone before her. At the time I was also working on ‘M3 2007’, which will be discussed later.

It was at this point that I really felt that I had made a break-through in trying to balance the two elements. For some time, I had been struggling to maintain a balance within the composition; a balance between that of the objects and the visible space that they inhabit. The works now underwent a major compositional change; a change in which a horizontal band of colour was introduced. This then preceded to stretch the
pictorial space and narrow the eye space thus; instigating a narrowing of the space – a ‘slice of space’. In a way it echoed the ‘cut’ from the Ryoanji Zen Garden; the separation, enabling what was once ‘unseen’ to now be acknowledged.

For ‘F3 2007’, it meant the introduction of a strong diagonal design element, which had the effect of diagonally cutting the two spaces. In resorting to this action, another problem was created; that of the ensuing strong diagonal force operating within the work. To counter this diagonal leaning, meant that emphasis on the direction of the brushstrokes was needed to ‘ground’ the composition, and also offer a vertical ‘counter-action’ for the viewer. In this work, the direction of brushstrokes, was becoming more and more essential in establishing the viewers’ presence.

Why was this?

The vertical direction of brushstrokes in the lower half of the composition had a stabilizing presence. The ‘verticality’ of the brushstrokes allowed the eye to read them and acknowledge them in a more comfortable upright stance. The visual grounding of the image in a perceived reality reinforced a vertical human element. Arnheim in *The Power of the Center*, writes “the composition of a work cannot be fully understood
unless the presence of the viewer is acknowledged".\textsuperscript{180} The composition of ‘F3 2007’ dictate the viewer’s perspective from the pictorial space and in so doing, created a structural disagreement between the “two dynamic centres, the world of the viewer and the world depicted”.\textsuperscript{181}

Shadows dance on the surface of the canvas. For a brief moment they become part of the composition … …still, silent, their subtle colours are in tune with what has gone on before. I hesitate, … …should I include them, no is the answer, for then it would deprive others.

For several weeks ‘F3 2007’, rested.

\textit{Did you eventually get back to the problem and have it resolved?}

Yes eventually and again the work underwent transformations. The ‘still life’ arrangement in ‘F3 2007’ is asymmetrical composed to the left side of the canvas; vision comfortably utilised this as the point of departure. To offset this, to arrest time and prolong the viewer’s presence, there was a need for a visual component to be established. A component which in some way would impose ‘itself’ on the viewer and take the attention completely away from the ‘still-life’. This would have the effect of providing a counterweight to the composition. The solution was to extend the surface area of the canvas; ‘F3 2007’ was extended by 21cm making it a total width of 101cm.


This indeed was a major rethink; to ‘add-on’ a pictorial surface area for which the ‘alveoli’, could occupy and utilize. With the addition of this ‘empty space’, the pictorial surface can now be vertically compartmentalized into five segments, five zones of linear time. The diagonal element in the lower-half does not forcefully pull you into the work as before and the new blank add-on of ‘empty space’ on the right hand side with its visual weight, now procures a greater part of the attention focus. The primary visual centre belongs to the gap between the conjoined canvases. The vectorial force imposes itself on the viewer as their first introduction to the work. The ‘weight’ that is on the left is now counterbalanced by the volume of empty space and the vectorial centre on the right. The diagonal nature of the composition previously would have tended to catapult vision towards the left and out of the image, if it were not for the blank add-on of ‘empty space’. This now adds stability and counterbalances the extended horizontality.

182 M Donnelly, ‘F3 2007’, oil on canvas, 60 x 101cm. signed and titled verso
What was the other break through with ‘M3 2007’?

For me this was a very exciting development; and in a way, it was not that far removed from what Barnett Newman experienced on the day that he was working on ‘Onement 1’. Yves-Alain Bois in his lecture at the European Graduate School gave this account:

... ... and so goes the legend, Newman was suddenly stopped in his tracks. He had applied a coat of varnish red paint on a small canvas, and he had fixed a piece of paper tape down the center, which he had smeared with red orange paint so as to test the colour. He was going to work at this much more; texture the background, modulate the colour, and activate the picture’s surface. Instead, he was struck as if by lightning. The work in progress was just perfect as is, it didn’t need any further manipulation on his part. It was saying as such, and with remarkable economy, all he wanted to say.  

To begin with, ‘M3 2007’ which measures 137.5 cm across by 50.5cm, there has been significant ‘conversation’ in its’ evolution. For a considerable length of time the objects on the right had become the dominating factor within the work. Even though as I began to alter the composition and the size of the objects and as they (the objects), progressed further and further into the right-hand corner of the canvas, their domination became more and more intense, tilting the balance and weight of the composition, making the focus inevitably...
their and theirs alone. It was not until I had began to read Rudolf Arnheim, *The Power of the Center*, that the realization of what was happening occurred to me. Arnheim writes that weight increases attraction and that distance increases visual weight.

The potential energy inherent in an object grows as that object moves away from the center of attraction... visual experience informs us that in a painting the higher an object is in pictorial space, the heavier it looks.\(^{184}\)

The expanse of ‘empty space’ could not compete with the visual weight of the objects in the top right-hand corner of the canvas. It was not until the introduction of a horizontal line that a sense of balance returned to the work. In my notes for that day I wrote:

Today I placed a horizontal band of the colour Vandyke Brown to the bottom of the canvas. By the implementation of this action the overall space has been divided horizontally by these two bands of colour. This has resulted in the creation of two separate zones which at the moment are being read as two narrow bands of space. Although each separate area is restricted to the narrow confines of its space, it is operating independently of the other and yet aids the composition by bringing a sense of balance and order. By the introduction of a balance to the visual weight the overall composition sits well and is pleasing to the eye. The

objects in the top right hand corner of the canvas although separated do not feel isolated and threatened as was the case before by the immense weight of ‘empty’ space that seemed to engulf them.

There now exists in ‘M3 2007’, a balance brought about by the introduction of the counter weight of the dark horizontal band. The visual weight of the objects on the upper right together with the visual weight of the luminosity of this narrow space has now, in effect been neutralized by the volume of the dark empty space below. A bright surface will look relatively larger and heavier.\(^\text{185}\) In M3 2007 the size of the dark horizontal ‘line’ is more that half of the canvas size and now allows for the space, the ‘void’ to become visible. As in most of the works, the weight, that is the visual weight and balance have become of foremost importance.

There is now a harmonious balance between the space and the objects that occupy that space. The space is compressed and the work is read from left to right or right to left. Vision travels across the canvas in both directions. An equal weight/an equal balance is now present within the work. The ‘weight’ of the objects and the surrounding space in the upper half of the canvas equals, in my opinion, the dark ‘empty’ space below. One of the questions confronting I, you and she has been, how and why does this separation of light and dark operate in

such a positive manner within the work itself; the idea of balance; of ‘yin’ and ‘yan’, the two opposing yet intertwining forces. There is an equilibrium between the objects and the ‘void’. By the introduction of the ‘weighted’ horizontal bands of colour, the pictorial space has been stretched, narrowing the visual eye space and also encompassing the peripherals. The ‘weightedness’ of the horizontal bands equally distributes the focus to the area above or below. There is a sense of presence within the works; the horizontal bands compress the space for the objects and yet, it [the space] reads as part of the work, part of the overall scene.

\[\text{M. Donnelly. } M3 \text{ 2007, oil on canvas, signed and titled verso. 50.5x137.5cm}\]
**Is the visible space now adding another dimension?**

Yes I believe so. In each of the works where the ‘band-lines’ operate, there was a degree of evaluation on each; ongoing conversations in regards to the visual weight that is entrenched within the composition. This then helped to maintain a balance between the objects themselves and the space in which they habitat. The ‘band-lines’ also offer a separation and an awareness of this separation.

**In which way is this happening?**

The ‘band-lines’ are functioning as separate ‘entities’, separate from each other and yet still provide the balance and stability to the composition. Within the confines of these ‘band-lines’ there is operating “a centre which is charged with visual energy emanating out to the viewer”. Each vectorial centre is in competition with and vies for the attention of a perceived interaction between itself and the viewer. It is through these fields of visual energy which are generated in part by the compositional elements and structure, that release a sense of ‘being here’. As with the works of Barnett Newman, where he invites the viewer to experience a sense of their own presence within the work; the physical confirmation of awareness – the *ein Ereignis*, the event of something has happened; the discernment that something has subconsciously passed between the viewer and the work. My approach is to situate the viewer quickly within the transitory zone, thus

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disarming conscious thought and foregoing any need for interpretation; laying bare the “centric and eccentric forces”\(^\text{188}\) within the work so that the channel for ‘interaction’ can be opened and operating.

I will conclude with my expression of a haiku that I wrote after an experience in my studio. I was ‘in conversation’ with the images, when I realized that ‘time’, a visible manifestation, materialization was moving on the canvas. The ‘void’ that ignites time; the space that surrounds the composition; the space containing compressed time.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Alive with shadows}

\textit{moving in time,}

\textit{The surface catches and releases them.}
\end{quote}

**Conclusion**

Immanuel Kant wrote that space and time become elements within a framework that are used to structure our experience. Throughout this project the intention has been to examine if empty visible space within an artwork could have the capacity of ‘igniting’ a sense of time; if we could project ourselves into the artwork or for the viewer to move through the experience of the artwork. The research of this project, examined the philosophy pertaining to the Art of Zen; its approaches not merely to hearing, but to listening; not just seeing, but looking; of thinking and the importance of experience. Photography was another avenue considered, where images can evoke an instantaneous emotional response and establish a connection between the image and the viewer; of freezing or sealing the moment forever. In the initial stages, within the realm of painting, it had been my untested viewpoint that only the Impressionist Movement could depict a sense of time within the compositional framework. The Impressionists attempted to depict the very moment of an experience as they are presented in works of art, seen from a given position in space at a certain moment in time, its representation of a visual experience, space is restricted to ‘the place here’ and time to the ‘moment now’. In works relating to Impressionism, the observer is outside time and space, observing a ‘given’ time and a ‘given’ place. Such a precise moment in time was partly implied by paintings in which one precise area was focused sharply while details were progressively more blurred the farther they were from the centre of focus. The technique was an attempt to mimic what is seen in our peripheral vision. The use of a central area of focus suggests the fraction of a second that our vision comes to rest on a particular area before resuming its constant and active
search. If we look at Monet’s *Cathedrals*;\(^\text{189}\) each separate painting corresponds to a separate moment in time at a specific location in space. Any sense of continuity in a time sequence must be contributed to by the consciousness of the observer, as it has not been communicated by the painter.

*Henri Bergson restored time to a central position in human experience... ...Consciousness itself cannot be cut off from the past and the future. Every moment of our conscious life carries with it influences from the past, even as the present reworks these influences in preparation for the future. ... ...this kind of consciousness Bergson located in time but such time was understood as duration rather than as a sequence of successive but separate moments.*\(^\text{190}\)

The task here has been to consider how a painting can have the ability to transcend past the frozen moment, to go beyond the artist’s impression of ‘sealed time’. In my work the movement is towards the representation of a ‘slice of space’; presenting a ‘framework’, which holds a past, future and present moment; of “space containing compressed time”.\(^\text{191}\) The use of compositions within the works allow for this to happen; producing ‘centric vectorial’ forces, which convey an atmosphere of ambiguity and a sense of time and place. Through the use of compositional structure, the stability of visual weights and the acknowledgement of ‘breathing spaces’ the work explores the possibilities of the physical confirmation of awareness on behalf of the viewer.

\(^{189}\) Claude Monet, *Rouen Cathedrals, The Portal in the Sun*. Image p. 129
\(^{191}\) Gaston Bachelard. *Poetics of Space*. P.8
“One paints for very few people,” writes Cezanne. Recognition from the regulatory institutions of painting ... is of little importance compared to the judgement made by the painter-researcher and his peers on the success obtained by the work of art in relation to what is really at stake: to make seen what makes one see, and not what is visible.\textsuperscript{192}

The works are not of the scale of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, but then again scale is not altogether necessary to become emotionally experienced, so that one could ‘lose oneself’ within the works. It is acknowledged that regardless of the scale of the work, there is within a painter, directed by their intuitive and compositional response to the canvas and the image, a vehicle in which to allow the viewer to ‘lose oneself’, in that momentary thought to be disarmed. Barnett Newman invites the viewer to experience a sense of their own presence within his work by the strong verticality of his ‘zips’; centric vectors equating to a humanized stance. With no image to distract the viewer in Mark Rothko’s work it becomes solely the responsibility of the viewer to draw on their own resources to see or not see what is there. The horizontality of the ‘void’ within Rothko’s work facilitates a realm for inner contemplation which enables the viewer to turn inwardly towards one’s interior. The creative body of work submitted here relate to the re – presentation of time and space within my studio, the experience of time and space within my studio; an event, an awareness of the immediacy of a moment’s experience. The works attempt to situate the viewer within the transitory zone foregoing any need for interpretation. In reference to works completed in the latter half of 2007 and also referencing works that incorporate the horizontal ‘band-line’, the resulting partitioning and division of space permits a layering of depth of space to occur. A depth of

space similar to that we discern as we look out at a vast landscape or from the shore, the horizon seems to hover at an infinite distance. Although initially the works could be read as an imagined space pertaining to a landscape, it is only by the creation of a deeper and richer colour that although it appears as a horizontal line is in fact only a division of colour on the surface of the canvas. The works impose upon the viewer, the reading of the image from left to right or right to left and it thus becomes the long interval, the single present moment, the gap, the wait. How can we become present ‘in the moment’? As with the imagined sensation of flight; the momentary experience of the kite and its struggle against the prevailing wind in an effort to take flight and soar higher and higher which became in effect my struggle. So it is with my work. The compositional long format is able to extend the momentary and the structured control of the painted surface texture has become a way to treat space ‘the void’ as possessing its own entity, separate from the objects on the shelf. Viewer’s vision is allowed to experience, to explore the space momentarily and as with the movement of time, it too moves on.

In the later stages of the writing of this Exegesis, I again encountered the writings of Henri Bergson. The extract is taken from *L’Evolution creatrice*, a passage in which Bergson discusses the constantly changing state of consciousness in terms of the observation of external objects and works of art. Bergson wrote:

“I say that I change, but the change seems to me to reside in the passage from one state to the next: of each state, taken separately I am apt to think that it remains the same, during all the time that it prevails. Nevertheless, a slight effort to attention would reveal to me that there is no feeling, no idea, no volition which is not undergoing change every moment: if a mental state ceased to vary, its duration would cease to flow. Let us take the most stable of internal states, the visual perception of a
motionless external object. The object may remain the same, I may look at it from the same side, at the same angle, in the same
light; nevertheless that vision I now have of it differs from that which I have just had, even if only because the one is an instant
older than the other. My memory is there which conveys something of the past into the present. My mental state, as it advances
on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates: it goes on increasing – rolling upon itself, as a
snowball on the snow. Still more is this the case with states more deeply internal, such as sensations, feelings, desires, etc., which
do not correspond, like a simple visual perception, to an unvarying external object. But it is expedient to disregard this
uninterrupted change, and to notice it only when it becomes sufficient to impress a new attitude on the body, a new direction on
the attention. Then, and then only, we find that our state has changed. The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the
state itself is nothing but change.”

And so, as “the Chinese jar still moves perpetually in its stillness”, 194 so too, do the compositions of my ‘still life’ wait; wait
within the space that they inhabit, a space containing compressed time.

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Can a moment of time exist on a two dimensional surface

Exegesis for Degree of Masters (Hons) Fine Art
Mary DONELLY # 15242365

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<td>Donnelly.</td>
<td>M3 2007</td>
<td>Oil on canvas, signed and titled verso</td>
<td>50.5 x 137.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnelly.</td>
<td>M4A 2007</td>
<td>Oil on canvas, signed and titled verso</td>
<td>50.5 x 137.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnelly.</td>
<td>Senza Titolo SIII 2005.</td>
<td>Egg tempera on canvas</td>
<td>70.5 x 51.0 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnelly.</td>
<td>View of studio</td>
<td>Black/White Photograph</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnelly.</td>
<td>Waiting '07</td>
<td>Oil on canvas, signed and titled verso</td>
<td>51 x 92 cm</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Donnelly.</td>
<td>Waiting I Nov., '06</td>
<td>Oil on canvas, signed and titled verso</td>
<td>50 x 80.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnelly.</td>
<td>Waiting II Nov., '06</td>
<td>Oil on canvas, signed and titled verso</td>
<td>50 x 80.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnelly.</td>
<td>Waiting II Dec '06</td>
<td>Oil on canvas, signed and titled verso</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friedrich, Caspar David.</td>
<td>Monk by the Sea, 1809.</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
<td>110 x 172 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghirri, Luigi.</td>
<td>The Atelier (Morandi studio)</td>
<td>Photograph</td>
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