

ABSTRACT PAINTING: AN IDIOSYNCRATIC  
FORM OF LANGUAGE

Lorraine Lawler

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*Dedicated to my boys, who have enabled me to be me, and them to be them.*

## *Abstract*

The thought before the mark, in essence the beginnings of the processes of painting, in this case abstract painting. Would be to consider possibilities of painting with the context of asemic writing. Where asemic writing offers no description of anything outside of itself, yet maybe the articulation of something, in other words, intuitive, impulsive painted marks that exist as utterances but without the equivalent formation of words. Schwenger writes, that the markings we see represent thought processes but are without content, "Asemic writing is an example of such surface models: it implicitly asks us to conceptualize what we are seeing – not reading" (Schwenger, 2009, p. 7).

This thesis was written to demonstrate the possibilities of marks and gestures forming an expression as an embodiment of the whole body, not just the mind, to consider utterances and gestural marks as the beginnings of an idiosyncratic language. The research is framed by the recognised practice of abstract (or non-representational / non-figurative) painting. I include comparative examples of recognised abstract artists including Roger Hilton, Robert Rauschenberg and the philosophical theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and cognitive scientist Guy Claxton. All of whom have been invaluable sources of reference during my research and enabling me to gain further understanding in what abstract painting may mean to the individual? More specifically, it is shaped by my personal practice as an artist who happens to create identifiable abstract paintings as opposed to forms of representational (or figurative) painting. Similar to my practice, the wider theoretical research is informed by the personal and unique experiences of being an artist and a mother of two children with autism.

The thesis also considers the wider question of how a visual artist could best use theoretical research to further their knowledge and understanding of their painting practice. At the core of this question is the paradox of ascribing to something that is essentially mute the characteristics of verbal language. How, therefore, could a practising visual artist reconcile what appears to be an inherent contradiction between the verbal and non-verbal? Especially in the case of an artist who understands the origins of their own practice and its specific operations arising tacitly and from the desire to express emotional feeling in non-verbal terms, through the visual and material qualities of paint. Herein lies the central question of how meaning can be found in how we make decisions of what to paint and how to paint.

At its most fundamental, the act of abstract painting, whether figurative or abstract, could be described as the compulsion to make marks on a surface which is then presented for contemplation on a wall. What exactly compels someone to do this? Is it possible to answer this question? Does it matter? Is it necessary to understand, and is it possible that the lack or absence of understanding is a necessary element to the act or performativity of painting? How or why does someone then self-identity as an 'artist'?

Arising out of my own personal and individual experiences, my research considers the question of learning through specific challenging circumstances and how meaning can be ascribed to such experiences. In answering this question, focus has been on an individual process of creative mimesis, informed story-making for storytelling as a mechanism of learning and meaning-making. Storytelling via reflective narrative enables a way of reflexive learning through challenging personal experiences and providing the articulation of meaning. In this context, meaning-making is recognised as a process wherein one imbues a particular event or phenomenon with a sense of personal significance, where the consequent subjective meaningfulness reflects the experience of feeling in instances of perceived personal significance (Dishon et al., 2018). In terms of personal life-narrative, this process of storytelling as meaning-making serves as a way of overcoming challenging experiences and developing the resilience necessary to move beyond them.

From this process of personal mimesis, there is also the potential for the transferability of experiential learning in terms of how we might better understand the self and look towards helping others with regard to those who may have similar situations and experiences. This, in turn, could potentially convey or determine and shape a wider collective set of experiences or phenomena, with therapeutic value to those who experience them.

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## CHAPTER ONE

*"It seems to me one looks at paintings hoping to find some secret. A secret not about art, but about life. And if one finds one, it remains a secret, because, finally, it is untranslatable into words. With words one can only, sometimes, make a clumsy map, hand-drawn, to show where the secret was found." (Berger, 2000)*



## Introduction

This research study considers the activity of painting as a creative practice and asks what it means for oneself to paint, the reasons why we may do so, and how we may give description to the act of painting. Perhaps more fundamentally my enquiry asks the question of how, specifically, a form of 'abstract' painting may be considered to communicate possible thoughts or feelings.

In many respects this study draws attention to a problematic relationship between the practice of painting and the use of words to explain it. A focus of this thesis is a quite straightforward question, whether abstract painting is an experience that could be expressed in words, or something which ultimately evades satisfactory description. A related question is the suggestion that abstract painting, in particular, is possible because it can only be informed *visually* through acts of seeing and the production of visual marks.

As practice-led research it is centred upon my own practice as an artist who paints. The corresponding research is framed by this practice that generates what are identifiable abstract paintings as opposed to forms of representational (or figurative) painting. This is a practice that exists and would exist outside of this research. Therefore, the research has developed through the desire to apply forms of objective analysis and theoretical study to a practice which is otherwise a loosely structure continuity of intuitive and impulsive subjective acts. Another important consideration is that I understand the nature of my practice as a form of creative response to personal experience. Therefore, the wider theoretical research is informed by the personal and unique experiences of being an artist and a mother of two children with autism.

The thesis also considers the wider question of how a visual artist could best use theoretical research to further their knowledge and understanding of their painting practice. At the core of this question is the paradox of ascribing to something that is essentially mute, the characteristics of verbal language. How therefore, could a practicing visual artist reconcile what appears to be an inherent contradiction between the verbal and non-verbal? Especially in the case of an artist who understands the origins of their own practice and its specific operations arising tacitly and from the desire to give some articulation articulate, or to 'express' emotional feeling in non-verbal terms, specifically through the visual and material qualities of paint. Herein lies the critical question of how meaning can be found in how we make decisions of what to paint and how to paint.

Especially in the context of practice-based research of this kind, and considering the personal experience which informs it, a question that underlies this thesis is how or why does someone then self-identity as an 'artist'? At its most fundamental, the act of abstract painting, whether figurative or abstract could be described as the compulsion to make marks on a generally flat surface which is then presented vertically for contemplation, usually a wall. What exactly compels someone to do this? Is it possible, or even desirable to answer this question?

At the beginning of *Ways of Seeing* John Berger insists that it is seeing which first establishes our place in the world (Berger, 2009, p. 7). He claims that seeing begins with what first stimulates us, which is more than the optical. What we subsequently see we do so to bring "within our reach". Our seeing is a form of "touch" that helps to situate ourselves in relation to other things. At its most fundamental, the act of painting could be described as the compulsion to make marks which are applied through various process onto a generally flat surface. Marks that could be considered forms of touch. The resulting 'paintings' are then generally presented vertically for visual contemplation, usually a wall. What exactly compels someone to do this? Is it possible, or even desirable to adequately answer this question?

The questions posed by my thesis are addressed through an experience of practice that is informed by situations in which, for whatever reasons, the desire to express oneself does not seem possible through the articulation of words. In order to give some form of context with regard to how this thesis should be read, I have scattered images of *paintings, texts and verses* throughout the thesis, in an attempt to project an outer fringe or a peripheral view of looking outwards towards the edges of the paper itself, where pauses and breaks of silence may help to provide familiarisation with the essence of thinking outside of the box and the contemplation of *new ways of seeing*.

As Guy Claxton, a cognitive scientist who challenges the view of about human intelligence writes, "We naively think of vision as largely unproblematic, objective, an access to the world around us, uncontaminated by considerations of subjective need. We see what's right there and then we evaluate it and respond to it" (Claxton, 2015, p.59). With this in mind I propose that to see is also, as Berger indicates, to feel and this research explores this relationship as it occurs in the everyday life of being a mother and an artist whose various practices gain meaning through simple acts of *doing*. To substitute words with painted marks presupposes that there is something to say. My own position is that this may not be the case and my concept of abstract painting is closer to that of an artist like Robert Ryman who practice resides in acts of looking and doing as opposed to saying.

It has always been my intention to write this thesis in a clear and comprehensible manner and for me to express what I regard as a better definition of what I cannot always articulate. By undertaking that research been helped by the significant texts of authors and writings of visual artists whom I feel can grasp those words I am trying to articulate in a more pertinent manner. As opposed to texts of art history I gain particular insight from reading statements by artists themselves. It is a point of connection by understanding how they themselves navigated themselves through their own lives and how these experiences influenced their work. In this regard my thesis has not been authored by someone formally trained in art history, nor painting. Therefore, writing based on personal experience, what might be considered a method of 'autoethnography' has been critical to definitions of meaning and establishing points of greater clarity.

My own relationship with language is, put simply, that it involves a lot of words and those words can involve a lot of variations with regard to their meanings and for me to articulate this research as a way of making sense, I have written this thesis to be read as a story. I also wish to illustrate the context of what this story entails and how this research could potentially accommodate others, who cannot articulate words to express themselves and who may unknowingly have their own story to tell even though it, at present remains unacknowledged and unrecognized by them. To understand how my own story was formed, is to consider an individual and unique way of establishing abstract painting itself as a story without obvious meaning, to make meaning of, or how the painting is perceived is purely based on the individual who 'sees' the painting.

With the above in mind, I have framed this thesis with the intention of using pauses in-between segments of writing, as this is how the research itself was temporally informed. It is a method informed by Levi-Straus' concept of the 'bricolage' I have included images of my paintings (with no image details) and pieces of reflective writing chronologically via a series of verses and diary entries. These have been presented as the '*in-between*' intermissions as my way of entwining both the visual image and the text. These intermissions can also be found in *Chapter Four, Practice Methodology* where they can be viewed both independently and, in any order, as well as read in abstraction from the rest of the thesis. They are also incorporated within the individual *Chapters*, as well as being individually *titled* on the Illustrations pages.

The broad research questions concerning the how's and why's of painting have themselves always been about trying to understand why I do what I do. The challenge itself was in how I could a construct a suitable methodology that enabled me to deconstruct my questions and answer them accordingly. This was by far the most difficult part of the research for me, yet the most rewarding

with regard to being able to understand myself and answer questions that I have contemplated for a long time.

The aims of the PhD are:

- To provide, via a novel methodological approach, an insight into the presented pieces of abstract art as a form of language which can be used to explore and contextually situate *“why I do what I do”* (Teddy’s story).
- To provide a corpus of art that directly explores the translation of lived experiences into my applied practice as a visual artist as an integral part of my personal identity as a mother to two children with autism and as a professional within the context of creative practice.

When starting this research, the practice element was itself the beginning of a learning process, of *‘self-awareness’*, paying more attention to and being more perceptive to what might be called the little things; I slowed myself down so that I could explore what it was I was doing and why. Writing structured notes, keeping a diary and taking images of the day’s work, were used to support my painting in an effort to reflect and understand what I was actually trying to do. I have worked through my research with an open mind and intuitively let it guide me. I would not necessarily consider myself a writer but a visual artist. As a mother to two children with autism I am very aware how they learn and understand that which is around them in very particular ways. I have used this experience and what I have gained from it as a reference point in questioning why I paint, why I need to paint and do so in particular ways. A large part of this experience, my everyday communication with my two sons, concerns the non-verbal and itself conducted in an intuitive manner.

This research poses the question of how the discovery and expression of emotional self-awareness may be achieved when, for whatever reason, the use of words and/or verbal interaction may not be possible. If we cannot articulate words to express ourselves then what do we do? And what do we use as a form of expression? These are questions I have contemplated since becoming a mother with regard to the how’s and the why’s I do certain things, why my children do certain things and why. Importantly I wanted to know if I could find meaning from my own unique experiences in relation to that of my children?

Running through the thesis are questions concerning the nature of seeing and the meaning of what may be considered abstract paintings with specific regard to what is seen *see* and why? I am questioning whether abstract painting is an experience that we are even able to express in words. Or is '*abstraction*' something which ultimately evades description through words and is made possible only because it can be visualised through the act of seeing the production of visual marks?

To help explain my research this thesis is divided into four chapters: *Chapters One, Two and Three* each providing a staged development of a theoretical framework and comparative analysis of work by relevant abstract painters. Each chapter is situated within aspects of the wider personal life-narrative context that informs my practice and consequently this research. *Chapter Four – Practice Methodology* is a comprehensive illustrated account of this practice.

In *Chapter One* I set out the origins of my research and provide the theoretical framework which has been applied to both my practice and wider experience. This has been a process of establishing the conceptual underpinning of the thesis and in essence the ontological and epistemological beginnings of the research questions and how they consequently informed the Methodological approach within the research.

Opening the chapter with the section *Beginnings*, I offer an account of how my research began in terms of stepping back and becoming more self-aware and more reflective in the ways that I work. The focus is on my first '*beginning*' which entails a personal story about my son Teddy. Teddy's story led me to understanding a particular significance of *silence* in the context of everyday language and communication and how through the notion of *catharsis*, silence may become a way of *feeling* where words themselves cannot articulate a sensation that has been experienced. An important reference point has been the semi-autobiographical writing of Sarah Maitland and, in particular, her book '*Silence*'. Maitland's reconsideration of varied meanings and purposes of silence has provided way of contextualizing and framing my own experiences and the silence that befell myself and my children. Which is explained in the section *Finding Oneself*.

These two more personal accounts are followed by explanation of five theoretical themes that have informed my thinking and methodological approach to research: meaning-making, autoethnography, phenomenology, mimesis and bricolage.

*Chapter Two* considers the relationship between notions of gesture and expression with both the need and possibilities of description. Attention is given to the possibility that a visual mark is a suggestion of thought giving a physicality between self, object and surface. I draw upon Merleau-Ponty's writings on embodiment, where the body becoming a shared site of embodied meaning, through gestures, expressions and actions. This raises the strategic question of whether we can

express ourselves appropriately and whether abstraction painting is something which ultimately evades singular description via the use of words and is therefore only possible if informed *visually* through acts of seeing and the production of those visual marks. This leads to the operational definition of the term *Clarity* using the example artist Romany Eveleigh's paintings and paper works and how an idea of Clarity may be applied to the interpretation of creative practice in this context.

In *Chapter Two* I also introduce the recognised practice of Asemic writing and the principle of mark-mark-making that may represent thought processes but, significantly are "without content", or easily translatable meaning. Proceeding through the chapter, I look towards language and the relevant artists of whom I felt some correspondence with my own practice and how they have enabled and facilitated me in answering my questions. By examining the creative methods of Mira Schendel, Léon Ferrari, Mirtha Dermisache, Cy Twombly and Henri Michaux's, with the aid of commentary which surround their work, I consider whether or not Asemic writing itself could potentially be considered as a form of abstract art.

In *Chapter Three* I consider possibilities of painting that, in the context of Asemic writing, does not offer description of anything outside of itself but which might be the articulation of something. In other words, intuitive, impulsive painted marks that exist as utterances but without the equivalent formation of words. I use comparative examples of recognised abstract artists including Roger Hilton and Robert Ryman who have been helpful touchstones during my research. With the further help of Merleau-Ponty and Claxton, I have been able to gain further understanding what abstract painting may mean to the individual.

*Chapter Three*, also includes observations on my cognitive processes and how they began within my own everyday life, how the average everyday can affect emotions, feelings and experiences. With the knowledge drawn from artists and relevant theory I developed a systematic mechanism of deconstructing the meanings of emotions and feelings as they constitute my personal everyday. *This everyday life* being a continuous state of being, perception and embodiment that are all integral parts of my own story to understanding abstract painting.

The chapter concludes with the section *Mapping*, where I consider the artist a person who undertakes mapping as a way of discovering individual placement within the world we live upon. Personal mapping coexists within our lived experiences where the mapping is shaped via our own personal perceptions as a way of (subconsciously) reflecting on the present and our current

placement within the world and arguably provides, perhaps an anchoring sense of belonging or stability.

*Chapter Four, Practice Methodology* provides an illustrated account of the practice-led approach to my research. Through visual illustrations of my painting and examples reflective writing I employ something of Levi-Straus's concept of bricolage introduced in *Chapter One*, to evidence the tacit activity of making and accompanying thought processes. As a form of autoethnography this is a comprehensive account of my creative practice and is traced back to the personal experiences which have informed my research.

I conclude the thesis with my *Conclusion* in relation to my research and the aims and objectives of answering my inquiries by contextually framing this research as five contributions to knowledge, through the attribution of key concepts to contemporary art practice. The contributions of knowledge which follow have all been discovered during this research period and conclude with: 'A Novel Methodology,' 'Abstract Painting: A Fragmented Memory Cluster,' 'Asemic Writing: A Form of Abstract Art,' 'Mapping,' and finally, 'What Defines an Artist?'



*"I believe there are 'beginnings' in everything we do and that we follow paths, paths of thoughts, experiences and memories which continually shape us within the world that we live within". - Diary entry, 2024*

## *Beginnings*

When I enter my studio, I talk to my paintings, I say 'hello' to them and I apologise if I have been away too long, I may even tell them how I am feeling and I will always say goodbye to them and let them know that I will be back soon. I miss them immensely especially when there has been a longer than normal break away from the studio. They may only be surfaces containing marks but to me they are an extension of myself, they may not reply back to me, yet I find comfort in their presence and I admit I am very attached to them.

During the four-year period of this doctoral research a general observation would be that my art practice has been oriented towards a step back and becoming more aware and more reflective in the ways that I work. The result being a more informed process of working with regard to why I do what I do. This has been a natural progression of thoughts and theory development evolving out of a studio-based approach of creating physical art work (painting) with accompanying note taking, a diary writing and taking images of studio work in an effort to reflect on the various processes involved. All this activity and related theoretical research (reading and writing) has taken place within the wider context of understanding how this art practice itself reflects on my life more broadly: what it is I do as an artist and being a mother. How the two become intrinsically linked and entwined.

The result of this process of reflection and becoming aware can be summarized by three key theoretical approaches and corresponding methods; *phenomenology*, *mimesis* and the concept of *bricolage*. All three which are explained in this chapter are framed within broader concern for *meaning-making* through (autobiographical) storytelling for which the qualitative method of *autoethnography* has been applied.

Writing is an essential part of this autoethnographic process, in the form of spontaneous thoughts written as they may occur and written notes of intentional reflection. It is an activity I have always undertaken alongside my painting and therefore is part of my overall creative practice although in a casual and unstructured manner, and not presented as my work. This programme of research has given the opportunity to give structure and analysis to my writing, situating otherwise private thoughts in the context of research process. Detailed recordings have been made from the beginning of the project through its completion. Viewed as a mode of inquiry, writing is a way of coming to know an experience better, or rather provide a more objective attitude. Autoethnographies often

begin as journal entries, poetry, blogs or other forms of personal writing in which authors explore their experiences. (Adams et al, 2015 p.68).

A key influence/guide to the development of my research has been Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* which provided me with a methodology that involves the 'self' as a story teller, as a way of expressing the intangible through the *everyday*. (Stewart, 2007). Significantly Stewart is an academic, a Professor of Anthropology and writes on place, the senses, affect, non-representational theory, but does so from a position of autobiographical *everyday* life, worlding, and ethnographic writing as a form of theory.

It is Stewart's writing that introduced to me the possibilities of autoethnographic writing as a form of theory applicable to my own situation. Reading *Ordinary Affects*, I felt it, the words, I just understood them in relation to my own life, the possible connections and how things just connect as if they were meant to. This pointed me towards finding what can call a 'beginning' for my own narrative within a framework of research. A beginning consisting of the 'everyday' with its nuances of deviations, memories, experiences and thoughts that lead to links or connections where pathways close and new pathways form; one thing leads to another and something else begins.

This first 'beginning' came about around four months after my research had begun. I was aware that I wanted to understand why I had this absolute need to paint, why I needed it to make situation feel better for myself. There was a something that I could feel but could not grasp, a *something* that could begin to answer my questions. Then something resonated and I began to comprehend the *something* which was right in front of me - I will state that I think it can be difficult to see things that are right in front of us, due to the circumstances of everyday life being busy and demanding. The something happened at home and it was within this environment that things started to make sense. This was the beginning of myself stepping back, not to obtain a better look but to be able and 'see' what was always in front of me.

The following is my written from a personal experience, a story about my son which became a beginning, my beginning. As such this identifying of a beginning was also the catalyst for locating my own self as an artist and mother within the narrative structure of this thesis. And more broadly it began the process of understanding why someone in my position may identify as an artist.

## *Teddy's Story*

Teddy is a thirteen-year-old teenager who has autism and Teddy is my son and currently he has a cold. He has been out of sorts and not himself because we kept him off school. So, his routine has been out of sync. He was due to go swimming today, and I know he will have wet hair after he gets out of the pool, so it won't help his cold. I have also recently found out that Teddy does not wear his coat out at break times at school (a new fad; before, he would not take his coat off). The weather has been cold, and it is damp outside, so now he is suffering with a cold.

It has just gone 7:00 p.m. and we are watching a film on the television before bedtime. The film is called *Wall-E*, a firm favourite in our house. I have just noticed that Teddy is upset, and he is... crying? I do not know why he is suddenly upset or why the tears have erupted. Teddy went to the TV controls and rewound the film to the exact scene we had just watched, and he started crying again. I comforted him, blew his nose and wiped away the tears from his face.

After I put the boys to bed, I thought about what had happened and why Teddy was upset. Teddy is unable to verbally communicate his feelings. So, Teddy used a *scene* from a film which allowed him to experience an emotion, or a feeling, and it must have hit the spot. So, he rewound it and re-watched it again. This film footage enabled Teddy to emotionally release himself, so that he could let himself cry because he felt unwell.

Autism is a complex disorder. Every child with autism exerts a huge variety of features or varied traits, which I can wholly vouch for. I have two autistic children, who are the complete opposites of each other, yet they can be similar. It is exceptionally difficult to be a parent to one child with disabilities, but with two, it is even harder. I am not doing my research for sympathy or a miracle cure. I fully accept my children for who they are, no more and no less. They light up my world on a daily basis and allow me to visualise and experience things in ways that I had never contemplated or imagined and, I would like to add, it is an absolute privilege to have them in my life.

Teddy is unable to verbally communicate his feelings and by using a '*scene*' from a film allowed himself to experience an emotion, or a feeling which enabled Teddy to emotionally release himself and experience '*catharsis*'.

Catharsis is recognised as an emotional release and the origins of term in Ancient Greek, translates literally to “*purgation*” or “*purification*”. Emotional catharsis is a process in which our emotions are displayed in all their rawness and is often associated with situations where we feel intensely. All emotional expression, even something like emotional catharsis, must be validated and never suppressed, emotions are a part of us and they make up part of who we are.

For a mother, a natural reflex in such moments is to cry. Claxton states that it is hard to understand why humanity cries Claxton describes crying a literal counterpart to an emotional overflowing; an inability to contain the intensity that we as humans can experience. (Claxton, 2015, p.128). In discussing her creative workshops, Argentine artist Mirtha Dermisache (1940 - 2012), speaks about, teaching students the techniques to access the often-cathartic emotion that arises in the process of uncritical artistic creation stated; “*happens within and proceeds language*” (Dermisache, 2017).

With this new perspective on the nature of catharsis and its implication to creative practice as well as motherhood, perhaps, I myself I began to become more aware that painting was something that I needed to do to feel better and I was perhaps mimicking a form of catharsis similar to Teddy to generate a form of a release. My release is not in the form of tears but the ability to express myself through paint in a particular in a way, similar to Teddy because I am also unsure of how to verbally articulate my own emotions which I feel so deeply inside of myself.

Not knowing initially what Teddy was doing was a little upsetting but to think and reflect after the event itself, enabled this experience to become a key moment within the beginnings of my research. This way of reflection always brings with it an element of sadness to the ‘*what ifs*’ of a child with Autism but at the same time it also allows a sense of clarity and something new regards to understanding Teddy and myself. The critical point being the possible confirmation for me that painting may proceed language.

The Everyday

Feeling endless.

No glimmer.

No light.

Every day, each day.

Every day, the same day.

Slow motion.

## *Finding Oneself*

For those who do not understand what autism can be like to experience, or for myself to think what it may be like for my children at certain times, it can be challenging. Prior to the diagnosis of autism, life felt as if it was slowing up, each day was becoming the same day. As parents we had to accommodate sensory issues in the need to discover how our boys would react in new situations.

Perhaps this period in my life was about me acknowledging the present and my placement in this world, and maybe it was about me learning to find myself within it all, so that I could find my way back. The term '*to slow up*' is a term that I use in relation to planning ahead, meaning how do we do *everyday* things without causing sensory overloads so nothing stops or changes. Perhaps it is the little things, the pace of life, the speed, the noise, if we just stop and look around our perception can alter and we can become more attuned to our surroundings and therefore more appreciative to the simplicity of which encompasses us.

I have found Sarah Maitland's book '*Silence*' helpful with the understanding of my experiences. Silence is Maitland's semi-autobiographical account of moving from a busy life in the south of England and building a house in a remote part of Scotland. She describes a small but important aspect with regarding oneself as living a quiet life and thus considers a different version of the meaning of silence:

I am sitting on the front doorstep of my little house with a cup of coffee, looking down the valley at my extraordinary. View of nothing. It isn't 'nothing', actually – it is cloud formations, and the different ways reed, rough grass, heather, and bracken move in the wind, and the changing colours, not just through the year but through the day as the sun and the clouds alternate and shift. I look at it, and with fewer things to look at I see better. I listen to nothing and its silent tunes and rhythms sound harmonic. (Maitland, 2009, pp.1-2)

Maitland describes things in a different context but the essence of the book itself is about living a simple life, a singular life and how it could change your perception by living in a remote and scarce location which may perhaps enhance our awareness of what surrounds us and how we could potentially become more aware of the sounds and the stillness of nothing, inciting a slower pace of life with the simplest of things sending you into a sensory overload. Maitland explains:

The first effect that I noticed, towards the end of the first week was an extraordinary intensification of physical sensation. The sensation that everything sensory was more so was the first effect that I noticed in myself and the one that I would say with most confidence was a direct result of silence. I suspect that some of this was simply having the time and opportunity to concentrate. But it was more than this. This is quite hard to describe, but by the middle of the second week I was feeling everything with an extraordinary degree of intensity. (Maitland, 2009, p.48)

This experience of the wind was something new for her, a moment when she noticed that she was able to “...*separate the different wind noises and follow a bit of their relationship to each other – like an orchestra*” (Maitland, 2009, p.49). Maitland’s book prompted me to also reconsider that what we perceive as nothing and the possibility it is not in fact nothing at all.

Below is a verse from a personal diary entry I wrote after reading Maitland early in my research, when I started to look back, to find my beginnings. This memory remains fresh and surprisingly vivid, although the memory itself was made before a diagnosis of autism, an early memory with regard to noticing something was different and the verse below is how I have encapsulated that memory. It is the memory of when I took Teddy for a walk on the field near to where we live, he was only a toddler and this was our first time to walk him up the hill and it was cold and windy. When the cold wind hit Teddy, he expressed every emotion he felt through his face and body as the wind blew through him. This memory still makes me feel profoundly emotional and is something that continually remains inside of my mind like an imprint of who he is and how he feels things so deeply within himself.

Such memories stay in my mind, perhaps to remember and at the same time as a form of forgetting? To forget is not to dismiss, I think when I say the word forget it means I am not dwelling on it as a negative, but I use it within my work as a form of presence, as a repetitive nature of memories and thoughts and how I translate them into and within my own work. The verse below with an accompanying piece of typed text on rice paper is an example of this process.

I have always wondered what Teddy could hear in such depth of feeling, could it have been as Maitland described? As a moment of hearing sounds that perhaps can only be heard when particular sounds are blocked out? Was Teddy able to hear some form of highly attuned *wind orchestra*...?

The Wind

Just a toddler.

A walk.

To the fields and the river.

Stop on the top of the hill.

Eyes closed, breathe.

The wind.

Embraced by its force.

It blows through him.

His body responds with sheer excitement.

Did it take him somewhere else?

How it did it make him feel?

He cannot speak.

A memory.

Forever cherished.

place we have ne ver been  
before  
the wind blows throug  
h your hair  
no words can describe  
what you feel  
i see your smile  
smile....  
if you could speak what you  
would say

the wind blowing  
through your  
hair

wind...blowing through  
your hair

wind in your hair...

## *Meaning-Making*

In psychology and education, the concepts of cognition, metacognition, and epistemic cognition are interrelated and interdependent. Perception, learning, memory, and problem-solving are all an integral part of cognitive processing. The term *meaning-making* has been used in constructivist educational psychology to refer to the personal epistemology that people create to help them to make sense of the influences, relationships, and sources of knowledge in their world (Merriam & Heuer, 1996). Knowledge of cognition and management of cognition, which entails organising, observing, and assessing one's own cognitive processes and outputs, are both components of metacognition (Kitchener, 1983). The higher level of cognitive processing, epistemic cognition entails considering, from a personal perspective, the boundaries, certainty, and standards of knowledge (Kitchener, 1983).

Cognition deals with what we know. Metacognition deals with how we know it and how well we understand it. Epistemic cognition deals with the nature of knowing itself—what counts as knowledge, how it is justified, and its limits (Alzate, 2025). Each cognitive process can act as a lens of perspective and interpretation, these layers are not standalone entities but are shaped by their relationships with each other's viewpoints (Somech, 2024). Hierarchy plays a vital role in cognitive processing by structuring information and facilitating interdependence among cognitive functions. Understanding these relationships enhances our grasp of how we think and learn (Zitek & Phillips, 2020). Cognitive processes with emphasis on critical thinking and reflective learning helped me to identify, and frame a methodical approach within my own research as a way to make meaning of the questions I was asking, which has theoretically underpinned a unique contribution to knowledge.

In psychology, meaning-making is a system of processes where we look to understand and make meaning of life, our experiences and the self (Ignelzi, 2000). Experience refers to conscious events in general, more specifically to perceptions, or to the practical knowledge and familiarity that is produced by these processes. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, founded logotherapy in the 1940s, a form of existential analysis centred on the belief that the primary human motivation is the search for meaning. This core principle, articulated in his seminal 1946 book *Man's Search for Meaning*: is that life has meaning. Frankl maintained that significance may be found in any situation, even the most dreadful ones involving sorrow and loss. According to him, people might find purpose through suffering, experiencing worth, and doing an act. (Frankl, 1946). Frankl did not coin

the phrase "*meaning-making*," but his focus on meaning-making had an impact on psychologists who came after him.

A process of meaning-making has been integral to a systematic methodical approach to my research providing a theoretical underpinning to my thesis. This has enabled me to make meaning of my questions and become an effective interlinking journey of both artist and mother, yet it has been not without consequence to myself. It takes a lot to break things down and in turn dismantle yourself to enable an understanding of what you are doing and why? To get a grasp and what that may all mean? Yet the research and the learning processes involved have been invaluable to me with regards to articulating my research into words and a pivotal step forward in understanding my creative practice.

While meaning-making is subjective it is both empowering and healing to be able to create meaning from even our most adverse experiences and use it as a foundation for helping others realize growth in their lives and that is what makes it so valuable. We are capable of experiencing the same event and deriving entirely distinct meanings from it, since our interpretation of the incident and of life will meet the requirements and perspectives of particular audiences, both of our meaning-giving contributions are significant.

Meaning-making could contribute a sense of passion, resilience and a possibility of relevance which could help others to see value and understanding within their own lives. John Dewey, a renowned psychologist and education reformer stated:

That experiences alone were not enough. What is critical is an ability to perceive and then weave meaning from the threads of our experiences... the function of metacognition and self-reflection is to make meaning. The creation of meaning is at the heart of what it means to be human. (Fagan, 2020)

Adopting a mechanism of story-making to aid my own meaning making, I am asking the question if my creative practice of abstract painting could be considered as the '*story*' how was the story itself formed? What are its '*beginnings*' and equally important where does it end?

Storytelling through narrative (meaning-making) enables a way of learning through difficult experiences and finding meaning within those experiences as a way of overcoming them, and being

able to develop the resilience we need to get past them. We could also apply the experiences we have been through to better understand ourselves and look towards helping others.

Storytelling is recognised as a powerful tool used to keep alive cultural traditions and communication alive as they pass through generations and between cultures, enthralling readers and listeners for generations. It is the skill of engaging an audience in an instructive, or inspirational way—typically through spoken word or written text. According to Adams, answering the call to narrative and storytelling places equal importance on intellect, knowledge, aesthetics and artistic craft (Adams et al, 2015 p. 25).

Experiences are understood as a conscious event in the widest sense, experience involves a subject to which various items are presented. We are better able to derive meaning from our experiences when we have given ourselves enough time to examine our character, feelings, desires, and motivations. This is because we are aware of who we are and what we stand for and have a solid base upon which to build future discussions, exchanges of ideas, and clarification (of meaning).

My own storytelling through and individual creative practice is perhaps more unique compared to these traditions but includes the three core elements define the art of storytelling include a narrative structure, emotion and imagination, and importantly a way of connection and meaning (Adams et al, 2015, p. 25). This storytelling as meaning-making has involved myself as a practicing artist and mother living within an what may be considered an *everyday* life. This thesis therefore reflects this process of meaning-making as a way of analysing what I do and why.

"I believe it takes a long time to just  
'know' what you are searching for,  
And those searches can change you as you live  
your life and experiences change you.  
Memories re-shape you, and the ways in  
which we think and see things alters.  
Life is like one big journey of trying to  
make sense of the world around you and we  
*have had to live a life - to understand a  
life lived*". - *Diary entry, 2024*

## *Autoethnography*

Autoethnography is a widely applied qualitative research method to examine self-experience in relation to life events, and also situated experiences in cultural and institutional contexts:

It offers nuanced, complex and specific knowledge about particular life's, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people. Qualitative research focuses on human intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions, rather than generating demographic information and general description of interaction. (Adams et al, 2015 p. 21)

Over the last four years, my art practice has been about taking a step back and becoming more aware and more reflective in the ways that I work. Etherington states: "Reflexivity may represent a means of constructing a bridge between research and practice" (Etherington, 2004, pp. 20-21). This informed a process of working with regard to why I do what I do. A natural progression of thoughts and theory developed and evolved as my research progressed via a studio-based autoethnographic approach of creating art work, note taking, diary writing, and taking images of the day's work. This was done in an effort to reflect and understand what I was actually trying to do in between painting, my life, and being a mother. Writing is part of the autoethnographic process from the beginning of a project through to its completion. Viewed as a mode of inquiry, writing is a way of coming to know an experience better or differently. Autoethnographies often begin as journal entries, narratives, poetry, blogs, or other forms of personal writing in which authors explore their experiences (Adams et al., 2015, p. 68).

According to Adams, Autoethnographers focus in the following core ideas: Recognizing the limits of scientific knowledge (what can be known or explained), particularly regarding identities, lives, and relationships, and creating nuanced, complex and specific accounts of personal/ cultural experience. Connecting personal (insider) experience, insights, and knowledge to larger (relational, cultural, political) conversations, contexts and conventions. Answering the call to narrative and storytelling and placing equal importance on intellect, knowledge, aesthetics and artistic crafts (Adams et al, 2015 p. 25). Mishler states, "Narrative research is an umbrella term that covers a large and diverse range of approaches" (Mishler 1999, p. XV).

Unlike a scientific design, the nuance and complexity of identities, lives, relationships, and experiences do not easily or neatly translate to an experiment, survey or list of interview questions. Autoethnographers, however, do have a common set of priorities, concerns, and ways of doing research (Adams et al, 2015 pp. 25-26). By using personal experience in research and writing by determining a process of sense-making in terms of a visual practice and written diary entries of which indicate contemplation of thought within an *everyday* environment. According to Dewey, reflective thinking is at the heart of metacognition and the function of metacognition and self-reflection is to make meaning (Dewey in Fagan, 2000).

By demonstrating reflexivity to illustrate inside knowledge of a cultural experience which could potentially be transferrable with regard to those whom may have similar situations and experiences, which could convey or determine to be part of a wider collective experience of phenomena. As Etherington states:

If we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us and write our representations of the work, then perhaps we can come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research. (Etherington, 2004, pp. 21-22)

Integrating autoethnographic methods has been fundamentally challenging as it incorporates vulnerability upon self, as both the researcher and the researched, as I have stated earlier, storytelling via '*personal experiences*' means ethical implications would need to be taken into consideration. With the research being of a personal nature it is important to safeguard those involved, not just the researcher where a responsibility of care must be exercised. Writing about *self* always involves writing about others. Autoethnographers – researchers who write about the self/ personal experience- must, therefore, make ethical considerations central to their work (Adams et al, 2015 p. 56). Even using a creative approach does not release the researcher from their ethical obligations to all parties involved; it is important to be explicit from the outset about what will be expected of participants and the aims of the research.

On reflection, this probably isn't the first time I have taken an autoethnographic approach to a project as my own art practice is based on my personal lived experiences, and those experiences which were already reflected in the work that I have already produced prior to this research. Autoethnography is

a way of caring for the self. We often write to work something out for ourselves, and when we do, we must take into account how we care for ourselves (Adams et al, 2015 p. 62). Using autoethnographic methods by way of being '*self-aware*' enabled me to correlate my thoughts in one solid place, which has provided me with a way of articulating '*my everyday*' in the form of contextualising my thoughts. Writing is part of the autoethnographic process from the beginning of a project through its completion. Viewed as a mode of inquiry writing is a way of coming to know an experience better or differently. Autoethnographies often begin as journal entries narratives poetry blogs or other forms of personal writing in which authors explore their experiences (Adams et al, 2015 p. 68).

Some of those thoughts have become metaphors for memories, stories and verses as a form of visual storytelling by opening up the '*connections*' of personal memories, experiences and thoughts, enabling me to demonstrate how the '*everyday*' influences my practice. In turn, this allows me to see a correlation between myself and other artists with regard to how something begins and if I am working within the same parallels as the artists I am researching.

My research has enabled me to use autoethnographic methods to deconstruct my processes of learning within the studio and in my *everyday* life and it is not something that just happened, the connections may take time to see, reveal themselves and understand. Using the concept of story-making for storytelling has allowed me to use my own and my children's experiences as a reflective approach, as a foreground for my personal experience in research and writing (Adams et al, 2015 p. 25-26).

Which has enabled me to make sense of my research questions by way of telling my story as part of a reflection process of knowledge and through understanding via reflective thinking, which is at the heart of metacognition. As Kitchener's Cognitive Processing states; Knowledge of cognition and management of cognition, which entails organising, observing, and assessing one's own cognitive processes and outputs, are both components of metacognition (Kitchener, 1983).

Clarity about what will be required of participants and the intentions for the research must be made clear from the start, even taking a creative approach to research does not absolve the researcher from their ethical responsibilities to all involved. I want to firmly reiterate that I have learnt so much from my children and had it not been for the hardships that they have endured and will continue to endure, I would have less of an appreciation of words and what words mean, how words can be misconstrued and how important it is to also express oneself, without verbally using words themselves.

It has been important for me to also protect myself as well as my children as the research itself has the potential to be quite emotive, as it draws upon my own personal experiences and the creation of artwork that embodies those thoughts and experiences. As the researcher there is also a moral importance with regard to considering the implications of allowing myself and other participants to be so vulnerable for the purposes of a research project. Writing about *self* always involves writing about others. Autoethnographers – researchers who write about the self/ personal experience- must, therefore, make ethical considerations central to their work (Adams et al, 2015 p. 56).

Autoethnographic methods allowed me a to use storytelling that is rooted in the self, rather than in a justification of general creative practice. Etherington writes: “Reflexivity implies a difference in how we view the ‘self’: as a ‘real’ entity to be ‘discovered’ and ‘actualized’ or as a constantly changing sense of ourselves within the context of our changing world” (Etherington, 2004 pp. 20-21).

My research has been understanding why I use my work to express how I feel and how I reflect on that process as a form of communication. By exploring an experience (my children’s) and my own experience, where communication is not linear, but instead a curious journey of exploration, through the realms of language and communication. The research itself has the potential to be quite emotive, as it draws upon my own personal experiences and the creation of artwork that embodies those thoughts and experiences, and as researcher there is also a moral importance with regard to considering the implications of allowing myself and other participants to be so vulnerable for the purposes of a research project.

## Phenomenology

Phenomenology studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first-person point of view, along with relevant conditions of experience. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, the way it is directed through its content or meaning toward a certain object in the world. (Woodruff Smith, 2013)

It is helpful to place the use of autoethnography in the wider context of phenomenology.

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a methodology where the researcher considers the individual's experiences, perceptions and behaviours. The phenomenological researcher is most interested in the '*lived experience*' of that individual – their experiences of their imagination, the outside world, and social interaction. (BMJ, 2015). Husserl believed that phenomenology suspended all suppositions, was related to consciousness, and was based on the meaning of the individual's experience (Creswell, 1994). The experience of perception, thought, memory, imagination, and emotion involve what Husserl called 'intentionality', which is one's directed awareness or consciousness of an object or event. The critical question for Husserl was: *What do we know as persons?* Husserl developed descriptive phenomenology, where every day conscious experiences were described while preconceived opinions were set aside or bracketed (Dahlberg et al, 2008). Heidegger rejected the theory of knowledge known as epistemology, and adopted ontology, the science of being. He developed interpretive phenomenology by extending hermeneutics, the philosophy of interpretation (Creswell, 1994) and broadened hermeneutics by studying the concept of being in the world rather than knowing the world. Hermeneutics moves beyond the description or core concepts of the experience and seeks meanings that are embedded in *everyday* occurrences (Lopez, Willis, 2004). Heidegger believed it was impossible to negate our experiences related to the phenomenon under study, for he believed personal awareness was intrinsic to phenomenological research. He also rejected understanding how we know as humans but accepted knowing as what it means to be (Dahlberg et al, 2008). According to Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom:

Heidegger asserted that human existence is a more fundamental notion than human consciousness and human knowledge. His philosophy makes it clear that the essence of human understanding is hermeneutic, that is, our understanding of the everyday world is derived from our interpretation of it. (Reiners, 2012)

Implicit knowledge is information that is challenging to articulate or convey to others orally or in writing. This type of information is acquired not through formal education but by practice, observation, and experience. Implicit knowledge, as discussed within Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, refers to the implicit understanding and skills that are not taught but acquired through individual experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 22).

This type of knowledge emphasizes the connection between the body and mind, highlighting how our physical experiences shape our understanding of the world. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* discusses perceiving as means of having a body, which in turn means inhabiting a world. Intentional attitudes are not mere bundles of sensorimotor capacities, but modes of existence (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 22).

Researching my own practice and that of the relevant artists that I feel connected to my research and learning about their methods and approaches is one way to cultivate Implicit knowledge in the field of art. Artists could gain fresh perspectives and insights by exploring the methods used by other artists and the similarities in how the work was made and how the decisions came about. The capacity to recognise when a piece of art is complete and doesn't require any additional alterations, as well as the understanding of composition and balance in a piece of art, are abilities and perceptions that are acquired gradually from the experience of being a practicing artist from 'doing'.

My interest in phenomenology stems from how I work intuitively, which I find normal and very natural to me, to feel something, a need to express something. A moment of, or a prevalent time, where the makings of the 'mark' prevail. A feeling, a readiness of anticipation that everything just feels right. A gut feeling, a listening to oneself, yet still not consciously attuned to exactly what. This sense that something is intuitively 'right' led me then to implicit knowledge, and my explorations pointed me in the direction of Merleau-Ponty. I will add that Merleau-Ponty's philosophical writings are both fascinating and insightful, but to truly know the pure relevance as well as its importance within my own practice would require me to study his writings as an area for further research.

It is interesting to add that it felt like Merleau-Ponty's writings were the 'missing' piece of the puzzle of understanding of what perception may mean within my own work and concepts and perhaps that of others. In order to understand Merleau-Ponty's philosophies I first had to go through a process, meaning if I had read his work four years ago at the start of this research, it would not have necessarily made any real sense to me. The act of stepping back and learning from 'doing', Implicit

Knowledge enabled me to understand and see, by looking back and recording a dialogue of thoughts in order to remember articulated a form of process, which was by no means an easy task.

## *Mimesis*

What quickly became apparent from the outset of my research was the realisation that my role as a mother, which is to help my children to learn, to grow, and to understand the world around them, was reversed and my own life, through that of my children, had evolved ways of learning and understanding the world around me differently. As a result, I developed a new way in which to see and understand my world, with a realisation that it had in fact become a form of *mimesis* whereby I was able to adapt and cope through new observations and new understanding.

Mimesis derives from the Greek word '*mimos*' meaning '*mime*' and refers to the attempt to imitate or mirror reality in literature and art. Mimesis could be applied to the imitation or representation of reality in art, literature, and performance, where it could potentially "... encompass the way in which artists and playwrights depict life and human experience, often striving to create a believable reflection of the world around them" (Fiveable, 2024). Aristotle discussed mimesis in his work '*Poetics*,' arguing that art should imitate life to convey deeper truths about human nature and argued that mimesis is a fundamental principle of artistic creation (Fiveable, 2024).

As I began to become more aware that painting was something that I needed to do to feel better and I was perhaps mimicking a form of catharsis similar to Teddy, to feel better by a form of a release. As Dermisache previously stated, where one can access the techniques to release the often-cathartic emotion that arises in the process of uncritical artistic creation (Dermisache, 2017). My release is not to release tears but to express myself through paint in a particular in a way similar to Teddy because I myself, am also unsure in how to verbally articulate my own emotions which I feel so deeply inside of myself.

British artist Roger Hilton (1911 – 1975), suggested that the complexities of human existence of a world we live within cannot be expressed in a literal sense and can only be expressed intuitively within that moment. He writes: "When I paint it is an affair of instinct and intuition.... All art is an attempt to exteriorise one's sensations and feelings, to give them form" (Hilton in Lambirth, 2007, p. 163).

The term '*temporal*' generally refers to something related to time or a particular time period, it can also refer to something that is subject to change over time, like a sequence of events, processes, and cycles; temporal things are always changing and moving through time.

Temporality and catharsis are interconnected concepts, particularly in the context of crisis and emotional release, temporality connects the past, the present, and the future. Temporality is fundamental with regard to how individuals connect with their experiences, we do not live solely in the present moment; our memories of the past influence our understanding of the world.

For Merleau-Ponty:

Time is not abstract or detached, but a constant part of the way we live, think, and interact with our surroundings. Merleau-Ponty argued that temporality is not a series of isolated moments strung together but an ongoing and interrelated process. Past, present, and future are interconnected, with each shaping and influencing the other. For example, our understanding of the past is always tied to our current perspective, and our thoughts about the future are influenced by both past experiences and present circumstances.

(PhilosophiesOfLife.org, 2025)

## *The Bricolage*

My research aims to ask the question of how the discovery and expression of emotional self-awareness may be achieved when, for whatever reason, the use of words and/or verbal interaction may not be possible. I am trying to explore a set of fundamental questions through my own lived experiences, as my study has involved me, as the researcher and the researched, attempting to make meaning of my own lived experiences in terms of how they have impacted my professional identity and development as both artist and a mother to two children with Autism.

By observing myself and my way of working I began to slowly create work which was informing my research with regard to the questions I was asking, of which I will fully admit took me time to establish, as with regard to what exactly what I asking. The process of selecting a Methodology which was best suited to those questions enabled a reflective working process which enabled me to understand the processes which were taking place with regard how my experiences with my children were in an essence a form of therapeutic mimesis.

Due to the nature of my research, where I am the researcher and myself as the researched, I have incorporated a number of methodologies in order to for me to understand and make meaning of the questions I am asking. The Bricolage Methodology includes overlapping methodologies including Phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, refers to the implicit understanding and skills that are not taught but acquired through individual experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p .22). While integrating autoethnography as a qualitative research method where Individuals are able to monitor their own progress (Kitchener, 1983). As well setting out my methodical research with regards to mimesis and its influence by way of understanding how meaning-making enabled the research itself to make meaning. Where a process where one imbues a particular event or phenomenon with a sense of personal significance whereas subjective meaningfulness reflects the experience of feeling as though something matters (Dishon et al, 2018).

The Bricolage can be defined as an attitude (or epistemology), an activity (as a *bricoleur*), and the result (or product) of both. Bricolage is a creative method or approach in art when pieces are made from different materials that are on hand or available, pastiche, collage, remix, and montage are examples of related ideas and is frequently regarded as a feature of postmodern art practice. It has

been described as the remixture, reconstruction, and reuse of disparate elements or artefacts to generate new meanings and insights, and it has been compared to the idea of curating.

The term, Bricolage itself was defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist and sociologist who was interested in how societies create novel solutions by using resources that already exist in the collective social consciousness. Lévi-Strauss argued that the 'savage' mind had the same structures as the 'civilized' mind and that human characteristics are the same everywhere (Lévi-Strauss, 2009). These observations culminated in his famous book *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) which established his position as one of the central figures in the structuralist school of thought. As well as sociology, his ideas reached into many fields in the humanities, including philosophy. Structuralism has been defined as "*the search for the underlying patterns of thought in all forms of human activity*" (Doland, 2009).

Brewer and Hunter explain that the bricoleur uses:

The tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials that are to hand ... if new tools have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. The choice of which tools to use, which research practices to employ, is not set in advance. The choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context ... what is available in the context, and what qualitative researchers can do in that setting. (Gray & Malins, 2004, p. 74)



## CHAPTER TWO



*"If abstract painting could be considered as the 'story telling' how was the story itself formed?" -Diary entry, 2024.*

## *Making a Mark*

This research poses the question of how the personal discovery and expression of emotional self-awareness may be achieved when, for whatever reason, the use of words and/or verbal interaction are not possible. If we cannot articulate words to express ourselves, then what do we do? And what do we use as an alternative form of expression? Flusser wrote:

If you lie in wait for a word at the moment it comes out of the mouth, try to catch it, to chew it before it is spit out (and that would actually be to grasp the gesture of speaking), you notice that you are always a second too late. (Roth, 2014)

Is a visual mark a suggestion of thought? A physicality between self, object and surface, where clarity may form itself as a physical expression. How could we then convey our thoughts to others via a mark? At the heart of my questions is a paradox. How do we ascribe to something that is essentially mute the characteristics of verbal language? How do we grapple with the desire to express emotional feeling in non-verbal terms through the visual and the material qualities of paint?

During an artist talk, figurative painter, Laura Lancaster, described the importance of 'marks' and how she would paint a hand (or make it visible as to be considered as a hand). Lancaster stated that her process consisted of around twenty marks to create a hand (Lancaster, 2023). If I am not looking to describe or identify a group of marks as an object or thing, I look to apply one, or minimal marks to represent the beginnings of why that mark was made. What lead me to that point, if I am not trying to paint something that is descriptive or obvious what am I actually applying to the surface itself and why?

Mark making is simply the act of creating marks on a surface, whether it be paper, canvas, or any other medium. This ancient practice has been a cornerstone of human expression, dating back to the earliest cave paintings, such as those found in Lascaux, France (Daner, 2024).

Yet what defines a mark? Mark making is a powerful means of expressing and communicating emotions, thoughts, and experiences, which could consist of marks structured as a diverse range of lines, patterns, textures, and shapes created through the application of various tools and materials applied to a surface.

A mark itself is made via a gesture which is a form of non-vocal communication in which specific messages are sent by outwardly visible body movements. It is a gestural language that artists use to convey their unique perspective, style, and emotions, which could be characterised by an expressive quality. This style could be loose and spontaneous, which may reflect the artist's emotional state, or it could be controlled and deliberate, showcasing their technical skill. No matter the type of expression, the process often involves direct contact between the artist's tool and the surface resulting in a uniquely tactile quality.

The word 'gestural' is defined as a motion of the limbs or body made to express thought or emphasise speech, or the action making such a motion or motions communicated solely by gesture. Kang & Tversky write, gestures can map many meanings more directly than language, representing many concepts congruently. Designing and using gestures congruent with meaning can augment comprehension and learning (Kang & Tversky, 2016).

Claxton states:

Bodies do not stop at the skin, so neither do minds, our internal streaming of information continues through our fingertips and out into the tools we use, for example; When you pick up a familiar tool, be it a fish slice or a chisel, your brain literally incorporates it into its representation of your body; it becomes as much a part of your body as the hand itself. (Claxton, 2015, pp. 7-9)

Perry adds, "Gestures are body movements that parallel verbal communication to convey meaning, and they're fundamental to how humans transmit ideas. In fact, the brain processes gestures in the same area as speech" (Perry, 2023). In addition to using body language when speaking, gestures enable people to express a wide range of emotions and ideas, from disdain and animosity to acceptance and love. Claxton writes, "We are deeply interconnected, through our bodies, largely unconsciously, with the material and social worlds around us - our bodies literally reverberate with each other at many levels" (Claxton, 2015, p. 9).

Claxton states:

According to one suggestion, our early ancestors first developed a kind of manual sign language, which gradually became augmented with characteristic vocalisations. As the vocal tract evolved to become more sophisticated, and the muscular control of tongue, mouth

cavity, throat and breathing became more refined, so speech began to run ahead of gesture, and eventually became the dominant partner. (Claxton, 2015, p. 177)

Evidence suggests that 'gesture processing' takes place in areas of the brain such as Broca's and Wernicke's areas, which are used by speech and sign language. In fact, language is thought to have evolved from manual gestures. The theory that language evolved from manual gestures, termed Gestural Theory. (More, Sattar, 2016). Gestural Theory, dates back to the work of 18th-century philosopher and priest Abbé de Condillac, and has been revived by contemporary anthropologist Gordon W. Hewes, in 1973, as part of a discussion on the origin of language (Müller, 1996., pp.7–41.).

Psycholinguist David McNeill at the University of Chicago has demonstrated that this is exactly what happens when we are trying to communicate:

His research focuses on the relationship between what we say – for example, when we are describing a cartoon, we have just watched to a third party – and the hand gestures that spontaneously accompany the speech. Through detailed analysis of videotapes, McNeill and his collaborators have discovered that speech and gesture do indeed emerge from the same root, and carry complementary aspects of the meaning we want to convey. (Claxton, 2015, p. 174)

Merleau-Ponty describes embodiment as the body becoming a shared site of meaning. Through gestures, expressions, and actions, we perceive others as intentional beings, and this mutual perception forms the basis of intersubjectivity. Embodiment, according to Merleau-Ponty, is a tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, feeling, or the representation or expression of something tangible or in a visible form (Gros, 2024). The body, in this sense, becomes a site of shared meaning, a medium through which individuals communicate and coexist.

He critiques solipsistic notions of consciousness, arguing that our engagement with others is not mediated by abstract inferential processes but is instead grounded in our embodied, perceptual encounter with the world. Through gestures, expressions, and actions, we perceive others as intentional beings, and this mutual perception forms the basis of intersubjectivity. The body, in this sense, becomes a site of shared meaning, a medium through which individuals communicate and coexist. (Gros, 2024)

Henri Michaux (1899 – 1984) was a highly idiosyncratic Belgian-born poet, writer, and painter who started his early career as a writer. Due to the linguistic crisis, he felt he needed to switch from writing to painting. He mixed both textural and graphic parts of his work.

Eschewing an expressionist vocabulary of abstract forms and gestures, Michaux concentrated on the pulse, rhythm, and movement of the line. The markings referred to the body in motion, as he aimed for a kind shorthand dance notation rather than calligraphic import. (Ebony, 2020)

Michaux used the body's language to symbolise something that is not the body:

Michaux distinguishes marks on the page that can be read as stable signs from marks that reflect in their form 'interior gestures'. These are not a matter of signifiable meaning but of emotion, for emotion impels gesture as its deepest conscious source. (Schwenger, 2009, p. 25)

Michaux's *Movements* [fig. 1] played a direct influence on Barthes's work. According to Schwenger, Barthes had learned from Michaux how to bypass meaning to unlock the power of the illegible: "Barthes called his Asemic drawings *contre-écritures* (counter-writings), and in 1976 published a number of them in the journal *Luna-Park*, alongside works by like-minded artists Dermiscae and Brion Gysin" (Schwenger, 2009, p. 32).



Figure 1 Henri Michaux, *Movements*, ink on paper, 1951/1982

"If clarity could be considered an array of lucidity, a moment of, or a prevalent time, where the makings of the 'mark' prevail.

A feeling, a readiness of anticipation that everything just feels right? A gut feeling, a listening to oneself, yet still not consciously attuned to exactly what? Yet enough to utter and create utterances that compel us to create a mark, or a scribble or scratch". -Diary Entry, 2024

*Romany Eveleigh*

Romany Eveleigh (1934 – 2020) was born in London but lived most of her life in Rome. She describes what a beginning meant for her:

I have difficulty waking – beginning is never easy for me. If what I am after is a force of clarity, a blindness of insight, I am after it in the decisive moment of the beginning. Clarity and beginnings are related for me. (Eveleigh, 2017, p. 41)

Reid writes that Eveleigh likes to return to the concept of beginnings: “...what are the basic elements, and how much can be created out of them? ‘I like limitations,’ says the artist, I like to set up limits-barriers – and see what I can do with them.” Reid states: “Eveleigh’s work can lead to a striking and delicate sort of primitivism: simplification by elimination; reduction to first elements” (Eveleigh, 2017, p. 75).

Clarity, the word itself means: the quality of being clear and understood. Is Eveleigh suggesting that clarity is key to understanding the beginnings of thought as the utterances of beginnings before language itself? Returning to the beginnings means beginning often and over and over again. Between 1981 and 1989, Eveleigh begins again with a series of delicate and post-minimalist collages. She states:

I like using paper, particularly very cheap paper. I like its fragility, the fact that, like all things, but more visible, it is perishable... The cheapness of the paper, too, it makes me feel less inhibited – I feel I can experiment more freely. (Eveleigh, 2017, p.75)

In a conversation between Eveleigh and Susi Bloch, Eveleigh discusses the beginnings in her work, in how her story begins, not directly through language itself but thought.

I have always resisted talking about my work and resisted thinking about it what it is, or I, might intend. I have difficulty working – beginning is never easy for me. If what I am after in working is the force clarity, a blindness of insight. I am after it in the decisive moment of beginnings. Clarity and beginnings are related for me. In waking in what remains of clarity its always only its residue, in the way that words (these words) are but discarded skin of a

snaking thought. I do not work my paintings or drawings - what is consistently reductive and sparse about them is not sought – after end, but a sought – after beginning. Abstraction relieves us of a narrativity - the need to find a storyline – though it does not imply and absence of meaning. Rather, it is our imagination that is called upon, as well as our knowledge and possibility our belief system. (Eveleigh, 2017, p. 81)

Eveleigh expression as a problem of language struggling to give form to perception: Romany Eveleigh’s paintings and works on paper attempt to capture something of that moment of being in the world when understanding registers in advance of intellect before words are engaged to fix boundaries of thought. (Eveleigh, 2017, p. 41)

Claxton (2015) writes that an idea evolves into a linguistic utterance (or a written or signed sentence) where all kinds of syntactic and semantic considerations come into play. He states:

Through spreading activation in the loops of the body-mind, the unfurling idea starts to recruit candidate words and syntactic frames to carry the intended meaning. But it could be that no readily available words or frames are capable of accurately conveying the underlying intention, so, if the utterance is to proceed, some of the nuances and subtleties of the meaning may be lost in transcription, and what eventually comes out is only an approximation - perhaps a crude approximation - to what was intended. (Claxton, 2015, p. 178)

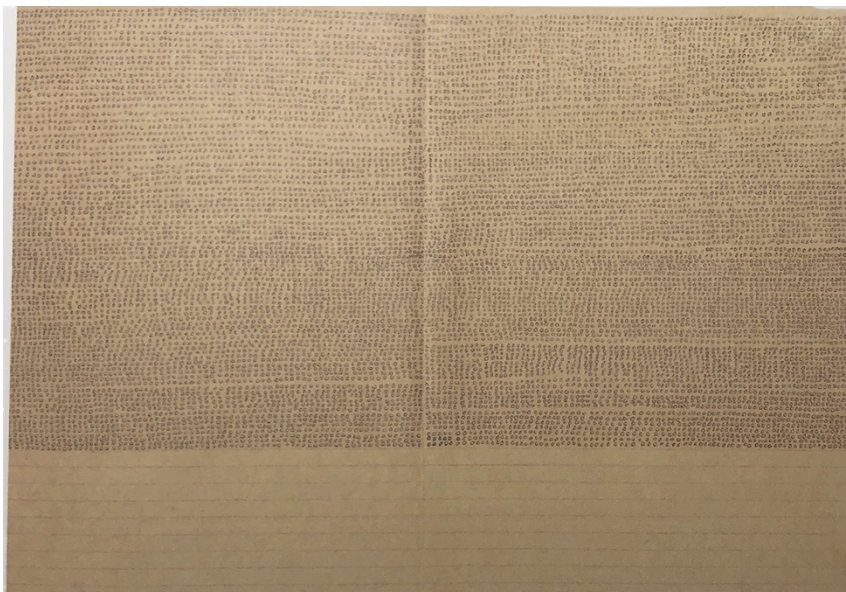


Figure 2 Romany Eveleigh, *Untitled*, 29 x 44

## Leon Ferrari

Leon Ferrari (1920 – 2013) was an Argentine contemporary artist who stated that he wanted his work “To question the distinction between art and language – between pure visuality and codified information, and between graphic gesture and calligraphy” (Ferrari, 1962). Starting in 1962, Ferrari began to use language and letters as a common theme in many artworks. Scholars point to multiple influences as explanations for Ferrari's interest in words. One reason is that his young daughter lost her ability to hear due to meningitis and had to be taught language differently by her parents (Casid, 2014, pp. 160-172). Bell states that it is also worth noting that: “Argentinian political thought within the public sphere was largely controlled by a corrupt media at this time, so Ferrari wanted to present words through art as a different medium for language in protest against the media” (Bell, 2014, pp. 35-58).

Ferrari did not always use language in intelligible ways. For instance, he would sometimes just use lines and letters to create the image of text, as in his piece *Reflections* from 1963-64 (Ferrari, 1964). In Ferrari's work [fig. 3] titled *Carta a un general*, which translates to *Letter to a General*. Bell states:

Another famous example of his unintelligible writing is Ferrari's famous piece, *Carta a un general*. This piece is written in a very loose, calligraphic style that does not allow the viewer to clearly read the message. This piece represented Ferrari's thoughts that effective communication with a political power (such as a dictatorial general) is impossible. (Bell, 2014, pp. 35-58)

When Ferrari did write intelligibly, Bell states, “...it was in an essay, letter, or poetic forms, transcribing his thoughts on politics, current events, or his own artwork. These pieces were still written in a sloppy, calligraphic style; however, one would be able to make out the words much more clearly” (Bell, 2014, pp. 35-58).



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Figure 3 Léon Ferrari, *Letter to a General*, 1963, 24 x 14

## Mira Schendel

Schendel's inscriptions on paper were a way of organising her experience of the world's chaos... the sheet itself is not a space of representation, but rather an element of the world, which she activates as space by introducing and modifying lines and signs. (Roth, 2014)

Mira Schendel (1919 – 1988) was a Brazilian contemporary artist who made numerous drawings on rice paper, but was also active as a painter, a poet, and a sculptor. Her work drew upon the art of language and poetry, and what appears to have driven her was the ability to reinvent it.

Yet Schendel's life was not simple; it was uprooted and misplaced, present at a time of chaos and uncertainty. A friend gifted Schendel a stack of rice paper and Schendel used her kitchen table, with very little material or a studio to work in. Schendel found a process of transferring marks delicately onto rice paper by layering talcum powder and even brick dust over the ink using her nails and other found tools to use as a scribe [fig.4]. Schendel was the first artist that I came across at the beginning of my research and it was the simplicity of the materials and her circumstances which made me see some part of myself within the something and the nothing.

Schendel found both her medium and – in a sense – her message. Rice paper is there and not quite there, something on which you can paint but almost invisible in itself, a surface so diaphanous it is nearly transparent. (Barnett, 2013)

Schendel had the insight to create marks on rice paper which could transpose something by verge of representing nothing – neither language nor form. In their project *The Silence of Things*, both Schendel's and Ferrari's work begins in the same way that we may imagine language itself beginning: through silence, the silence of objects, and the effort to capture silence with a name (Pérez-Oramas, 2009). Schendel's work features mixtures of calligraphy, phrases, letters, and encrypted traces of language, and Ferrari would sometimes just use lines and letters to create the image of text, as in his piece *Reflections* from 1963-64 (Ferrari, 1964). The graphic output in Schendel's paintings explores the relationship between language and art, and the inquiry into that relationship reveals itself in the totality of her work (Butler & Cornelia, 2010).

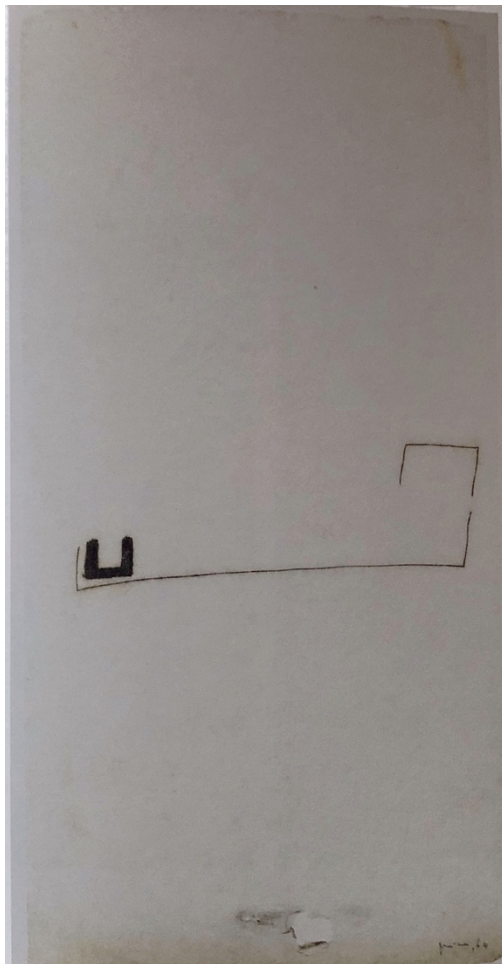


Figure 4 Mira Schendel, *Untitled*, oil on rice paper, 1964/65

Pérez-Oramas describes Schendel's work as lines of drawings that are driven toward writing. The precise inscriptions are linked to letters, and her works explore the universality of language (Pérez-Oramas, 2009).

Sarah Suzuki examines Schendel's use of Japanese paper in the untitled work (*Objetos gráficos*) [fig. 5], which exemplified the artist's longstanding interest in experimental writing and exploration of language and its forms. She states, "The incredible, masterful Untitled, (*Objetos gráficos*), is from what is likely her best-known series of drawings, made in 1966 and 1967" (Suzuki, 2017).

Suzuki claims:

This work began as a very thin sheet of Japanese paper, which was inscribed by hand with forms suggesting alphabets both real and invented—reflecting Schendel's longstanding interest in experimental writing and exploration of language and its forms—and collaged with Letraset type, which signals her interest in concrete poetry, creating a tension between the handmade and the commercially produced. The sheet was then sandwiched between two sheets of Plexiglas, and configured to be hung in space, where it suggests the density of language, our need to navigate through and around it, and the body's interaction and confrontation with it. At the same time, it dissolves one of the most basic traditional notions of a drawing: that it has a front and back. (Suzuki, 2017)

Brazilian philosopher and writer Vilém Flusser had a friendship with Schendel, an artist who shared many of his concerns and incorporated them into her work. Flusser describes Schendel's work on rice paper: "This is the Asemic effect, suspending the observer in a productive tension, and what is produced Flusser would assert, its conceptual: We have before us an attempt to present thought constructions (concepts) to us as images. To make them imaginable" (Schwenger, 2009, p. 8).



Nancy Roth writes: When the entire world has become transparent, that is to say that it is 'not concrete', then, everything is symbolic, and no symbol has any final meaning any more. Everything means everything, which is essentially to say it means nothing at all. When the world no longer has any objects, it becomes meaningless to 'think'. 'Transparency' basically means, then: it is possible to see through any meaning. And 'meaning' basically means, then: it is possible to make any object that seems to be opaque transparent. These are the co-ordinates of the contemporary situation as it appears to a thinking person, but in particular to a visual artist. Flusser then describes how he believes this transparency expresses itself within Mira's work. A sheet that hangs freely in space suspended from the ceiling. It consists of two transparent sheets of acrylic about one and a half meters square, fastened together. Between the two sheets, very thin pieces of rice paper have been mounted in such a way that they overlap one another in places. The papers have been marked with black signs. Other signs have been inscribed on the four sides (the two inside, and two outside) of the acrylic sheets. Since it is all perfectly transparent, the observer is looking at a text through which he can see the room. And because the sheet swings easily with any air movement, the observer sees a text that changes constantly in space. Flusser continues: All of these shapes call one another into question, because many can see through them and so reject them. The overall impression is one of a completely meaningless text, yet one that can be deciphered at any point if one focuses attention on just that point. In this sense the sheet is a map of the world as it currently presents itself to human beings in its transparency and ultimate meaninglessness. All the while, the work makes a clear aesthetic impression: it fascinates, and demands continual decoding, to say nothing of its decorative function in the room. Despite its transparency, the sheet dominates its entire environment (Roth, 2014).

## *Mirtha Dermisache*

Dermisache was an Argentine artist whose work was considered as Asemic writings. She dedicated much of her life to arts education. In 1971, she inaugurated Taller de Acciones Creativas (creative action workshop), an arts workshop for adults that she ran intermittently for the rest of her life. Frustrated with the emphasis on formal role learning in most adult courses, Dermisache's workshops aimed to develop creative capacity and free graphic expression through experiencing and experimenting with a variety of methods and materials. She focused on giving her students the techniques needed to access the often cathartic emotion that arises in the process of uncritical artistic creation – that which she said “happens within and proceeds language” (Dermisache, 2017).

The writings and artistic practice of Dermisache's work were created while living under the military junta in Argentina. Her work is lasting and subversive, even though she barely penned a legible word. One could argue that writing is itself a state of being in conflict – with oneself, with one's subject, with one's government, or with one's community. Everything that follows – in how we traditionally conceive of writing – is an attempt to capture that compulsion, to make approximate marks that convey our thoughts to others. Is this what John Berger may have referred to when he wrote:

The boon of language is that potentially it is complete, it has the potentiality of holding with words the totality of human experience”. (Fenstermaker, 2018). Prose, he came to believe, “expressed something that was far from truth because it was too artificial and too trusting; it did not speak to the immediate wound” (Fenstermaker, 2018)

Dermisache's work insists on the autonomy of the sign as “the essence of writing ... a shape that refers to its own definition” (2018). Dermisache wrote, “the unconscious impulse to write comes before the word, and it does not always take the form of language” (2018). Dermisache describes that when she started to write, it was the result of something unreadable and illegible, which became a key aspect of her work. This created a tension between the communications format which offered stability, and the act of writing which created an unstable dimension. Dermisache writes “My work is characterised by movement. There are no closed forms. There are no secrets in my work. I develop a form up to its highest point of evolution. You will never find any title referring to feelings or psychological dimensions. Titles just identify the format, i.e., they tell how their order of appearance in a given year of production” (Dermisache, 2018).

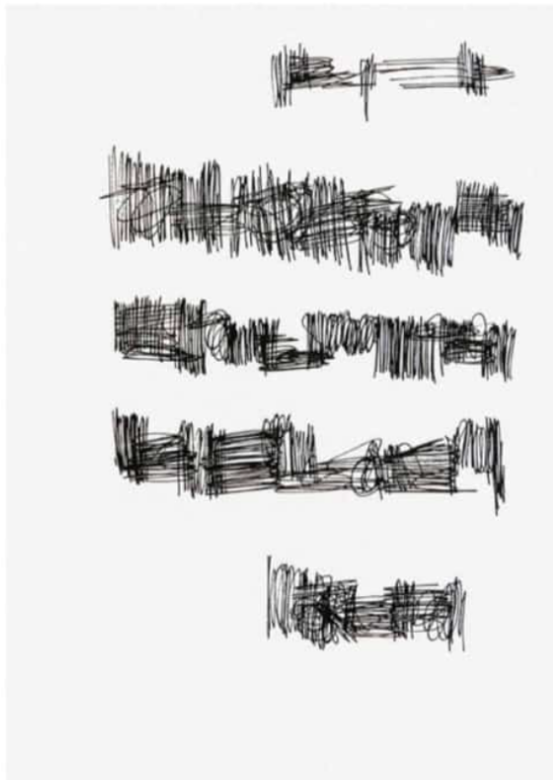


Figure 6 Mirtha Dermisache, *Untitled*, 1970's, ink on paper

## Cy Twombly

Cy Twombly (1928 - 2002) was an American painter known to splice and re-edit poetry by defamiliarising it within his work. Jacobus (2016) describes Twombly's early series of works on paper. *Poems to the Sea* [fig. 7] displays Twombly's use of horizontal line, wave signs, and quasi-writing, along with thick, creamy paint, to eroticize the abstract play of repetition:

In a series that makes reference to Sappho, Twombly also seems to be alluding to the typographical experiment of Mallarmé's shipwreck poem, *Un Coup de Dés*, as a sequence of rhythmic marks and blanks. Non-referential signs tussle with the impulse to 'read' and 'write', as if words and thoughts were about to be born from the waters of the Mediterranean.

(Jacobus, 2016)

For Twombly, the act of inscribing words onto paintings was not only a way to extend visual art's frame of reference, but to perhaps acknowledge truths in his own life. Twombly was also considered one of the forefathers of Asemic writing.

Alongside conceptual arts scepticism about the traditional role of drawing as a cipher for the artists emotional and mental state, a path of reproaching painting drawing within the context of painting was chartered by Cy Twombly. He did so, by engaging with but never quite falling into mimicking, the visceral gestures of the untrained, spontaneous 'drawing' practices, such as graffiti, children's art, etc. This leads French therapist Roland Barthes to identify Twombly as operating in an "allusive field of writing, since he restrains the 'gesture, but not the product' of linguistic marks. Twombly populated his canvases with marks that skirted meaning even as they courted it, creating a full panoply of gestures without overburdening the compositions with specific meanings, while still leaving many tantalising suggestions to stir a viewer's iconographic impulses". (Anderson, 2022, p. 11)

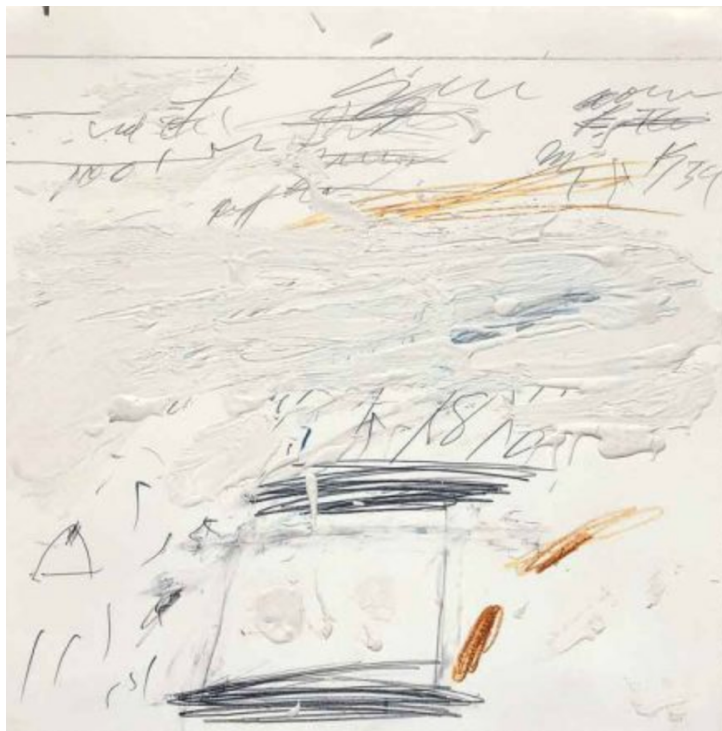


Figure 7 Cy Twombly, *Poems to the Sea, XIX*, 1959, oil-based house paint pencil, wax crayon, paper. 12 3/6" x 12 3/16"

## *Asemic Writing*

Could the marks that I make be considered as a beginning where thought processes are seeking to be understood, but are still without substance? It is not easy to decode Asemic writing, just as you cannot easily decode abstract art. Could asemic writing be considered a form of abstract art? Asemic writing entails 'marks' that are created because speech itself would not suffice; they are utterances, the beginnings of an idiosyncratic form of language, so how is this dissimilar from creating a piece of abstract art?

Asemic writing existed before a name was given to it. The name itself was given by two poets, Tim Gaze and Jim Leftwich, who adopted a term which had already been used within the French language. Cambridge dictionary highlights this connection when it states that, "Asemic writing is left to the reader to interpret, almost like the way in which one would deduce meaning from abstract art" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). The art of asemic writing could be considered as writing nonsense, yet it is more receptive within mark making. Schwenger explains that the linguistic term 'seme' (derived from the Greek term *sema* or sign) is negated or neutralised by the prefix "a-". Thus, meaning itself, or rather the sign's capacity to convey meaning, is eliminated. (Schwenger, pp. 1-2, 2019).

The terminology describes Asemic as using lines and symbols that look like writing, but which do not have any meaning. Tim Gaze explains, "At a young age, children make no distinction between writing and drawing, even before they are able to write their names, children will depict the look of writing they cannot yet read" (Schwenger, 2009, p. 12).

Michaux spoke of his love for movement, to break up the inertia of tangled lines and agitate or mix up the alignments, ridding himself of construction. Perhaps as a way to break free from rigour and allow the markings themselves to generate hand movements with accidents of ink, which allowed those to come into being in accordance with unplanned impulses. (Schwenger, 2009, p. 24).

Not much is known or written about in respect to Asemic writing, yet I believe it is an important part of a process. For myself, my *everyday*, and my studio practice, it plays an important role within my own working processes because it is part of my beginnings in relation to my own thoughts and feelings. It is where clarity informs beginnings which are intuitively transferred onto a surface as utterances of a mark, a scratch, a stain, or a scribble.

The graphic output in Schendel's paintings explores the relationship between language and art, and the inquiry into that relationship reveals itself in the totality of her work. (Butler & Cornelia, 2010). Pérez-Oramas describes Schendel's work as lines of drawings that are driven toward writing. The precise inscriptions are linked to letters, and her works explore the universality of language. Asemic writing could also be considered as wordless, empty, or non-specific, yet it can also be interpreted as an action of explaining the meaning of something (Pérez-Oramas, 2009).

Roth's article states that, "Flusser is not alone among media theorists in associating writing with a particular form of consciousness, or in projecting a culture after writing, a time when writing becomes a rather esoteric skill, if not altogether extinct" (Roth, 2014). He goes on to describe his conflict between writing consciousness (he calls it 'historical' consciousness) and image-based consciousness (Roth, 2014). He states that an idea comes in the form of an image:

In order to write the idea down, he must attack it, shattering it into word-scaled pieces, forcing it to follow the grammatical and orthographic rules of a specific language. His description of Schendel's procedure suggests something like the reverse, only in some ways also a move forward. He reaches a concept by writing it; she goes on to turn a concept to a new kind of image. (Roth, 2014)

Roland Barthes (1915 - 1980) was a French theorist whose work discussed the sociology of signs, symbols, and collective representations, among other topics. He considered himself a 'Sunday Painter.' Barthes was quoted as stating, "Super-writing, a meaningless scribble, opens out on oblivion" (Schwenger, 2009, p. 7). Schwenger states:

It is super-writing because in its essence, no longer upstaged by the claims of writing. Through these works we can see writing for what it was; a kind of scribbling.... the markings we see represent thought processes but are without content... Asemic writing is an example of such surface models: it implicitly asks us to conceptualize what we are seeing – not reading. (Schwenger, 2009, p. 7)



## CHAPTER THREE



*"If abstract painting has become the story, how did the story begin?".*

*-Diary entry, 2024.*

## *Introduction to Painting*

If marks are created to represent thought processes but are without content, how is this different from abstract painting? My previous chapter was written to demonstrate how marks and how gestures inform an expression, an embodiment of the whole body, not just the mind with regards to how clarity forms within the processes of thought, to consider utterances and gestural marks as the beginnings of an idiosyncratic language. That gestural markings were made, because speech would not suffice, they were utterances, the beginnings of language which "...implicitly asks us to conceptualise what we are seeing – not reading" (Schwenger, 2009, p. 7).

Hilton states:

Words and painting don't go together. The more words that are written about painting, the less people will see the painting. Half the difficulty that people find in 'understanding' painting is that they think that they have to put it into words. The only way to understand painting is to look at a lot of it, no amount of reading about it will help. (Lambirth, 2007, p. 163)

Within this chapter, I am questioning whether abstract painting is an experience that we are able to express with words. Or, is 'abstraction' something which ultimately evades description through words and is possible because it can only be informed *visually*, through acts of seeing and the production of visual marks? If we cannot articulate words to express ourselves, then what do we do and what do we use as a form of expression?

Within this enquiry, I am asking why the act of painting, whether figurative or abstract, could be described as the compulsion to make marks on a surface which is then presented for contemplation, hung on a wall. What exactly compels someone to do this? How or why does someone then self-identify as an artist?

This Chapter includes observations on my cognitive processes and how they began within my own everyday life, how the average everyday can affect emotions, feelings and experiences. With the knowledge drawn from artists and relevant theory I developed a systematic mechanism of deconstructing the meanings of emotions and feelings as they constitute my personal *everyday*.

*This everyday life* being a continuous state of being, perception and embodiment that are all integral parts of my own story to understanding abstract painting.

Meaning-making is “a process wherein one imbues a particular event or phenomenon with a sense of personal significance whereas subjective meaningfulness reflects the experience of feeling as though something matters” (Dishon et al., 2018). Storytelling through narrative (meaning-making) enables learning from difficult experiences, finding meaning within them, and overcoming them, thereby developing the resilience we need to get past them. We could also apply the experiences we have been through to better understand ourselves and look towards helping others.

Hilton wrote, “If a painter appears in words people think they are seeing a more intimate part of him than they do in his work. What in fact they are seeing is not him at all” (Lambirth, 2007, p. 163).

So, I begin by asking: why do I need to use paint in a particular way and why do I find it easier to express myself in the act of abstract painting, rather than using words to speak or to explain?

As Dermisache states:

The unconscious impulse to write comes before the word, and it does not always take the form of language. Everything that follows – in how we traditionally conceive of writing – is an attempt to capture that compulsion, to make approximate marks that convey our thoughts to others. (Dermisache, 2018)

Dermisache argues that a mark can represent the beginnings of our own unique representation of something unspoken, where processes begin with the experiences that lead to thoughts and reflection, where we need to articulate our own bodies to express ourselves and apply something to a surface to mark it. As Eveleigh suggests within her own work, it takes time for clarity to form and to make sense of our thoughts and how we start to articulate those feelings onto a surface.

Could the marks that I make be considered as a beginning where thought processes are seeking to be understood but are still without substance? Michaux stated that markings themselves are generated by movements of the hand and accidents of ink, which allowed them to come into being in accordance with unplanned impulses. Michaux also spoke of Asemic writing that entails ‘marks’ which have been created because speech itself would not suffice; they are utterances, the beginnings of an idiosyncratic form of language. So, how is this dissimilar from creating a piece of abstract art?

I begin this chapter with *my everyday* because I think it's important to stress that this research is based on an *everyday* and average working-class life of an artist and a mother. Everything that I have discovered has been through living that life and being that person, but being more aware of the unseen or the uncanny of my *everyday* where things began to make sense.

## *My Everyday*

My life is an ordinary one. My *everyday* begins at home where I am a mother to two children with autism and we do *everyday* things like washing up, cooking, cleaning, and going to the shops. We go to the studio in between life.

Stewart's definition of the *everyday* describes the ordinary as:

A shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or the simple life. Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They're doing things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up something that feels like something. (Stewart, 2007, pp. 1-2)

Being more aware of my *everyday* by slowing down and observing these seemingly ordinary things enabled me to contemplate what was actually influencing me in the studio where I make stuff and why I was making it. I would have days full of thoughts and ideas, and I would also have the in-between days, where not much would happen but where I would spend time in thought or just thinking. I would be thinking about my work rather than being physically productive. Then, something just happens – a flurry of ideas ignites something in my mind. This can happen in different ways. I could be asleep, and something could wake me up, or I could be making dinner, or doing a food shop. I have noticed that my ideas and thoughts are created within something 'normal,' something I do regularly, within just another day – my *everyday*.

I then transfer my ideas onto whatever I can find: quick scribbles, a shopping list, the back of an envelope. This is similar to Asemic writing as I am never quite sure if what I am writing is actually readable. However, it is done in an attempt to try to remember something for my next visit to the studio. By the time the studio day arrives, I try to develop my thoughts and ideas that are still hanging around. Some have altered, and sometimes I use my prompts: an image of what I was writing and drawing on, some notes written on some scrap paper in my bag. Yet despite this initial flurry of

thoughts, I may still not be ready to paint. The thoughts are still merging and not necessarily making sense yet, but I think something is happening?

## *Feeling*

Through my research, I am now aware that my own beginnings are that I paint to feel, to feel something which leads to expressing something. I have confirmed that I paint to feel catharsis, where I myself may have learnt to access the often-cathartic emotion which has arisen through the process of uncritical artistic creation which “happens within and proceeds language” (Dermisache, 2017). I have done so through observing and understanding my children (Teddy’s story). I know that memories, experiences, and thoughts merge into my *everyday*, which cannot easily be articulated into words, nor that they necessarily need to be, yet the need to apply something to a surface as a form of expressive release is a necessity. So, how does this necessity to feel something apply itself onto a surface?

The term *feeling* is closely related to, but not the same as emotion. *Feeling* may, for instance, refer to the conscious subjective experience of emotions. At its most basic, the act of painting, whether figurative or abstract, could be described as the compulsion to make marks on a surface which is then presented for contemplation by being hung on a wall. What exactly compels someone to do this?

American artist Robert Ryman (1930 – 2019) stated that painting “something has to look easy even though it might not be easy. That’s an important part of painting, that it has to have that feeling of...like it just happened” (Art 21, 2014).

Frémon writes,

The concern, the concentration, the thought, the rhythm, the emotion, the feeling, style a painting just as they colour a melody. There are a thousand ways of playing a note on an instrument. And Ryman doesn’t deny these; on the contrary he claims emotion, as a decisive criterion. That his paintings hold no metaphorical or symbolic meaning as an “attempt to be and to remain, as much as possible, paintings and nothing more. Honest paintings, calm and sure of themselves. (Colaizzi & Schubert, 2009, p. 180)

So how does an artist who understands the origins of their own practice and its specific operations, arising intuitively and from the desire to express emotional feeling in non-verbal terms, do so through the visual and material qualities of paint? How does an artist make decisions about what to paint and how? In psychology, the term ‘heuristics’ is described as a mental shortcut which allows you to make

decisions quickly and efficiently based on the way that you feel (your affect) toward a particular stimulus. This can impact our decisions which can be heavily influenced by our current state of our emotions. Essentially, your affect (a psychological term for emotional response) plays a critical role in the choices and decisions that we make on an *everyday* basis (Kahneman, 2011, pp. 20-21). In respect to myself as an artist, my own 'affect' affects my *everyday* and therefore influences why I do what I do.

Ryman states in a conversation with Achille Bonito Oliva that,

I pretty much work from my feelings. I mean I do things because of my intuition, things that I feel are right, rather than trying to prove them before. To make it clearer, I really need, I mean, it's almost essential for me that I surprise myself, you know in what I do. If I am surprised about it, then I know, there is something happening. (Ryman in Colaizzi & Schubert, 2009, p. 180).

To work intuitively seems normal or so very natural to me. It is as basic as feeling, or feeling a need to express something. Hilton wrote: "For an idea to exist there must be a feeling, an intuition or an obsessional image" (Hilton in Lambirth, 2007, p. 163). What defines the word feeling? Claxton states that feelings are somatic events that embody our values and concerns; they signal what we care about, that which gives our lives both meaning and direction (Claxton, 2015, p. 5).

Hilton writes that all art is an attempt to exteriorise one's sensations and feelings, to give them form. He states:

One must express oneself. There are situations, states of mind, moods, etc., which call for some artistic expression; because one knows that only some form of art is capable of going beyond them to give an intuitive contact with a superior sort of truths. The direct imitation of life or nature cannot express the complex human situation which exists for all of us today. (Lambirth, 2007, p. 163)

Truth itself could be considered as a broad phrase that may indicate anything from a transcendent idea to an indication of conformance with fact and of avoiding error, misrepresentation, or lying. Perhaps Hilton's *truths* could be considered as *verisimilitude*, where the quality of appearing to be

true or real, often used within literature and art to create a sense of realism and could describe the quality of a representation that causes one to accept it as true.

## Something

A perception or memory, for example, is not just a mental state, but a perception or memory of something. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 16)

The definition of the word 'perception' is the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses: *the normal limits to human perception*.

How do we get to the point of something? Is there an answer? There may not be an answer, but perhaps there is a process, a process of thoughts and of actions which translate into 'something' and therefore could be considered as a *beginning*.

Stewart describes impulses, sensations, expectations, and daydreams as a form of 'something.' A compulsion, nodes of attention, to form something that feels like something to form a beginning (Stewart, 2007, pp. 1-2).

Beginnings are my reflection of thoughts, where I try to discern something, to make meaning from something inside of me where I am trying to find ways of articulating it. From the outset of this research, I have now become aware that my own beginnings are that I paint to feel, to feel something which leads to expressing a 'something.' I have confirmed that I paint to feel catharsis, where one can access the techniques to release the often cathartic emotion that arises in the process of uncritical artistic creation (Dermisache, 2017). I am aware of this through observing and understanding my children (Teddy's story). I know that memories, experiences and thoughts merge into my *everyday*, which cannot be easily articulated into words, or whether they necessarily need to be. Yet there is the need to apply something to a surface as a form of expression with a release as a prerequisite. So how does this necessity to feel something apply itself onto a surface?

Andrew Lambirth writes that British artist Roger Hilton:

Is trying to make something durable and meaningful out of the nothingness that surrounds him. In the case of a painter today, what he discovers can only be expressed in visual terms,

and at a certain moment I imagine the results always look to him ludicrously inadequate for their pretensions. (Lambirth, 2007, p. 160)

Ryman states that he does not know where something begins exactly with regard to his paintings, or how they will look at the end. He states, "...exactly how the painting came to be and where it stopped was something that he worked his way into. It was intuitive" (Martin et al., 2017, p. 22).

Stewart describes ordinary affects:

As varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They're doing things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up something that feels like something. (Stewart, 2007, pp. 1-2)

Could something be considered as the beginnings of thought, a beginning where clarity itself identifies thought and thought itself transfers onto the surface and creates itself as a form of abstraction as a non-verbal language?

"I am aware that its usually when I am in some kind of thought which is not necessarily creative, it just happens in-between everyday things. I know that I do not want it to be understood as something that speaks and I intentionally make it so it is unreadable, so it becomes something else and, in some respects I am concealing my thoughts and discharging them as a form of a release onto a surface." -Diary entry, 2023.

## *A State of Being*

Put simply, a 'state of being' could describe a current experience, how things are going, or the general tone of the circumstances. To 'be' means simply to exist, therefore your state of being is the quality and the state of that existence. In reference to my own work, time is required for understanding to emerge, and you have to allow it *to be*' before meaning can be ascribed. My work is like something that is in a constant state of *being* at the exact point of coming to existence. As such, I am unable to recreate an exact copy of a painting. Just as Buren describes that if one is 'exposed' to a Ryman painting that the experience itself is "temporal" so too is the moment that the artist creates the painting itself. I will elaborate further in my section titled, *Perception*.

Merleau-Ponty believes art expresses, but not just in the limited sense of articulating something that exists in one's mind prior to being made public. Rather, art expresses in the sense of bringing into being something that is only inchoately, if at all, conceived before it is given form...one can realize something in the sense of discovering some truth that was, in principle, available prior to its realization; however, one can also realize something in the sense of bringing it into being – in a sense, creating it. (Gilmore, 2005, p. 303)

At its most fundamental, the act of painting, whether figurative or abstract, could be described as the compulsion to make marks on a surface which is then presented for contemplation and hung on a wall. What exactly compels someone to do this? How or why does someone then self-identify as an artist? This is to say, why do we keep making the same thing? Why do we keep painting?

Where does this intuition of place and time originate, and how does it influence what I am doing? I cannot seem to produce the same piece of work from a day or two before; it is impossible for me to do that and I know because I have tried. I am intuitively led, and each time I am in my studio, I am different in the way that I feel. Making sense (meaning-making) occurs after an event or after an experience when humans try to engage and become self-aware, and later, we try to articulate and *construct meaning*. Yet meanings (our understanding about the event or experience) may change our perceptions as other events, experiences, and moments are created and then pass, making it impossible to recreate those same feelings which present themselves intuitively within the original painting.

The moment, or the feeling of the experience, is temporal. The moment passed, which means the painting is unique and the next abstract painting is never entirely like the first one. British artist Bob Law (1934 – 2004) wrote with reference to his Field drawings, “In the world of the Field drawings, tomorrow would bring another day with another set of unique conditions that would be equally beautiful and no less fleeting than those that came before” (Law, 2015, pp. 8-9).

“Perceiving means having a body, which in turn means inhabiting a world. Intentional attitudes are not mere bundles of sensorimotor capacities, but modes of existence, ways of what Merleau-Ponty, following Heidegger, calls “being in the world” (*être au monde*) (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 22).

As Hilton has already stated, the complexities of human existence in the world we live within cannot be expressed in a literal sense and can only be expressed intuitively within that moment. (Lambirth, 2007, p. 163).



Figure 8 Roger Hilton, *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 12" x 14"

## Perception

Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the mechanistic model of the body and his insistence on its intentionality drawing on insights from Gestalt psychology, he argues that perception is not a passive reception of sensory inputs but an active structuring of experience. The body's movements and orientations shape the perceptual field, revealing the intentionality of perception as a bodily act...for Merleau-Ponty, the body is not merely reactive but expressive, constantly engaged in the articulation of meaning. (Gros, 2024).

Why do I find it easier to express myself in the act of abstract painting, rather than in the act of using words to speak or to explain? Ryman was not interested in painting a narrative and thought it should be about the painting itself. He states, "I thought the painting should just be about what it's about" ((Art 21, 2014).

Ryman continues:

I mean there can be the story, you know there can be a lot of history behind it, there can be...but when it, you know when it...you don't have to know all of those things uh to...to receive the pleasure from a painting... Uh, it's like listening to some music. You don't have to know the score of a symphony in order to appreciate the symphony. You can just listen to the sounds. (Art 21, 2014)

As Hilton himself wrote about his own paintings conveying meaning, "that the chances of their communicating anything to anyone but the painter who made them must seem abysmally small" (Lambirth, 2007, p. 16).

Yet Ryman seemed to prefer to talk about music rather than describe his paintings. He could articulate his words more descriptively if he referenced his own paintings in some form of musical interpretation. Perhaps this was because it was difficult to articulate what you may not yet be consciously aware of? Within my own work and this research, I have come to understand that time itself is required for understanding to emerge, and I have to allow it *to be* before meaning could be ascribed, or exposed.

Hilton's work does not give easily of its meaning:

In a letter (dated June 1965) the poet C.H. Sissan wrote 'I do not pretend to know about painting. It is merely that I can go on looking at your things all day for months or years on end and find they still have a tension (bad word I dare say) and novelty which fades readily from the work of many people, I find. Also, you have the air of trying to do some deliberate thing (I am not saying it is done with deliberation) slightly different each time, though I am not clear what it is'. It was the kind response – made here by someone who lived with his paintings – that Hilton must have hoped for. His work had appeal which lasted. (Lambirth, 2007, p. 222)

Would Sissan's remark suggest that to see the same Hilton as *new* was perhaps an interpretation with regard to Sissan's perception being changed by new experiences and therefore alternating what he sees and how he feels from the last time he viewed the painting previously? Claxton states that we never do perceive what's really out there:

Our perceptual world is always powerfully imbued with the knowledge, needs and capacities our body-brains bring to the situation. Perception is a fabrication - a hallucination. But it is a hallucination that is constrained by the facts. It is put to the test of experience time and again, and if it works, it stays. And this is yet another kind of anticipation. (Claxton, 2015, p. 74)

Ryman's paintings were not obvious in their meanings. The artist Daniel Buren, states:

That to encounter a painting by Robert Ryman was not to see a fixed image or object, but a matter of being 'exposed' .... In the same way one is exposed to a cold, to the sun or to an X-ray. For him, Ryman's art is something temporal rather than fixed, a memory or imprint as in the paintings themselves. (Martin et al, 2017, p. 261)

What does that statement mean, and why do I think it's such an important statement with regard to understanding what abstract painting may be about, especially in reference to a Robert Ryman painting? Is Buren stating that if one is 'exposed' to a Ryman that the experience itself is 'temporal,' and could this describe the meaning as being momentarily exposed?

The term temporal generally refers to something related to time or a particular time period. It may also refer to something that is subject to change over time, like a sequence of events, processes, and cycles. Temporal things are always changing and moving through time.

The word 'expose' could suggest vulnerability, revelation, or something seen and uncovered. Every experience or *exposure* in itself is a revelation, a new understanding and a new way of *seeing*, so the abstract painting's language may also change. If the artist has not asserted 'words' to the meaning of what they painted, then the meaning is subjective and is open to constant interpretation. As a result, this could impact its meaning and what it might mean to the individual who sees it.

To perceive something is to become aware of something through the senses, so what could we be seeing and what are we being exposed to?

Merleau-Ponty's concept of the 'phenomenal field' contends that perception is always situated within a broader horizon of meaning – a field that encompasses not only what is immediately given but also what is implied, anticipated, or remembered. This field is not static but dynamic, continuously shaped by the interplay of past experiences, current intentions, and the structures of the world. Memory and habit play crucial roles here, not as mental archives or automatic reflexes but as lived dimensions of our being that enable the continuity and coherence of our experiences. (Gros, 2024)

Claxton writes that real events always involve a mix of perceptions, actions, and concerns, but these maps, with their different kinds of abstractions – concepts, habits, and values – enable us to partially decouple those different elements:

We become able to look at objects with a more dispassionate (means not influenced by strong emotion, and so able to be rational and impartial) eye. We can wander round an art gallery just looking, without needing to do anything about what we see. (Claxton, 2015, p. 146)

My research has led me to consider if Ryman's painting itself is not just theoretically fixed upon the wall but hung up in one moment in time, the memory itself or the imprint could shift through time, and the painting's perception transfigures itself, dependent upon who is seeing the painting itself. If I

am suggesting the above, how could I determine what *exposed* means within the context of *seeing* abstract painting itself?

Claxton writes:

This way of looking at vision is a shock to the Cartesian view of perception. We naively think of vision as giving us largely unproblematic, objective access to the world around us, uncontaminated by considerations of subjective need. We see what's there, right, and then evaluate it and respond to it. We see 'seeing' as a receptive process, just noticing what's there? But this way of looking at seeing obscures its deep relationship to doing and needing. To see, we need the world to rub against those specialised bits of skin called eyes - or our eye-skin to actively rub against the world, identifying its textures and edges. (Claxton, 2015, p. 59)



Figure 9 Robert Ryman, *Untitled*, oil on linen, 26" x 36" x2"

## *Embodiment*

When a painting is viewed by another person, and if that person feels some form of connection, something appealing, then the painting itself has begun to express itself in a visceral sense, and the viewer's experience of what they are seeing and feeling may vary. Their connection will relate in a different way via their own personal perception of what they have experienced or are currently experiencing.

Charline von Heyl stated in a conversation with Isabelle Graw, that a space between viewer and painting is external and internal at the same time one could say. It only exists during the act of seeing. During the duration looking, thoughts shift, attention shifts, focus shifts. One can never quite take the image of the painting away in one's mind, since there will be no one image. If it has clicked, one needs to go back to it, to stay in relation to it. The love of painting is the love of one's potential of making one painting one's own. (Graw, 2015)

Gilmore writes, "Merleau-Ponty would otherwise describe by philosophical means that our relationship to the world is as embodied beings, with a perspectival or incomplete grasp of the world in which the meaning of what we experience arises neither from some determinate and unchanging landscape of objects, that our perception passively follows nor from our mind imposing pre-existing categories on the world. Rather, the meaning of our experience comes from our bodily and perceptual confrontation with the world, from within it" (Gilmore, 2005, pp. 295-296).

The meaning is described further, "Such meaning is given to the world prior to any meaning or significance that might come from our intellectual judgment of what we find around us. Objects are meaningful first because of our sensorimotor relation to them – such as the fact that the front of an object implies, for beings who can move through space, the object's back as well" (Gilmore, 2005, pp. 295-296).

Phenomenological description expresses the meaning objects have as a consequence of belonging to the orbit of such embodied beings "...the experience of a real thing cannot be explained by the action of that thing on my mind: the only way for a thing to act on a mind is to offer it a meaning, to manifest itself to it, to constitute itself vis-à-vis the mind in its intelligible articulations" (Gilmore, 2005, pp. 295-296).

In order for me to explore what Buren, stated, “That to encounter a painting by Robert Ryman was not to see a fixed image or object, but a matter of being ‘exposed’ .... In the same way one is exposed to a cold, to the sun or to an X-ray. For him, Ryman’s art is something temporal rather than fixed, a memory or imprint as in the paintings themselves”. (Martin et al, 2017, p.261).

Perhaps to understanding what being ‘exposed’ to a Ryman painting may mean within the larger context of what does ‘exposed’ mean, in reference to what an abstract painting actually is? German philosopher Immanuel Kant, argued that *noumenon* is a concept of an ideal reality that exists beyond our physical understanding, he argued that this reality is unknowable and only accessible through our imagination. Kant also believed that this unknowable reality is the source of all knowledge and truth. Noumenon can also be used in reference to a state of being or consciousness, where one is free from attachment to physical objects and experiences. (Rohlf, 2020). In this state, one could experience the underlying truth and reality that exists beyond our physical understanding.

Gilmore writes,

By putting the body and perception at the core of philosophical investigation, Merleau-Ponty attempts to restore the lived reality of human experience while navigating a middle path between reductionist scientific materialism and abstract intellectualism. This is so even if the organizing or meaning-giving activity of our embodied perception hides itself in its operation, leaving us to see things in the world habitually as if determinate and existing independently of us. (Gilmore, 2005, pp.295-296)

Perhaps Merleau-Ponty is suggesting that embodiment is in itself a relationship between body and the experience, where the body is the physical object and embodiment itself concerns the individual space between the body and the experience. The embodiment of something gives concrete form to an abstract idea, a flag could be considered as the embodiment of a country, “Embodiment is about giving forms to ideas that are not tangible; like love, hate, fear, justice etc. A gavel is the embodiment of justice; a wedding ring can be the embodiment of love. The word body in embodiment is a clue to its meaning: this is a word for giving a body to things that usually don't have one” (Vocabulary.com).

Claxton insists that our own emotions are buried deep within us as an intergraded embodied human intelligence, he writes “Emotions are what make the world meaningful. If we perceived the world only

with rational understanding, leached of emotional significance, we would not last long, and while we did last, we would find no fulfilment in our survival” (Claxton, 2015, p.102).

## Mapping

Mapping ourselves coexists within our experiences, where the mapping alters via our own personal perceptions as a way of (subconsciously) reflecting on the present and our current placement within the world. This could be considered perhaps, as a sense of belonging or stability. This does not necessarily mean that we create art as some form of map to hang on the wall. I use both the floor and walls to paint onto surfaces, and naturally presume that a painting should hang on the wall. Yet if I myself placed a painting on the floor and viewed it from above, would that alter my perception? Would the concept of *mapping* present itself more easily if this were the case?

The word 'map' derives from the early 16th century from the medieval Latin phrase *mappa mundi*, literally 'sheet of the world', with the Latin *mappa* meaning 'sheet, napkin' and *mundi* meaning 'of the world' (genitive of *mundus*). Bob Law described his field drawings as a place in time by acknowledging one's own position in the world around us and our placement.

Law writes,

Both acknowledging the transient nature of the world that we inhabit while also celebrating the profound uncertainty that this transience engendered. In the world of the Field drawings, tomorrow would bring another day with another set of unique conditions that would be equally beautiful and no less fleeting than those that came before. Despite their conceptual rigour and their minimal means, these drawings would paradoxically become fragile, poetic records of the passage of a highly subjective and ruthlessly personal non-historical time. (Law, 2015, pp. 8-9)

I have also not spoken much about my youngest son, Bertie. He is a very inquisitive and curious child who attends the studio with me when I am painting. In fact, my youngest son probably knows more about my paintings and my research than anyone else, as he happily converses with me about the paintings that I make in the studio and what they may mean or imply. Importantly, it was through his own work which enabled me to understand what or who could perhaps self-identify as an artist.

Bertie constantly maps. He builds alternative worlds and universes. He changes the landscape and reconceptualises places by changing economic, political, religious, and financial systems and logistics. By designing an array of new flags as representations of these different systems, he connects them to

his alternative universes. Each day, the system can change by way of how the day (his real day) affects his experiences. In this way, his change in perception allows him to create new alterations, iterations, maps, and systems.

Nancy Ann Roth's essay states that Flusser himself describes Schendel's work as a form as a map:

The overall impression is one of a completely meaningless text, yet one that can be deciphered at any point if one focuses attention on just that point. In this sense the sheet is a map of the world as it currently presents itself to human beings in its transparency and ultimate meaninglessness. (Roth, 2014)

I asked Bertie to explain to me why he continuously made maps and flag representations, and he explained his personal ideas to me, which I have included here. Bertie creates maps and flags, he merges past aesthetics, government systems, economic systems into the present day whilst maintaining the aesthetics, cultural & media systems of the present along with Inserting original conflicts & events (sometimes taking inspiration on real-life events from our world) in order to make it narratively appealing to the person who is viewing it.

Has Bertie just identified himself as a form of artist who maps because he needs to alter his current perception and map an alternate place, where he could find something which could navigate him through a world which he finds unstable? This is his way of creating something that may ground him within a world that is complex and difficult to navigate through, especially through the eyes of a young boy with autism.

Perhaps to identify oneself as an artist, is to identify as a person who maps. Making meaning from one's own experiences cannot easily be articulated, and therefore an artist creates works which is an act of expression itself within a space, or on a surface or object, through sound or movement. By way of mapping their temporal placement within their world, they are therefore creating their own form of idiosyncratic language as a means to understand who they are and where they are currently placed.

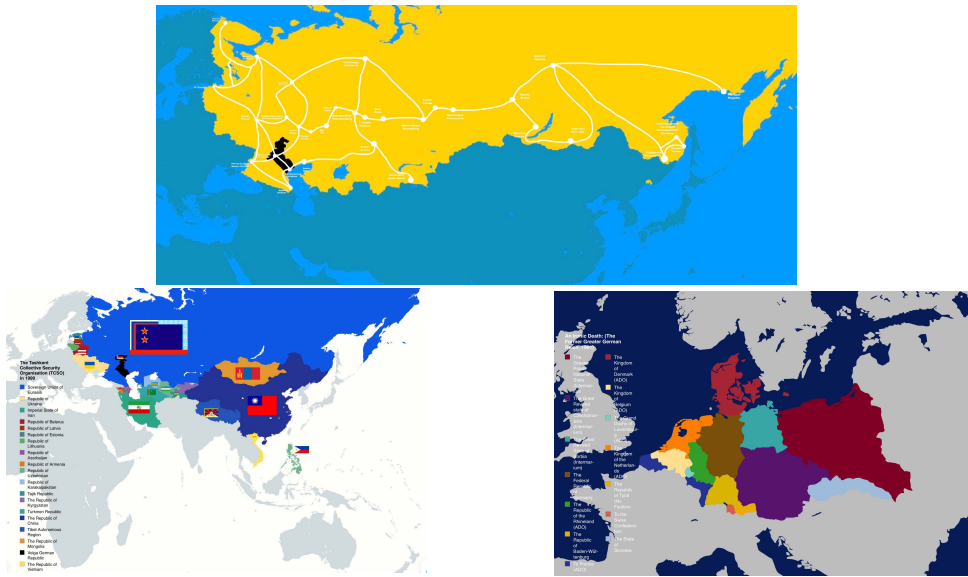


Figure 10 Bertie's World Maps, 2025

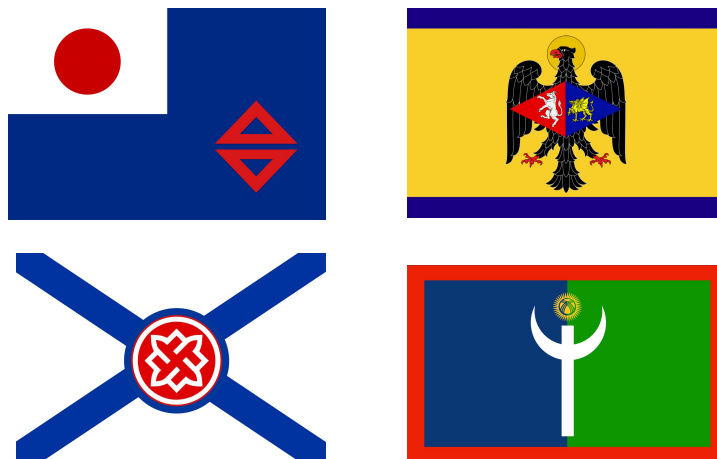


Figure 11 Bertie's Flags, 2025

If I myself feel a requirement in the form of releasing my emotions, I make a variation of a piece of work where my emotions are perhaps still connected. I take these ideas and push them forward, building on past and present, especially if I have learnt something new in between my last session with the piece.

That does not necessarily mean that it works as a piece in itself, but it is just part of an intuitive process that I have learnt to do, or that I need to do as a way of understanding myself and of that which is currently happening around me. I need to recreate the moment that I felt when I painted the original painting, to feel that 'something.' I am intuitively led to try and recreate that feeling because I want to feel something, to release something. Or, am I trying to establish myself within some form of positioning, similar to Law?

Law described his field drawings as a place in time by acknowledging one's own position in the world around us and our placement. Law describes the world around him as a diary of his *everyday*. Perhaps this is Law's placement within the world on that day? In a conversation with the critic Richard Cork in 1974, Law said:

The early Field drawings were about the position of myself on the face of the earth and the environmental conditions around me: the position of the sun, the moon and the stars, the direction of the wind, the way in which the trees grew, an awareness of nature's elements an awareness of nature itself and my position in nature on earth in a particular position in time. I was finding myself, and the map that went with myself. I was transcribing it graphically into charts. (Law, 2015, p. 6)

Perhaps Law was finding himself? Each and every day, Law would go outside and would repeatedly position himself in the same spot, like a pin on a map, recording what he saw. Fogle suggests that this act of repetition, of artistic record-keeping, also enabled Law to find his position within it all, and thus to find himself. Fogle writes:

In each case, these carefully positioned icons inhabited a blank visual field delimited by a rectangular framing device that the artist drew with a single line just inside the edges of the rectangular paper. As much a proscenium as a boundary, these slightly off-kilter and unabashedly freehand framing lines would appear over and over again in these drawings. Graphically reiterating the convention of the picture frame – albeit with a deliberately handmade sensibility – this conventional representational boundary had the effect of providing a provisional field of protective containment or a talisman, holding at bay the

sublime terror evoked by the expansiveness of the void, whilst also emphasising the receptive emptiness of the blank piece of paper. In a sense, these framing lines became projection screens on which the intimate and transitory theatre of the everyday would play itself out. Clouds would move across his field of vision; the wind would blow; stars would make their appearance in the dusky sky; and the sun and moon would trace their celestial trajectories across the arc of the visible world. All of these movements would find themselves recorded, one after another, within the field of drawing defined by Law's graphite boundary and in doing so the artist would find himself. (Law, 2015, p. 8)

Within my own work, I do something similar where I use rice paper to create marks and gestures in order to find beginnings. Yet I could not fix or separate what I had made. One piece could not leave the other, and I would end up moving them around, layering them, trying to separate them, but ultimately placing them back together as 'one.' Each time I would get the box out, I would do exactly the same thing. However, even though I tried to go through the same process, their meaning would change and mean something entirely different. I realised that how I placed each piece of paper, how I moved and layered them, etc. depended on my mood and how I felt. It was dependent on whether something had affected me emotionally, or since the last time I made the marking. I also realised that in this process of discovery, I was unable able to fix or put the paperwork together indefinitely.

Claxton states that our mood can affect our perception. He says:

If our moods vary, we can learn different things from the same presentation... all of these emotional lenses will highlight different facets of the information, direct attention in different ways, prime different emotional reactions and, overall, lead to a rich and complementary set of mental representations. (Claxton, 2015, p. 133)

Perceptions change when time shifts and we move forward. Perhaps this is what has drawn me to Law's process, what I find interesting about repeating the same/different marks over a period of time. That being said, when we 'refocus our lens' and go back out again, we can sometimes discern that the changes may not be so significant. Nevertheless, we are compelled to repeat it, to do it all again.

Roger Hilton suggested that the complexities of human existence cannot be expressed in a literal sense, and can be done so only intuitively and within that particular moment. He writes: "When I paint it is an affair of instinct and intuition.... All art is an attempt to exteriorise one's sensations and feelings, to give them form" (Hilton in Lambirth, 2007, p. 163).

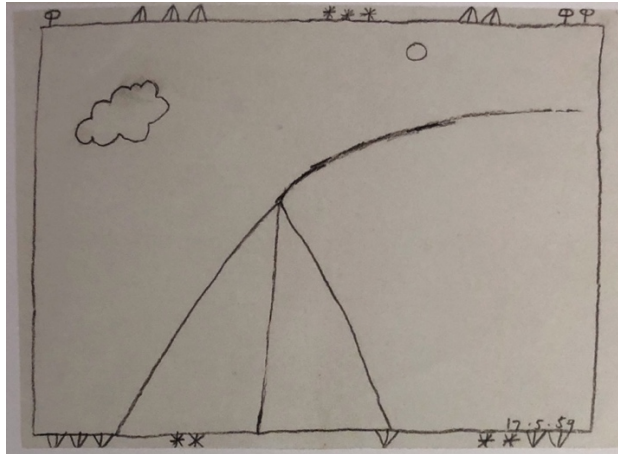


Figure 12 Bob Law, Drawing 15.5.59 [1959], pencil on paper, 25.5 x 35.5cm,

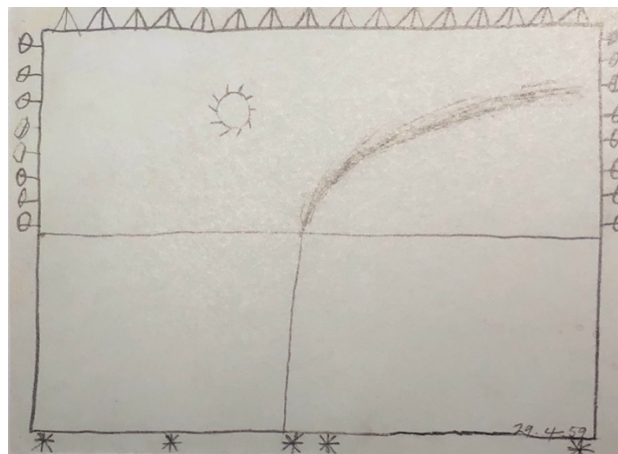


Figure 13 Bob Law, Drawing 29.4.59 [1959], pencil on paper, 25.3 x 35.5cm

Was Ryman using this show as some form of mapping system himself? On a video text, Ryman describes the exhibition of his work, the *Third Philadelphia Prototype*. He states:

The panels are not really the painting. The painting consists of the two walls. The original surface of the panels are the same. Even from the first showing. The only thing that changes is the... is the edge which goes onto the wall itself. Some of the tape is going off of the panel onto the wall, and others seem to just appear on the wall. Which tells you that it's... it was not really the first time it was done. That's done on purpose because I don't want it to be the exact same each time. The light is extremely important in the way it affects the panels. In the afternoon, later when the sun moves around to this side... the panels will look very different. The softer light brings out the nuances and you can see the... the panels have a glow which would be wiped out in a strong straight on light. Yesterday was the first time I actually saw the space. It should be a soft, quiet experience. It's nice to look at. I like this. (Art 21, 2014)

Ryman himself created work, as he stated above, as a new experience by re-using the same pieces of work. Which informs us that the work already has a past, another experience and a new 'temporal' moment is created. Ryman used the light and the time of day (akin to Law's field drawings) to alter the painting's perception again and again, re-exposing the viewer to a new experience and recreating another perception of the paintings themselves. "For him, Ryman's art is something temporal rather than fixed, a memory or imprint as in the paintings themselves" (Martin et al., 2017, p. 261).

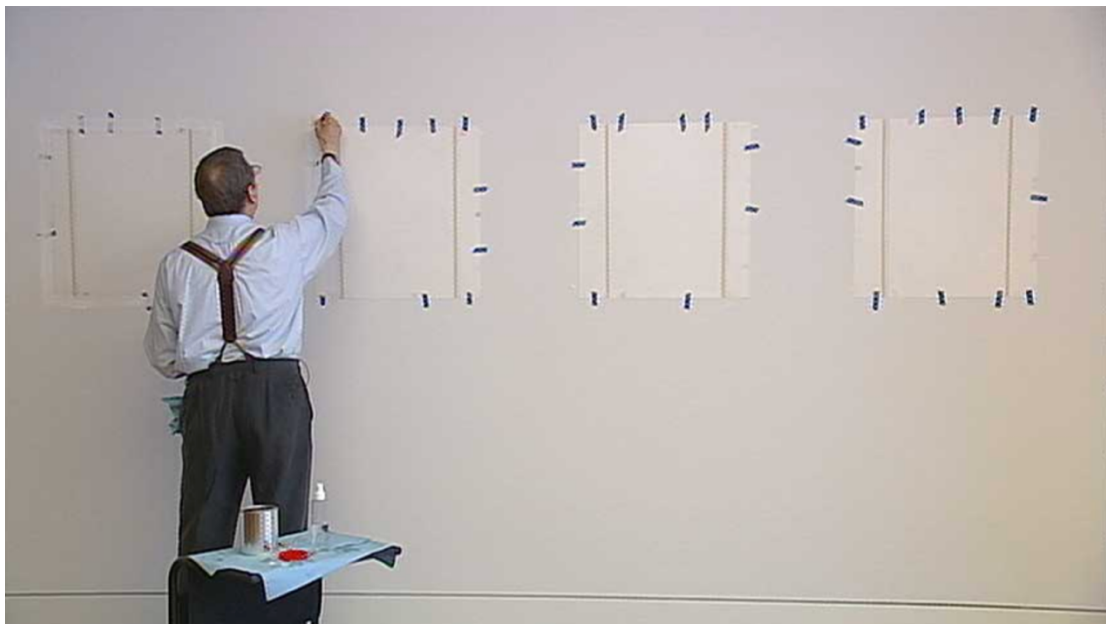


Figure 14 Ryman in *Paradox*, 2014, video still



## CHAPTER FOUR



*"Perhaps a more interesting question for the paintings.....is not what makes them abstract and what this means, but what they do; how they occupy space and how we look at, and see with, them. Paintings are not just objects in our environment, they also emulate and comment on our visual relation to the world". (Mummery, 2011).*

## *Introduction to Practice Methodology*

*Chapter Four* consists of my Practice Methodology where I provide a comprehensive account of my practice methodology and how the beginnings are traced back to my personal experiences by embracing ethnographic methods of observing, making, and reflective writing. This practice is examined in the context of a broader experience of visual art practices and the influences of critical discourses discussed in earlier chapters as a way of articulating some of the ideas that have emerged through the use of a Bricolage methodology. I have achieved this by observing myself within my practice as the reflective researcher, and by reflecting on my practice-based processes were formed out of *doing* and *thinking*, which in itself has been instrumental in rooting practice and the theoretical development within my research.

From the outset of the research, I went back to the beginning. I tried to understand why I was fascinated by the act of mark making and I began to look at Schendel, Ferrari, Dirmische, and Twombly. I could relate to their work and I could see similarities within their work and my own. The first year of research entailed experimenting with mark making, thinking, and reflecting as I looked back upon memories and experiences. I started to write down *verses*, and I was becoming aware of them as *beginnings*. My research began with using graphite, crayons, and inks. I first used paper as a surface, then worked with Schendel's concept of using rice paper, talc, and printing ink. I was fascinated by the marks themselves, as well as the luminosity of the paper.

The *autoethnographic memoirs* start at the point where my work started to make sense to me. Up until that point, I was making work but not quite understanding what or why I was doing it. The work that I made during this time is immensely significant to me, and without making that work, I am not sure if I would have been able to identify the importance of what I myself have learnt through this research. The notes themselves are raw, meaning they are as they were written at the time, as this autoethnographic method allowed me to write up the words required to understand in relation to the questions I was asking. In some respects, these notes are just as important as the work itself, something I have needed to remind myself. I have presented my practice methodology within this thesis as an insight into how I came to understand within the context of *doing* and *thinking* while living an *everyday* life, and sometimes a difficult one.

## *VERSES*

## A Beginning

*My thoughts, my feelings.*

*All of them coming together.*

*I create a surface to express something that I feel.*

*Something that I do not always know or understand.*

*I have no prerequisites of what it should be.*

*I accept the notion of it as a form.*

*Of which I can communicate.*

*Something...?*

*Perhaps.*

*All I know.*

*Is that it is a beginning.*

## The Wind

*Just a toddler.*

*A walk.*

*To the fields and the river.*

*Stop on the top of the hill.*

*Eyes closed, breathe.*

*The wind.*

*Embraced by its force.*

*It blows through him.*

*His body responds with sheer excitement.*

*Did it take him somewhere else?*

*How it did it make him feel?*

*He cannot speak.*

*A memory.*

*Forever cherished.*

## Perceptive

*A perceptive little boy.*

*Who just knows?*

*Difficult to put into context.*

*Exceptionally sensitive.*

*Feels everything,*

*Everything is felt.*

*A slight change of your voice.*

*A tiny frown in your expression.*

*To understand you.*

*To understand himself.*

## The Everyday

*Feeling endless.*

*No glimmer.*

*No light.*

*Every day, each day.*

*Every day, the same day.*

*Slow motion.*

## The Shop

*Look a dog, a small dog.*

*No, do not sit on the dog.*

*In the trolley.*

*Spin, wee, move, get the job done.*

*Too much.*

*Too much.*

*Leave quickly.*

*Sensory overload.*

## First shoes

*First shoes.*

*One step forward, take a picture.*

*Two steps back.*

*Second, first shoes.*

*One step forward, take a picture.*

*Two steps back.*

*Third first shoes, take a picture.*

*A step forward.*

## Painting

*Why does the empty space need to be filled?*

*Maybe the empty space means more than the filled space?*

*The empty space has things inside it.*

*Stains, marks.*

*Has the empty space....*

*Become more important?*

*Just because you cannot see it.*

*Does not mean it is not there.*

## Silence

*Is silence all part of listening?*

*If we were more silent within ourselves.*

*Would we not hear more?*

## Transfer

*Transfer the marks.*

*Quickly.*

*Intuitively.*

*Onto a surface.*

*Break it down.*

*Minimal marks.*

*Unspoken.*

*Utterances.*

## The Feather

*Everything has its place.*

*A small feather from the cushion.*

*Escaped.*

*It went on an adventure.*

*A day at school.*

*Once discovered.*

*It was placed in a pocket.*

*Kept safe.*

*On its return.*

*It was carefully placed back.*

*Inside in the cushion.*

*Everything has its place.*

## Stairs

*Help.*

*I am scared of heights.*

*I cannot get down.*

*Okay.*

*I will throw up a pretend rope.*

*Catch.*

*Careful.*

*Huffing and puffing.*

*Are you secure?*

*Okay.*

*Down you come.*

*Gently.*

*All okay now.*

Pace

*Up, down, pace the room.*

*Up, down, pace again.*

*Repeat.*

*Up, down, pace the room.*

*Up, down, pace again.*

*Repeat.*

*Up, down, pace the room.*

*Up, down, pace again.*

*Repeat.*

*Up, down, pace the room.*

*Jump...!*

*And release.*

Memories

*Memories.*

*Moments in time,*

*Reflect.*

*Experiences are layers.*

*Visual moments.*

*Reflection.*

*Lived experiences.*

*Are Beginnings.*

Painting

*A story of layers.*

*What is it?*

*Nothing but something?*

*Something is nothing?*

A Response

*They like it.*

*They don't like it...?*

*I don't care.*

*I like it.*

*I made it.*

A line

*The horizontal line.*

*Is a moving line.*

*it ebbs and flows.*

*With each breath that is taken.*

*My line.*

*My life.*

*What I can do.*

*What I cannot do.*

*Tension.*

*Want.*

*Need.*

*Balance.*

Life after School

*In simple words.*

*School will stop.*

*You are growing up.*

*What would you like to do?*

*A verbal reply.*

*“Freedom”*

Something

*In the studio.*

*He asked what the paintings were about?*

*I said, what do you think they are about?*

*He replied, I think they about nothing mum.*

*I replied...then they represent everything.*

*You just can't see it yet.*

Clarity

*Break it down.*

*Understand it.*

*Simplify it.*

*Project it.*

Flag

*Flapping.*

*Flapping.*

*Flapping.*

*Flapping a flag*

Socks

*Socks on.*

*Socks off.*

*Socks on.*

*Socks off.*

*Cold floor.*

*Cold feet.*

*Tape those socks on.*

*TA – DA....!*

*Warm feet.*

Meaning

*Everything means something in some small way.*

*Especially when your life is in part.*

*Been a life of silence.*

## Memories

*Remember,*

*Forget,*

*Remember,*

*Forget,*

*You feel to remember,*

*I feel to forget.*

*Remembering and forgetting,*

*Are intrinsically linked.*

*To remember something,*

*Is to forget something else.*

## Studio

*I am in my studio,*

*It is my space.*

*An idiosyncratic language.*

*Between thought and mark.*

*A surface to transfer.*

*Thoughts as utterances*

*Utterances as thoughts.*

*Unreadable.*

*Yet relatable?*

*Something that can connect.*

*An understanding of something?*

*But yet not fully understood.*

*PAPERWORK*

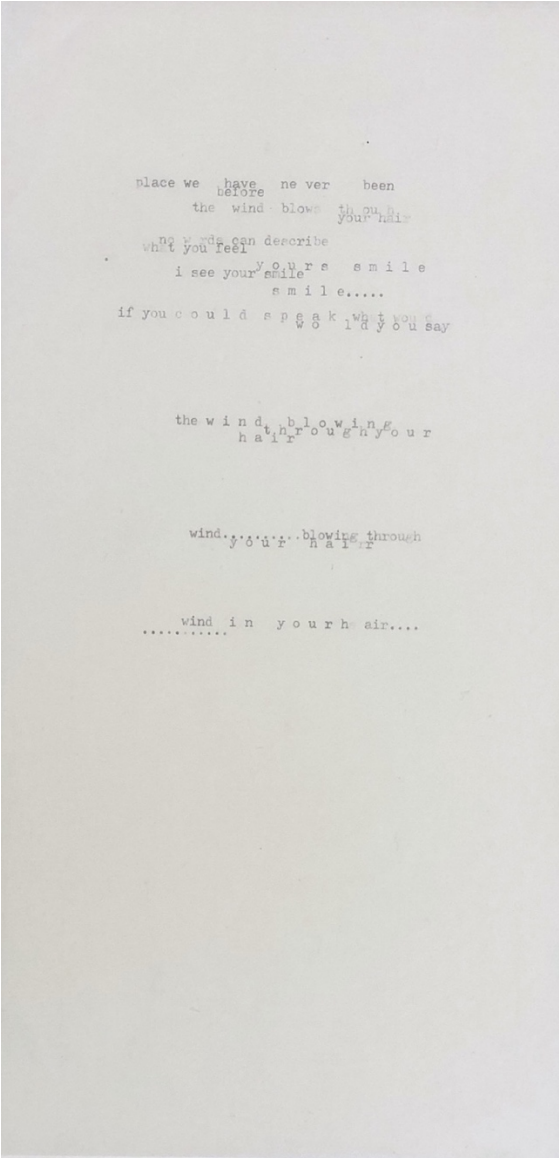


Figure 15 *Untitled*, text on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2024

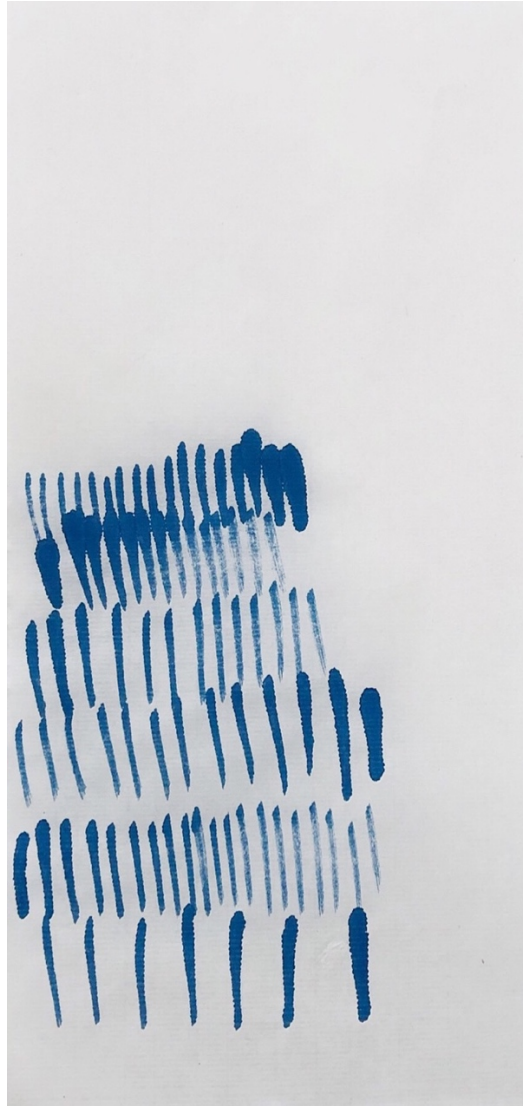


Figure 16 *Untitled*, ink on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2022

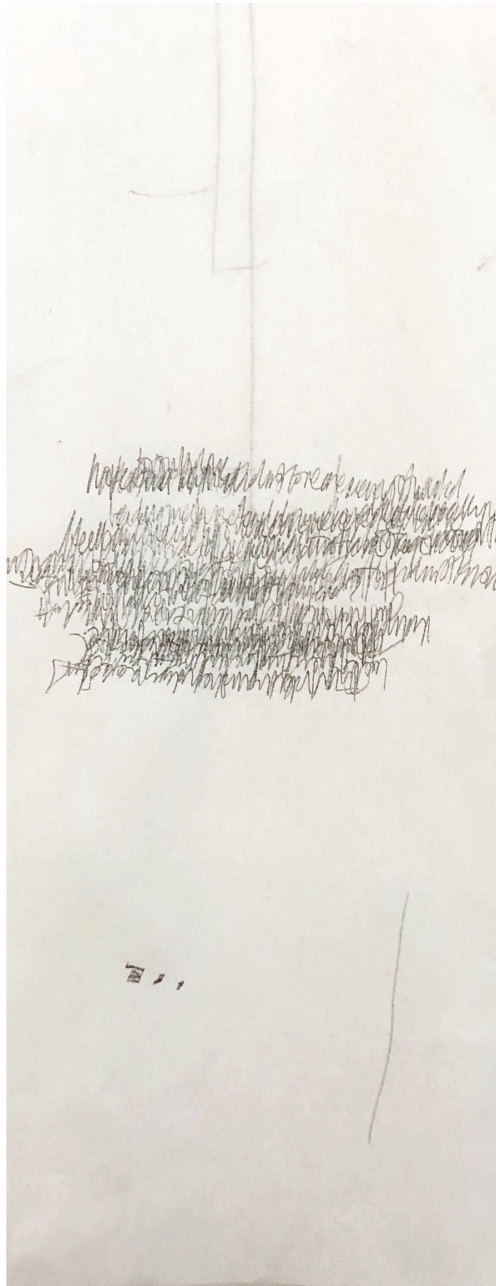


Figure 17 *Untitled*, graphite on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2022

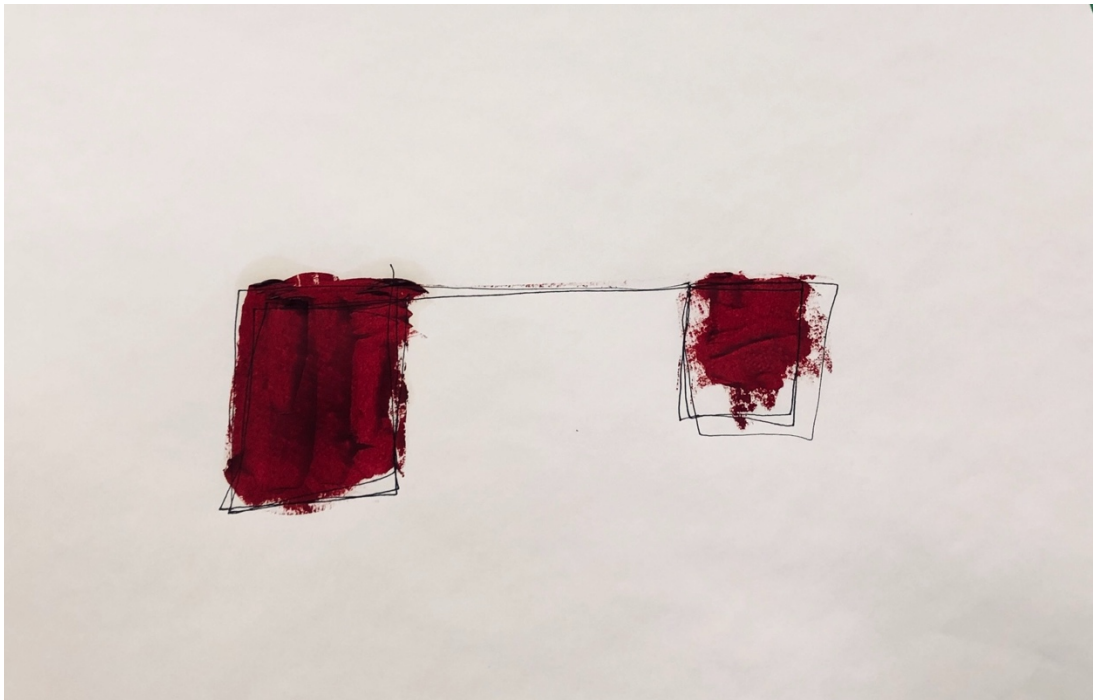


Figure 18 *Untitled*, oil and pen on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2022



Figure 19 *Untitled*, montage of paper work, digital image, 2022

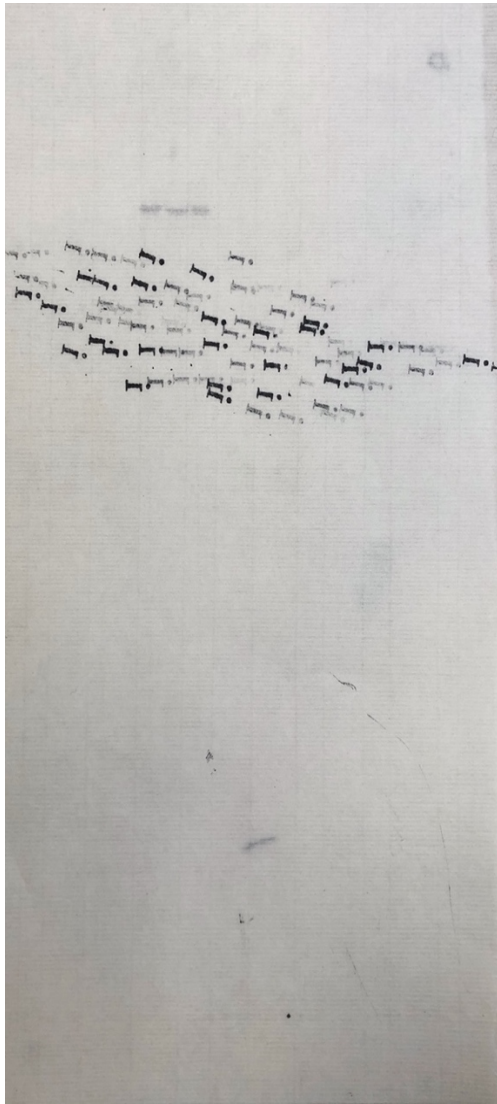


Figure 20 *Untitled*, stamps on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2024

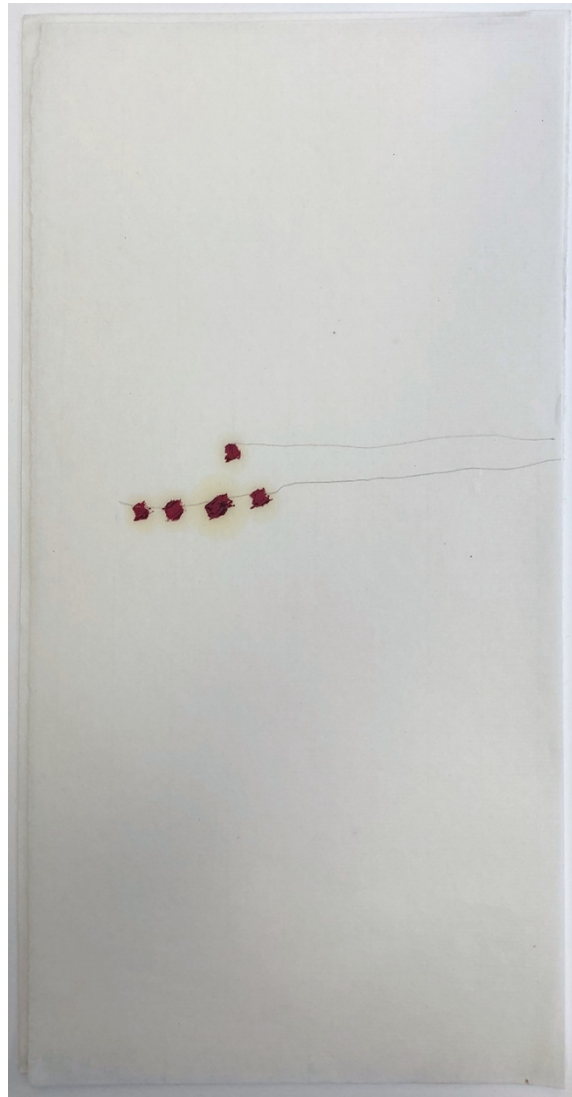


Figure 21 Untitled, oil and graphite on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2024

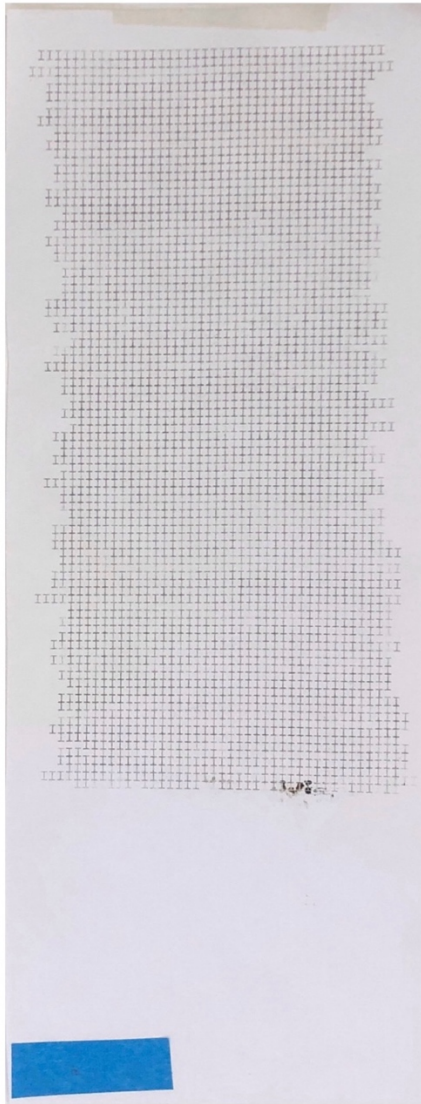


Figure 22 Untitled, typewriter on rice paper and tape, 15 x 30cm, 2024

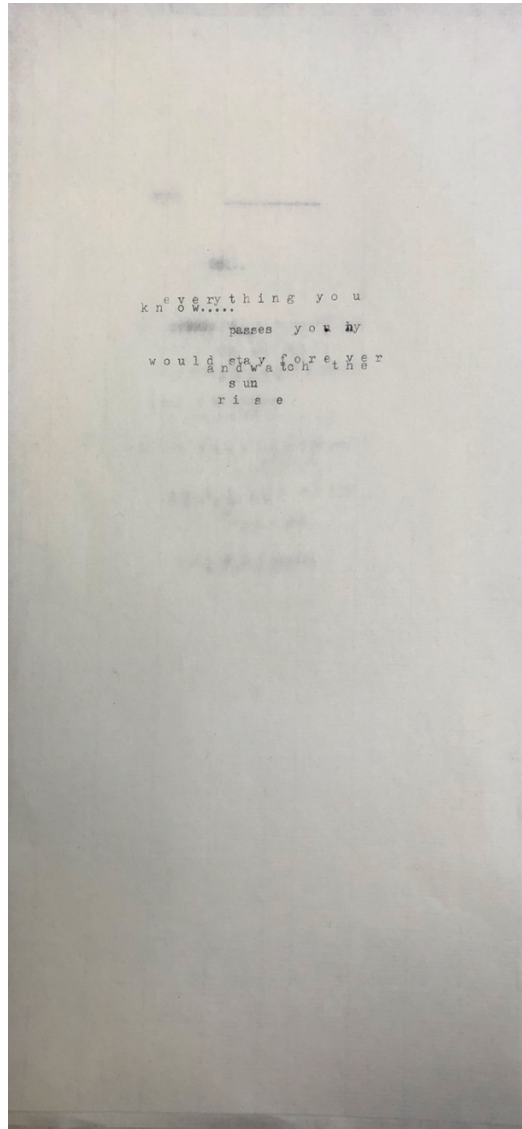
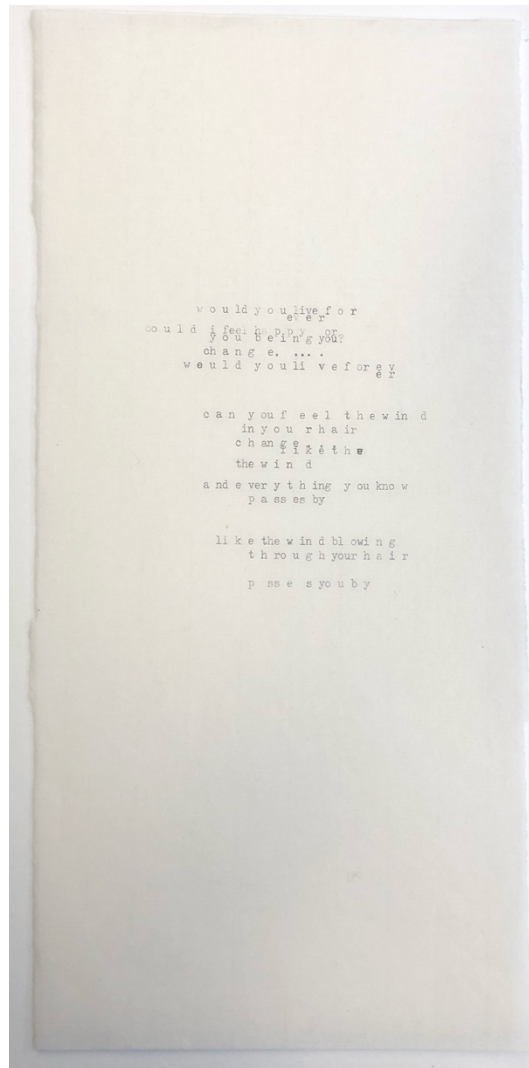


Figure 23 Untitled, typewriter text on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2023



would you live for  
could i feel the pain of  
change. ...  
would you live for

can you feel the wind  
in your hair  
and everything you know  
passes by

like the wind blowing  
through your hair  
passes you by

Figure 24 Untitled, typewriter text on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2024

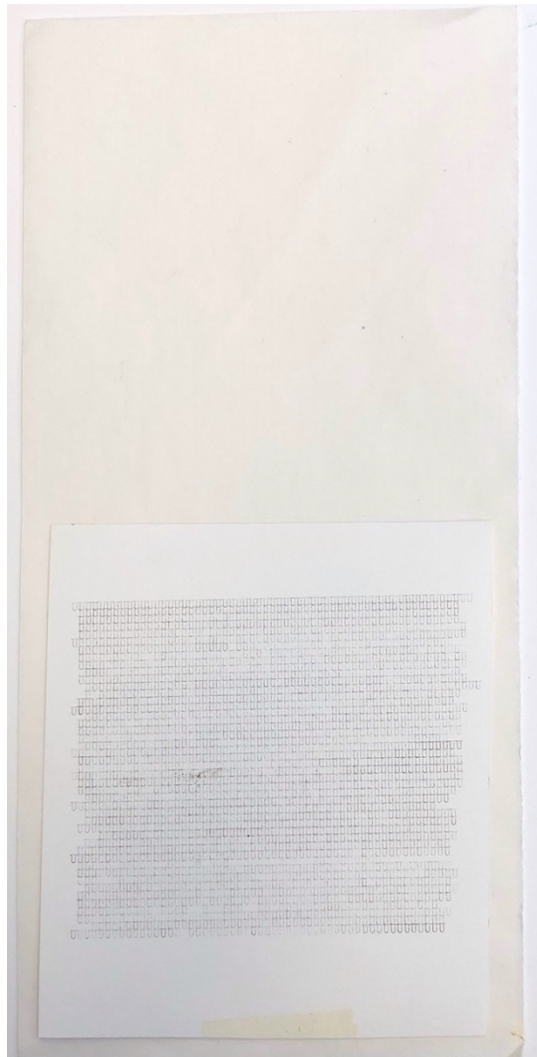


Figure 25 Untitled, typewriter text on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2024



Figure 26 *Untitled*, oil and stamp on A4 paper, 2022

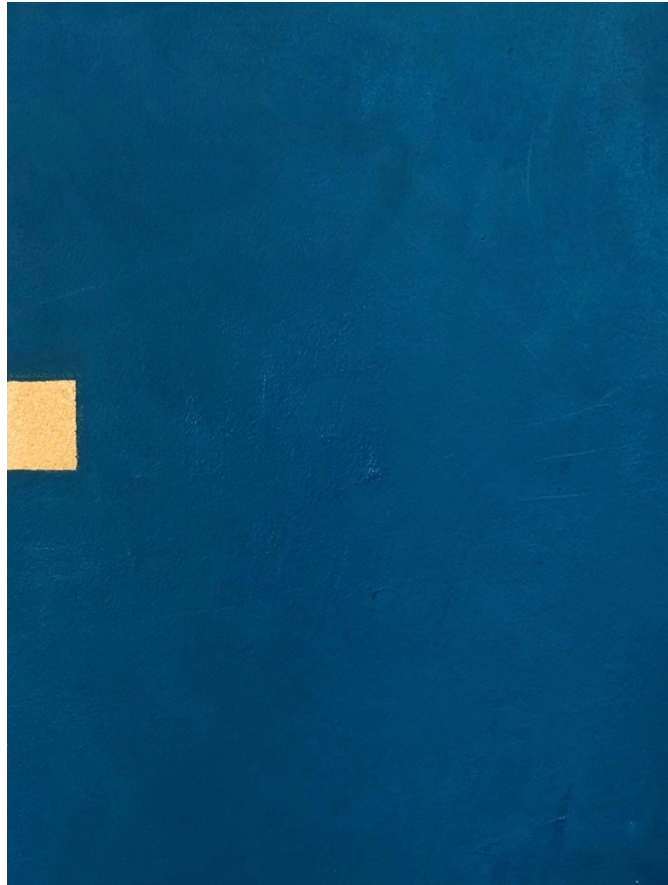


Figure 27 Untitled, oil and gold paint on A4. paper, 2022

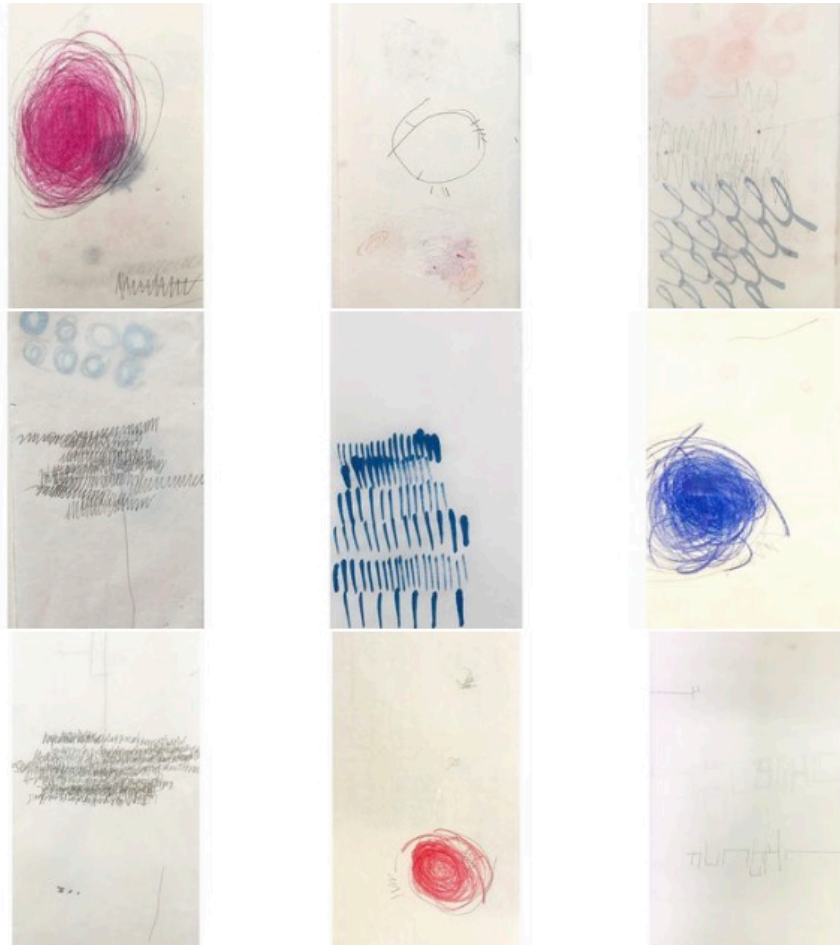


Figure 28 Untitled, montage on rice paper, 15 x 30cm, 2023

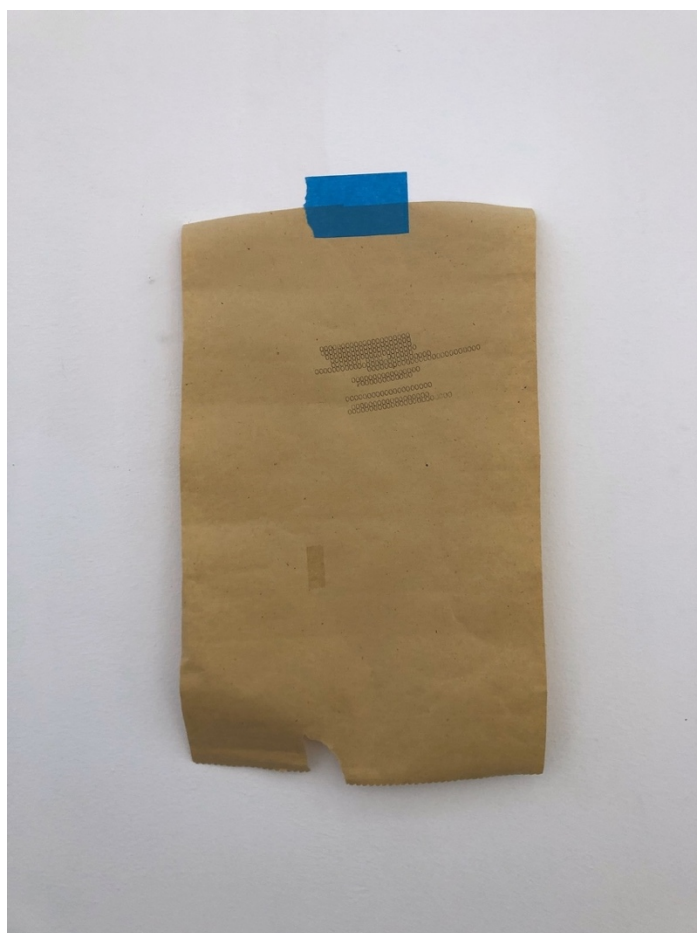


Figure 29 Untitled, typewriter text on brown paper, 10 x 25cm, 2025



Figure 30 Untitled, oil and pen paper, 15 x 30cm, 2022

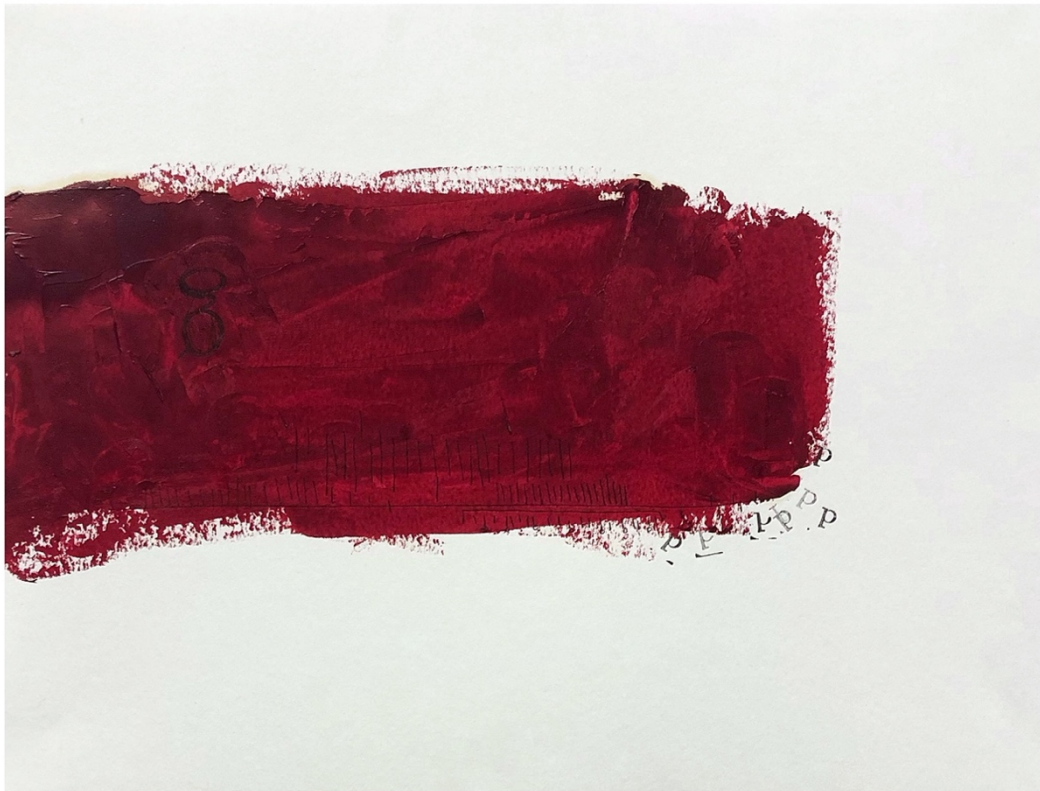


Figure 31 Untitled, oil and stamp on A4 paper, 2022

*AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC MEMOIRS*

## *Autoethnography Notes*

5<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Echoes – a friend states, they are echoes of my life (repeat/repetitive moments, memories?). They are always in my work (particular marks that I always do...fade away but still visible...)

27<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Paper work... Working on paper, especially rice paper is the preliminary point of where everything for me begins. By transcribing onto a surface which is both delicate and difficult to use but comfortable, then transferring those ideas onto a canvas becomes another challenge. My work intuitively adapts or changes with each new piece I make... That is my working process. The concepts and theoretical reasoning behind why I do what I do is a little bit more in-depth as my research degree develops.

10<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Visual abstraction becomes more prominent through actual lived experiences of living in a time of war & pre-war, uncertainties, PTSD There was a need to re-establish a world through abstraction in order to understand it? Abstraction is (perhaps) memory related... it is an individual outlook or expression of something in relation to the artist's life... (their memories and personal lived experiences).

January 2023

Is abstract art something that we are unable to put into words or describe (an experience)? Or is it a form of abstraction that is formed through visual seeing? (memory/ moments)

STUDIO... making work....

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023

We live within a world where the expectation of normality seems universal, that we are expected to fulfil criteria that suggests we are normal and yet the reality is, there is no normal.

13<sup>th</sup> October 2023

To 'feel' something. I paint to feel something, that allows me to 'forget'...to feel that moment where I am not there (but I am)...unaware of what is physical except feelings – when I paint (that particular

painting)...or something that feels like it's working...working but not aware it's working and not planning it...

Breaking down memories...simplifying them...we do that in different ways...mine is the boys. I have had to break down 'things' so they can understand the world around them... A coping mechanism... So my work is a 'simplification' of how I communicate to the boys and how the boys communicate to me (each one behaves differently)... which has also adapted and changed as they have grown up.

By using my own life experiences of not being able to communicate or speak about how I feel (my own emotions) and how I have and still am learning through them – by how to deal with and control their environment (so they can handle life)... and through their own personal struggles, allows me to cope with my own. So, my attachment to my boys is a cycle of learning and constant adapting in a very slow and quiet way. In fact, change is minimal, in order for them to cope and therefore for me to cope.

My painting is a reflection of release, releasing myself which can enable me to create 'a feeling' that allows me to forget for a little while.

Ryman did not trade music for art. He chooses to feel through paint, his music teacher said choose. Painting was his choice because.... It's in the book (Ryman feels his music through his paint).

I know that I have 'lots of stuff' – lots of words, important words.... (Research notes) And it's there... inside those notes and my drifting thoughts. But my brain is full...to just see it, or there is too much (valuable info to see it all and to just let it make sense...)

It's like, an amalgamation of 'everything' setting off and firing in my brain...maybe that should be exciting for me? I don't know, maybe I am scared to know 'something' so important (to me)...

I think I feel fatigued... because my brain is gathering thoughts via my mental notes and physical notes... something is 'there' and (my brain) is slowly pondering to make some sort of sense of it... I mean... That could take a while...

17th October 2023

The horizontal line....

The life that is led... and the life that is desired?

The need, the desire, the want...the understanding.

20th October 2023

My work. Ryman is an influence...absolutely. But there is a thing about painting in white... It's a detachment from a colour...no baggage...

I feel like...white means...nothing (colour theory sense)... so I do not need to justify myself...

Which means I can cope better?

The word 'feels'... We use words to describe. But we struggle with the right words that describe a 'feeling'... Is that not my research degree?

Everything and everybody within my painting... It's all hidden underneath the marks...

The words... Well I am trying to find the right ones...which can help me understand why I do that...

23<sup>rd</sup> October 2023

Maybe, I am feeling a little underconfident with my painting... It happens...

I like that painting... I am not sure if it's finished?

I know it's basic... but raw... I don't know... I am always drawn to simple things... Sometimes that feels like it's not acceptable...

28th October 2023

My line. My life. What I can and what I cannot do.

Tension, balance, frustration, want, need, comfort, security.

The uncertainty I feel is because it is not what maybe I think it should be... A product? I make it with no plan. No technique... I think it's about accepting it for what it is... Perhaps embracing the fact or the idea of 'that is how I paint...' I think it's a confidence thing...

I think I am pushing the boundaries of paint (in my own mind).

Re-written... I think I am pushing the boundaries of paint verse acceptability (in my own mind).

Acceptability that extends to myself and my circumstances.

A reflection of myself... within my work.

Which can mean nothing to others... but means everything to me...

30th October 2023

'White paintings'The ideal balance... not always easy to achieve... and not always evident when it is... keep seeking... through making..



Figure 32 Studio, 2023<sup>1st</sup> October 2023

My thoughts...

Working with white takes away any sort of representation of emotional colour attachment. It allows me to see and feel in a clearer manner. It takes away the chaos of lived experiences. So, I can live in that moment of applying paint to a surface... I can transfer myself, and it allows me to be myself in that moment... free from boundaries, ties, circumstances... It allows me to feel free. Or it allows me to forget?

I think... it's harder for us to understand white(s)... There is no emotional memory (green for grass, etc.). It does not compute or process in our minds as quickly...

My son asked me what they were about. I said, what do you think they are about? He said I think they are about 'nothing,' mum. I replied, then they represent everything... You just can't see it (yet...). Painting is not about understanding it. Good painting is about contemplating what it might be about...

11<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Convo with friend on Instagram...

Has there been something in particular that's prompted your new work? (White paintings). Or has it just changed as times gone on?

The work is influenced by the research and the research influences the work. I think I am taking my work apart... Sounds odd. Theoretically I can back up what I am doing... I suppose that is the point? I am taking risks... Perhaps?

19th November 2023

Abstraction as a language... Maybe more prominent now as we live in an age of technology, political correctness, a lack of physical writing... As life becomes more 'digital,' more monitored, more fast-paced, more restricted/controlled... A world where an artist feels the need to express emotions through unspoken words or unreadable words (asemic).

Visual abstraction becomes more prominent through actual lived experiences of living in a time of war and pre-war. Mira Schendel? A need to re-establish a world through another language in order to understand it?

Abstraction is (perhaps) memory related... It is an individual outlook or expression of something in relation to the artist's life (their memories and personal lived experiences).

Is abstract art something that we are unable to put into words or describe (an experience)?

Or is it a form of abstraction that is formed through visual seeing? (memory/ moments)

27th November 2023

Just trying to fully understand my questions... and break down and understand what I am actually asking and writing about and why...

Sounds odd, maybe? But your brain gets tangled up with loads of info...

I look or read it (and the things I have not read yet...) And think 'shit,' this is going to take years...

But I do think, once I establish myself within it all, maybe it won't take years.

I also think (the bit that excited me) is this how will this feel? To finally understand or have 'something' that might make sense of yourself as a person?

I want to stop writing words – I just want to paint them... To know and understand why I do what I do (not fully)... but enough to feel settled with myself, perhaps an acceptance of sorts?

Doing this PhD and I will admit, I do find it very difficult at times. To work alone and to continually be self-motivated with not much reward.

7th December 2023

The horizontal line is a moving line; it ebbs and flows with each breath that is taken.

The marks are utterances of something that cannot be spoken verbally, but are only present via a faded mark which is not necessarily understood or needs to be understood?

My research is about finding parallels in my work that may be similar to other artists and considering the 'connections' that might be somehow familiar in terms of thought or feeling, as well as myself and how I work.

9th December 2023

It's not about the past; it's about the present.

Some memories, a few are significant enough for me to replay them in my mind... Because there are still 'essences' of what was, and of what is.

I cannot control, I cannot change, I can only accept and try to understand and adapt.

The positives and the benefits of being human.

Do I have 'something' that some people can pick up on or feel? It's the present... the now... this moment in time.

Perhaps these things leave an 'energy,' a trail... Utterances? A reason to not fully understand but still feel its essence...

It's not a childhood memory, it is the 'now'... Is this what makes work different or resonate in a particular way with others?

12th December 2023

Do you find this?

When you are in a moment of sorts... and you read a particular book... It makes sense. Then... you go back to another time (maybe not in that moment of feeling)... and you don't feel the words like you did before...

15<sup>th</sup> December 2023

I think Ryman works by feeling.

So, therefore, he is not sure what they mean or why he made them...

That is 'not seeing,' it is about feeling. You can't 'see' it yet because you don't understand why you made it... It was made through feeling (intuitively)... Therefore, not knowing is 'not seeing.'

Also not seeing (glasses) is part of the intuitive (feeling) of painting something...

21st December 2023

When a painting is at a certain point of perhaps being considered a mess...

You are aware that this 'moment' cannot be recreated, as that time has elapsed, and the marks themselves were made in a moment of not knowing, or being self-aware of what and why you painted them. Or, what actually led you there? You just know you enjoyed doing it (catharsis).

I do not believe it's good enough... Yet, maybe that is why I like it? It's not trying to be good; it's just 'being' exactly as I painted it.

The Acceptance of Things... A chapter (work in progress maybe?) in my thesis.

My current paintings...

I don't paint over everything... only of late (would normally bin and start from scratch). This work needs to be worked on or pushed, and that might mean ruining them...? Maybe. Anyway... they annoy me if I don't do something to change it... to make it feel right.

It means it is not right, it means it does not feel right... Something is missing...

Something is wrong...

Then I go home, let it dry, and think about it...

2nd January 2024

White paint.

The canvas is the paper... just a different surface (one that can hold more).

Why white?

Enables me to separate me (emotionally) from my work with more ease and therefore enables me to let go at the right point. By not pushing it forward... to become something I may understand or want to understand.

I let it simply 'be'...

White allows me to see and understand these choices (no colour to confuse my emotional state at that time).

17th January 2024

But... one positive... I now know what to do with a painting I was unsure of... Things come to you in unexpected moments...

Progress is made... by just living your everyday life.

The realisation of what allows you to feel peace in your head... by the process of painting something.

Then reflecting on it and feeling that peace in your head that you now require... and therefore understanding why it may have been painted...

No words. Just visual... Looking and being able to feel some sort of peace within it... That is what painting means to me.

It's not about making sense... It's about allowing me to be at peace within myself.

5th February 2024

These are works in progress... layers... or tests... not necessarily finished...

Meaning... White has not left the building... It's how you get to the white...

It works because I did not think too hard about it...

13th February 2024

This period of 'doubt' is always present at this time (currently colour work)... When I start repetitive work... Unsure why I keep making it. Am I learning anything? Is it ok to keep doing this?

Uncertain/unsure.

15th February 2024

Sometimes, by letting go of colour... It can allow you to re-use it via a different dialogue.

Purple Painting

12th March 2023

I think I understand why I do what I do... It's no great epiphany though... It's about seeking... To feel.

I already had the answer, I just did not know it...

Feelings have variations... to succeed, to love, to feel pleasure, to desire, to feel sad... Etc.

We look to fill the gaps of those things that can fill it...

And this... The ability to understand it, will continue to change/shift...

It's why my work changes... As the need to feel changes (the timeline, what is happening in my life)...

Nothing is in constant situ...

How this may apply to others, I am unsure of...

It's based on intuitive abstract painting, no planning... just feeling...

White and Now

12th March 2024

I love white, I loved making my white paintings. White is not finished with.

White enabled me to learn new ways of thinking, one example (important) was to detach myself from colour theory (yes, things still have to go or there needs to be a balance in my head).

I stopped thinking of what colour represented in words (green = nature or calm) and looked at colour as something completely new.

When I look at the colour paintings, I think about white and how I would apply white to them but still keeping something of the colour...

It is about the texture... The movement of the oil upon the surface... That enables me to feel catharsis.

18th March 2024

One small working process of my work (which happens naturally) is to begin something with marks, which can appear chaotic.

Then the work is reduced (for various reasons) into something more manageable in my mind, because I paint for myself and the work is in part a reflection of myself.

Traces of layered textures suggest 'other levels'... reasoning and emotions.



Figure 33 Untitled, oil on canvas 50cm x 55cm, 2024

I have begun to detach myself from my work, which I think for me was and is important, the ability to let go in the sense of the work itself (the paint and the marks)... And then the painting itself. Letting go is not automatic, I do need to understand it to a point, but I do not need to know everything, that is something that I have needed to learn and understand.

Not everything needs to be understood (or detailed), it is what it is, it is what it becomes. It's something you like, or you do not like? It means something? It means nothing? Meanings themselves change as time passes, relevant and perhaps irrelevant.

One thing never changes and that is who the person was who made it... Who are they...

Does it matter who made it? It only matters to them because they made it, and from that first initial mark, they were questioning themselves and the world they presently live in.

The chaos subsided as reflection and understanding began to form, minimising the marks.

Making the same type of art...

How do we or how can a lot of artists make the same type of art?

What is it, that enables them to do that?

Why can I not do that?

It's not because I do not choose to, I physically cannot. I make a certain amount; I make them to understand whatever it is I am trying to understand.

Then I move on because I have learnt something else or something else that I have to try and work out.

The work is linked, maybe it's a different type of link...

They have particular details that are unclear?

Is it what they feel when they make it, is the feeling different in how I feel it?

24th March 2024

Small paintings.

I do wonder... How many can I make?

And what is the point of making one painting after another?

But... it's to feel, to experiment, to explore on a small scale (feels like a sketchbook).

To catch something 'quicker' with limited space/movement, harder and longer to do this on bigger canvases.

27th March 2024

Sometimes I think I am nuts, I have more than enough to cope and deal with, but my curiosity to learn has led me down many paths, where I am always trying to understand myself and the world around me and that in itself has allowed me to understand my boys. Stewart defines 'pathways' as how things connect or are connected via events, what leads us to one place connects us to another...

9th April 2024

Insta post...

The first problem is that the very word 'silence' lacks a clear definition. Everyone thinks they know what it means, but on examination, it turns out that there is an enormous range of understanding. Even the dictionary definition is ambiguous. According to the OED, 'silence' means but an absence of all noises and absence of speech.

Alongside my work as an artist, I am currently completing a PhD research degree. I am interested in how the discovery and expression of emotional self-awareness may be achieved when, for whatever reason, the use of words and/or verbal interaction may not be possible. Like my painting, which is framed by the methods and traditions of non-representational (or abstract) art, this research is informed by the personal experiences of being an artist and a mother of two children with autism.

Me life

10th April 2024

I find it difficult to speak words about myself or generally talk about me. This is not something new, it has always been this way since I can remember.

The words were in my head, in my mouth... at the ready, but I could not say them out loud.

Yet I can express myself through a pencil, a doodle, a mark on a surface, a painting. I can express those unspoken words onto a surface where I can make it all make sense?

I use humour to deflect conversations.

Yet I struggle to express my own self using words?

15th April 2024

Thoughts

Sometimes in the studio, I wander around looking at my own work, or I just stop and actually look, really look.

Perhaps it is a type of reflection in thought?

I then ask myself, what am I doing?

How many of something do you have to paint?

When does it stop?

I presume I am looking for something... Then I think I have found it...

But I never seem to find it because it's never enough... And then something happens, a thought, a memory, just being somewhere or seeing something... and it fires me up and it starts the process all over again.

New Work

18th April 2024

New work... But is it actually 'new'?

5th May....2024

When I say the right words. If I had time to think about the question, I could write an informed explanation...

Maybe Ryman cannot explain it in words... He can only describe it through music... And that is enough... because that is his process. (What is my process?)



Figure 34 Studio, 2024



Figure 35 Studio, 20

6th May 2024

Thoughts...

I have been flicking through some books that I purchased during the 'beginnings' of my research. At that time, I knew they were relevant, but I did not know why. I was very overwhelmed with information, a bit overloaded. Now, I flick through them, to check... and I am like 'wow,' it's all there, this understanding of where the jigsaw puzzle pieces are. Now I have this momentous challenge of putting it together... to make sense. This challenge excites me and completely overwhelms me. I know I can do it, but I am also aware that I am feeling fatigued. That I have to be steady, controlled, and pace myself. I know that I have worked so very hard on this, and it has been mentally and physically draining. Running it alongside life and everything else that I live with. It kills me but then it saves me? So today I rest. I gently think about 'an order' of things. Try to forget time... and breathe carefully and slowly.

It's about one's own relationship between painting and what it means to them and maybe how that can relate to others?

We never know for certain what an abstract painting is about; that is the point of abstract art, it is subjective.

But we can hypothesise what it may mean... A connection between thoughts and marks... the beginnings of something?

I just use my experiences (methodology) to perhaps shed light on how we communicate in non-verbal ways via my own personal experiences with the boys. If we cannot articulate words, what do we use?

How does this affect me as an artist and a mother to my boys? From my continuing experiences, what am I transferring across onto my art practice via paints (or tools) onto a surface? What am I actually doing and why? Does it mean anything? Does it have to mean something? And why do I do this?

When I am in my studio, within my own personal headspace...

Am I creating my own Idiosyncratic language between experience and paint? Am I using a surface to transfer thoughts as utterances to create marks within that space? Something unreadable, yet relatable? Something that can connect with others in different ways... An understanding of something not yet fully understood. Perhaps I am shaping the beginnings of an idiosyncratic form of language.

This is what my research degree is about.

11th May 2024

My thoughts...

Is it language? Language means to communicate... This is not necessarily communicating as such because my son cannot comprehend certain things, he just does not understand.

It can feel like it's more like a sensory language, an intuitive understanding, or a just knowing via child and mother.

The same way that I apply paint to the surface. What to paint, what to leave out...

When to start and when to stop...

What's the difference?

Except perhaps no spoken words have been exchanged... but visually assessing, visually doing, visually understanding.

I think it's how I work anyway, but the boys have enabled me to consider how and why I do that.

Like a step back, as if in slow motion, I see things that maybe I just did not notice before, or take more notice of? All before they entered my life...

Or maybe I did not regard the 'little things' as so important in my everyday life? (Maitland reference... Knowing, releasing... Seeing more?).

To stand back, to break down, to see, to feel, to understand. Life slowed down... You could say partly to their delay in growing up. What was considered normal, to what was not normal for me, for us?

My life, the boys... I was forced to slow down, to step back... to really see and to actually understand.

Not sure if it is a language... but then it goes back to maybe a 'form' of language...

That is one of my questions... "What is language?" Still a complicated question in itself, will need a lot of thought...

20th May 2024

I am not trying to give meaning to a painting, I do not believe that you can truly understand abstraction, and why would I want to know? Why do we need to know?

I am trying to understand how I have/may have/might get to that point. What takes or makes that painting become (or come into being)? Why are we so fascinated by what we see but perhaps do not understand?

My link is language via marks, the initial marks... the beginnings... experiences via marks (drawing and Asemic writing). And how that transposes onto a surface and becomes a collection of non-verbal beginnings...

22nd May 2024

Communicating my process...

I don't think you can have an answer, or it is near impossible to have 'a universal answer,' because as we know art is subjective.

What I have learnt is that I have looked at questions, questioned my questions, and looked within myself as both an artist and a mother and asked myself why I do what I do.

Through that, I have created a system of thought. I have created or been made aware of a process by using myself as the researcher.

Using my own personal experiences.

Painting – what is it?

Does it mean anything... Does it need to?

Does it do anything?

Why paint?

27th May 2024

The beginning.

In order to understand, then I need to go back to a 'beginning.' What is the beginning?

What influences and shapes it?

What do I think a beginning could feel or look like?

The beginning - thoughts, experiences, memories...

State of mind

Before words – we create utterances, the unspoken, the non-verbal, the nonsensical

When something is nothing... a scuff, a mark, a stain... They could be considered as utterances – before the marks...

Memory

Experience

Thought

Utterances

Marks

Drawing  
Painting

30th May 2024

What am I doing in the studio? What is your daily routine? That's not how I work... The process is in my head, a feeling... Intuitive.

A working day changes, it's up and down... There is no routine.

Just messing about, testing. They work, they don't work...

I think about it more than actually making it.

31st May 2024

Writing.

My work, it's ok... Maybe it's good, or I am trying to make it good or to try and make it all make sense...

I know that the beginning is important... To set it off in the right way... So I have been working hard on that, words are slow... The word count is like a snail. I know that I have lots to do... and this bit is important... Once I get a 'flow' I know how to proceed and adapt it as I go along... I am trying to make it 'link' as I go along... As in one thing connects to another...

So, I have begun the journey forward and I will be ok. Limping but managing, not well... Up and down.

31st May 2024

More thoughts...

It's a weird feeling... It's like you are truly beginning to understand something that has been puzzling you for most of your life. It's what has kept you creating and making and doing what you do... And then, by turning to words, your words and other people's words, and a theory or theories, begin to make sense and you feel this fresh understanding. Although you know that you have only scratched the surface, you can already feel that things are changing, my perception is changing, my thoughts on painting and my work is changing. In a weird and an unknowing way, it is scary but it's also so very liberating.

The writing process...

This is happening naturally... I am just writing and it seems as if the answers are coming first... I presume... Then I go back and fill in the gaps, bulk it up and make it all solid as a piece of research.

1st June 2024

The White Painting.

There are certain paintings that I would find it hard to part with, this is one of them. Firstly, I had no idea what I was doing so it was a difficult painting... It exhausted me and it took longer than normal. When I look at it, it says nothing to me? Yet I find it incredibly peaceful to be in its presence... To just know it is there, allows me to feel better about stuff.

Abstract painting baffles me at times.

Need to go food shopping... boring.

Paper 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024

I love working with paper; there is no pressure... it's just paper.

Yet there is something delicate, a fragility, a simplicity, something tangible but at the same time obscure.

5<sup>th</sup> June 2024

A painting. I do not think it's finished but sometimes I like to just see it for what it is. I am not sure if it works as a painting... but it is just at that 'moment' of uncertainty and that in itself can be an interesting thing to think about. Well for me, maybe that would bore others (probably).

The amusing thing is... Now that I have written that post. I see it as finished? Thinking about my painting. I think it's Hilton underneath - the abstraction and Ryman on top... meaning... The object becomes nothing, but layers exist. Or it's what brings me peace in myself.

Like Ryman says: he knows what he is doing but he doesn't know what he is doing. It's something and at the same time it's nothing. And who actually cares? It's this... What I want to happen... I think that is what my 'aim' is and has always been about. Like a veil of sorts... But was never sure how to achieve it... Now I kind of do know...

I think there is a method in my madness... which I am approaching or getting to...

But it could all change...

Worked out what my work is about... taken me most of my life... in-between life... but I have been trying to understand it, as in experimentation (maybe the process) over that last eight years (through an education system).

I think that is what I have been doing and continue to do.

It is just now I have a realisation and a better understanding of the 'whys'...

A turning point today. A knowing of where I am and what it's all about. I know where I am at and where I want to go. A sense of peace now.

9th June 2024

Was wondering how to display these... use Ryman's method – tape. Coloured and clear tape, layer them... It's what I use anyway... tape.

10th June 2024

The paint can speak for itself. There are no feelings attached to it... I wanted to post something, don't know if it's finished or if I even like it?

I put it up to see... See what happens... Does it surprise me or do I delete it because it's just not right... yet?

I like that painting (all the white ones)... It becomes something that I am aiming for/towards... if it was well received - I feel pressure... Pressure to make what others like instead of painting what I need to paint and express with paint with regard to myself.

It also means others are unsure, it's different... They may see something? But not everything as a whole...

It's not aesthetically pleasing, it's non-objective... There is no apparent story or narrative.

They are marks.



Figure 36 Studio, 2025



Figure 37 Studio, 2025

17th June 2024, 4:05 a.m. morning ramble to myself.

I am coming to the conclusion that painting is fakery, a fakery to conceal realities... Life can be hard. Paint can hold us in a moment of not knowing because not knowing is better than actually knowing... It becomes a need, like a drug... To find something required, whether to paint or to view a painting, in search of something to fill gaps of what we as humans need most... to feel something... Because it's all part of being human and being a human can be arduous.

What something is and what something is not.

Something is a concept that exists, has a presence, or has a reality.

It can be a physical entity, an abstract idea, or an intangible concept.

Something can be defined as the opposite of nothing, implying that it has a distinct identity, properties, or characteristics.

What Something Is Not:

Something is not nothing, which is the complete absence of anything.

Something is not a void or an empty space, as it implies the existence of something, even if it's intangible or abstract.

Something is not a concept that is purely theoretical or hypothetical, as it implies a tangible or perceivable reality.

Something is not the absence of existence, as it implies a presence or a being. Not sure where I got this text from...

In summary, something is a concept that exists, has a presence, or has a reality, whereas something is not the absence of existence, nothing, or a void.

20th June 2024

'Beginnings'

I suppose my physical beginnings are the marks I make initially.

But the beginnings before I apply to surface are the MET (Memories, Experiences, Thoughts).

My work is about capturing it quickly... So smaller works (like paper) are my way of doing it. Using cheap canvases (like paper) allow me to transpose the pure first marks... And that is important to me.

Because those marks can represent something that we can be drawn towards. Perhaps something which is 'universal' in our biological sense of being.

A familiarity (like language) of something which we can find difficult to explain – yet hold our own somethings (MET) which can be difficult to articulate into spoken words but can hold themselves as thoughts.

Something that is imprinted into our minds, a visual which can set off something else... a pursuit, a need to know to make sense so we make more, we make the same or similar of the version of works... In an ongoing process to understand something.

I think to 'not know' is a very important aspect with regard to painting, both as a painter and to view a painting. My own research is based on the tip of the beginnings, in respect of why we do certain things and what they might mean... As I am beginning to write up my own research, which does not come naturally to me.... so many words... so many pages of words... How do I use it or them? To make it all make sense?

Painting does not have to be justified to make sense. Why should it have to make sense?

Obviously, others may already know that, but I have concentrated on the reasoning through my own life via academic research.

Yet here is the conundrum... I now have to write about it. I have to write about why abstract painting does not need to make sense to be understood.

It seems my quest in life is to make life difficult for myself...

22nd June 2024

Thoughts...

I paint over a few weeks, maybe longer; I add things here and there. Currently, I work small; I suppose I am experimenting and researching together. I don't plan or know what is next or if something is finished...



Figure 38 Studio, 2024

22nd June 2024

Each time I do something to a painting, something has changed or altered in myself or of that which is around me – I can't plan, or I do not want to plan. I try to capture something, a moment, a time, a feeling of just knowing but not knowing at the same time.

Sometimes it can just work, sometimes it needs more time and sometimes they can fail. And equally, the failures can sometimes be the successful pieces but at later point in time, or they lead to something better.

I suppose there is an indication of something unexplainable, something which words themselves cannot articulate, and I suppose that is the point or my point.

I don't think anything is complicated about it or hidden. I think it's about learning to slow down or just stop and feel what is actually around you. To form some sort of silence and just let something happen, no narrative, no meaning, just a personal interpretation, a release of a moment of something.

This is my interpretation of breaking down about ten thousand words of research text. What I am good at is 'breaking things down' so that they can be understood. But not understood as a tale but as something to contemplate. The words are the research, and the paintings are the processes of those words. It all gets complicated and messy, so many words that need to make sense...

Painting is not always about making sense; it is also about the 'not knowing', and that is why I prefer to paint.

30th June 2024

Life has changed again; my perception continues to shift and hopefully at a slower pace. Positivity is required each day, every day... That is how I manage, that is the only way forward.

8th July 2024

It has been a very difficult year, life and stuff, then illness. I think I am peeping out of the other side, not fixed but a bit more pain-free.

I get Abstraction, I understand it. I understand it through myself (not sure about others).

Unfinished reasoning.

It's about repeating, a loop, part of a process (personal) process.

Why you keep doing the same thing? (Sign of madness).

Unfinished is accepting it for what is. And then you go do it again... to feel something... again. It's not a big deal to the artist; they go make more. But to a viewer, they do not understand... especially so many years down the line.

It's about letting go of it... accepting it... repeating the process again in the hope of finding a new ending/conclusion. Multiple works are made, all within the process. The artist decided what works and what does not...? Then the viewer decides what works and what does not...? And what do they mean? It's why it's subjective... not to the artist but to everybody else.

Abstract painting is an interpretation of the artist's process of learning, mostly unaware of why they do it, not wanting to talk about it or even understand it. It's their work, their life, and how they can non-verbally express themselves without words.

10th July 2024

Life feels a bit weird. It's like I have been here... And not here? In between worlds.

Losing hours, days... pain and discomfort and the pain relief makes time merge into a fog.

23rd July 2024

"Words"

I do not find 'writing easy,' not in-depth essay writing... I get lost in the words, a vast number of words and letters... I struggle to make it all make sense.

I do not really get lost in paint, I do not have to make it make sense, I just paint, and that is easier for me, it makes my life feel that little bit easier.

27th July 2024

Thoughts...

If you are doing what you think you should be doing, then time is no longer relevant.

Time runs out when you are not doing those things...

22nd August 2024

Stating the obvious in my mind... But are my remarks obvious?

A thought... I believe thought processes take place within our everyday. Washing up, walking to the shops, making dinner. To have a space is perhaps (in my own circumstances) a place where I am able to apply those ideas onto a surface or an object, etc. Whether that be the kitchen table, a surface, or outside.

Sometimes it's a scribble or a mark on the back of an envelope... It's still a beginning, and for me to think it was just a thought, which in itself is the most exciting part of making art because I am making those thoughts within scribbles and marks become something.

4th September 2024

First day back at school.

His uniform went from navy to black... That is all it took...

Meltdown.

14th September 2024

If I was on 'top form' I would have done more work, but really... what I do is enough.

The paintings just happen, no expectations, then I stop, hang them on the wall... And then 5 or 10 mins... later... much later, I can see if they work or not...

17th September 2024

Instagram...

Not being present in that world holds some relief... because that world is not real. It's just a world of words and images held together in a loose digital format, then held in a rectangle-shaped object.

There are no sounds, no smells, no natural human instincts to measure to understand others in a humanitarian way.

21st September 2024

A transition.

A painting.

Something different.

A transition, maybe?

It's curious, you like it, but you do not...?

You know there is something there...

But you are uncertain...

You know it's the beginning of another beginning.

Paint this on a larger scale...

Not sure if I can...

Not sure if I like it...

More fascinated in why we just slap something together... and we don't know why...

And does that make it a better painting?

27th September 2024

What is my painting suggesting?

Nothing really... I painted it for myself, to make me feel better.

I just like the colours.

It works.

Better than the big one... currently.

I suppose it's a step forward (not sure how or where?).

A mental step forward... in my work and how I feel about it.

4th October 2024

Yellow and Green painting.

I like the yellow.

Maybe because the paintings seem to be evolving... It is what lurks underneath... Then I cover them up...

I am not sure... I like them?

9th October 2024.

Paint and writing.

It's a little strange... I know that I cannot paint freely when I am writing and thinking or when I am in that theoretical mindset.

I have to be one or the other.

Yet... The more I write theoretically, the more I understand.

I feel a sense of 'liberation' from the paint itself.

It's not that the paint shackles me, it just creates or forms a new understanding of how to mix it, apply it, scrape it on and off and let my mind and the paint decide what to do.

When I am writing, that relationship is strained because my head is full of thoughts (e.g., currently the methodology or glue of bonding theory and being creative using words).

Or being in the creative 'zone' where I have absorbed theory and now, I release or free myself up to the paint.

I know that it's going to be another three/four months of just writing.

Always at loggerheads, the only difference is... that I know I need to look after my health. The colder months are setting in, and this current written research has an end date in sight.

At the same time... I am nearly there... in making things glue together... it's sticky with bits missing but it's 'there'... stuff makes sense.

That is important for me... to just make sense.

The more I understand... the better I am, both as a person and an artist.

But it all tires me out... and being a mum can be difficult because health wise I feel a bit drained.

There is improvement but I know it's long term... Hence me giving myself three/four months to just rest and keep warm while writing.

16th October 2024

Words

I wrote this at 5 a.m. this morning... It came to me (after sleep and a switching off)... An epiphany of sorts?

Being able to put my work alongside 'psychology' as a form of methodology.

Quite a good one... as in being able to understand what it means...

And there I saw it... the link... it will take a while... maybe this is how Catherine sees things...? Not the same as me, but what something is in an academic sense.

The paintings are the artefacts... the non-verbal story.

Marks/Asemic...

They are in part 'self-awareness'... to come to understanding... to form clarity...

Painting is to make meaning of the painting making... (story-making)

Mixing asemic and painting... they cannot work one without the other.

Not necessarily an order, or that is difficult to articulate... or how can you even articulate something that you are unable to or have difficulty talking about... if there is an element of difficult experiences...

just because asemic is done on paper does not mean it is a different form of a mark... it is equivalent to a sketchbook... Catching the thoughts and applying them to a surface sub-consciously.

Asemic is, in a sense clarity forming... and it is being created in a physical sense... articulated from mind to hand (Claxton reference)... the start of my research was Mira... Mira is known to work with both... mark making on rice paper and paintings... Mira was oppressed...(politics).

Romany Eveleigh... does both... she confirms the idea of understanding - clarity through her words and her paper and canvas work.

Painting- is to tell a story (Storytelling)

I think to write about something that you have just painted in an abstract manner... is near impossible.

How can I?

How could I?

It was because you could not find the words in the beginning... because there are no words to describe...

That is the point of painting it in the first place...

That's why I hang it in a wall... because I do not know what it is... Only after the event of painting it... I try to make meaning of it... Times passes, things happen... One thing leads to the next.

When I look back at the painting... the meaning of what the painting was or is... may have shifted (Bob Law) because it's like looking at 'a new.'

(Hilton reference)

The painting is as the painting was... Our perception of what we see or how we see it has changed.

It's why it cannot be put into words, because each time a new person looks at it, they can see it differently than the last time...

In the same way that a person looks at it at a different time... the meaning of what you are 'seeing' has shifted.

Because life moved forward, experiences change... Our perception of those experiences could have shifted...

Ryman used paint... like he is making music, or the music plays within the paint.

(Ryman was story-making) He was trying to make meaning by use of the paint instead of words.

Painting was in some respects his own language in paint. Perhaps musical? Playing and hanging on to notes or rhythms within the paint.

Feeling his way through... Intuitively working...

He knew how it was going to turn out... It had done it many times before (like a sheet of music). Slight changes, like the light shifting in the space changed its rhythm, changed its language... and each time he placed the paper in a new position or place, a new wall (he changed its language)... It left the marks of where it had been before... like Law... a tracker, a marker? A diary of time shifting and leaving traces of what was... A past experience.

The new wall/ space... The new tape being applied... Creating a new experience, a new perception, a new way of looking at the painting (a new story...). Ryman was storytelling... New marks on the paper were to tell a new story...

Every time a painting gets hung on the wall... the circumstances change its perspective... By place, by people, by experience... It will and cannot ever be the same.

Could apply to all paintings...

With abstraction... there is no obvious political stance... because of no direct narrative or no words... It's still raw and as powerful as the moment it was painted.

Henderson... marks... flutter... like words and speech are bouncing off each other... causing a 'tension'...

Daniel Buren... to be exposed... to see a Ryman painting... is to feel it?

It's temporal... making sense of... the experience changes every time you look at it... The experience changes every time you make another... It can never be the same because it's temporal! Just like M... gestures in asemic writing... everything is always moving (and Bob Law)...

(Moving the paper around... changing it... never keeping it 'fixed'... it does not work (in my head).

Could not fix them in a position, could not separate them... could not give them away (sell). It's like I knew they were/are important... more important than the paintings... These were the beginnings of the paintings (I was or they were story-making).

\*\*this is why abstract art is so valuable... in the way that it releases our emotions (physically)... yet still protecting us, we are vulnerable...

Abstraction... is something that protects us, fascinates us, keeps us human... lets us express ourselves (be vulnerable - in a safe way) by NOT explaining it.

but to not talk about it. And that is why we need it... why it's important... and why we will never really understand it... and that is good because that is what keeps us safe within ourselves...

23rd October 2024

The answer...

I wrote the answer... I had already written it! Experiences change you... They change how you look at abstract painting (temporal)... in that moment. Look again... and how you were seeing the painting is new – as your experience has changed.

The painting is a story, it's storytelling... The narrative is your own experience... Time moves forward. How you see the painting anew is based on what else has changed in that time.

25th October 2024

A discovery

Paperwork

This is asemic work...

"They are only pieces of paper" ... I never knew how to fix them... They are still loose in the box...

I change them around... They all mix together...

Always playing... Always messing with what goes where.

Then I put them back in the box.

I was always doing it. Moving them around...

Each one means something and they all connect... They are all experiences, moments. I layer them, it alters... I cluster them together... but I cannot 'fix' them as one piece.

I dropped it... A new mark appeared. The paper work had changed?

Always looking... luminosity... translucent effect... where one experiences layers up on the other.

They are always temporary...



Figure 39 Studio, 2025

Mira was doing the same...

Searching for what feels like most of my life... Then it all begins to make sense.

I was painting/using white... as a reflection of paper (mimesis)... the marks and colours underneath...

Paper itself is temporary... delicate.

Translucent.

26th October 2024

It's a little bit odd... wanting to know something... then seeing it... opening up, understanding it.

It changes how I paint, as in every time I learn or understand a thing...

I become less bothered, less tied up in the actual meaning itself; the meaning is relevant, but thoughts can become bigger than the existing word itself (a self-discovery).

Whatever the new work becomes, it is on another level of thinking and painting.

I am always learning (small steps), theory makes the steps 'bigger'... I think that is why my work can adapt and change at speed... it's propelled by thinking and thought... mostly when I am doing everyday things.

What was the beginning?

The actual beginning...

Mark making... I went back to mark-making in November 2021... just before I started the PhD in February 2022.

Mark making and asemic writing took me to gestures on canvas...

Transferring the marks.

Canvas work: rabbit glue, crayon, pencil, graphite, acrylic...

Then I went to white painting... Then mixing white with colour...

(I think this was me going back to paper through canvas).

Oil enabled me to 'feel'... Play, tactile, smearing... allowed a 'catharsis' effect.

I worked small, then big, then small... Then big.

Swapping and changing... Learning from doing.

3rd November 2024

Why I did a research degree...

I did a research degree for myself. To learn why I need to do certain things and what they may mean overall. I could have done things which were not so emotionally hard and didn't require opening up...



Figure 40 Studio, 2025

A vulnerability in myself. Yet being open can allow you to see and feel things on another level if you choose to listen.

An artist's research never ends... It's all part of the process, I just feel better as a person, a mum and an artist... I understand myself and others better, and I understand what I do in a way that I never did before. And with that comes this sense of 'clarity and calmness'... I believe that was always what I wanted to feel within myself, my life, and my work.

14th November 2024

How to be strong?

How to deal with what is coming?

How to cope with the fear of loss?

2nd December 2024

It's not about feeling trapped. We are all trapped.

It's about a sense of 'order' when something changes and how we adapt... acknowledge and move on or move forward...

How do we deal with that? How do we understand it and make it make sense so that we can reflect upon these new 'things' that have appeared?

How do we balance this and how do we cope?

Everything means something, yet we are unsure of what it may mean. We write things, we say things, we paint things and not always because we know why...

Our perception changes, something can mean one thing, then you look or read it at another point in time, and it can mean something else...

How is that possible? How can something now mean something else, meaning its importance is still relevant because it has changed its meaning and allowed a sense of correlation of thoughts to take place? To allow clarity, to understand why certain things or events happened, and a pathway has opened up leading us to the next event.

The 'what ifs,' the maybes. So many things to sort through, so many things to consider.

All formed on pieces of paper, marks create the memories, points in time, perception changes meanings, meanings alter perceptions. Clarity may form and a need to understand with an urge to

apply it to surface as an utterance of which no language can describe exactly what it means because it's not supposed to.

It's just a beginning of awakenings (Eveleigh), where one moment of memory leads to another as a way of moving through life. Some of us are aware; most of us are asleep.

I thought at first (until recently) that the repetitiveness of the mark(s) was a form of some kind of anguish or oppression (Mira).

To not be able to verbally articulate feelings via words... That made sense. Maybe that is the 'beginnings' of the expression (release) itself, to express in non-verbal terms (Asemic writing) and abstraction, where nothing is obvious because it cannot be. To enable a sense of forward motion is within the processes of our minds where we are in the midst of trying to form some form of understanding (clarity) in how we can accept and acknowledge that of which has caused our everyday to 'move away from its routine alignment' and make us shift in our perception and how we now 'see' things at that new moment in time where the meaning has changed via the new changes that we have just experienced.

When I suggest 'meaning' I am not suggesting something anew but something familiar, something that helps us get through the next stage of acceptance. Reflection forms via clarity and expression takes place via our bodies in moments of bodily gesture through movements (like sound, dance, art). We express to acknowledge to understand, and not always knowing why.

As a bodily experience expressed via expression.

9th December 2024

I paint with my eyes closed and my mind open.

30th December 2024

I lost my way... Now I am beginning to find my way back.

31st December 2024

Bertie constantly maps... He builds alternative worlds/universes. He changes the landscape and reconnects places by changing economic, political, religious and financial systems and logistics.

Designing an array of new flags as representations of a different system and reconnects them to his alternative universe(s).

Each day, the system changes by way of how the day (his real day) moved with regard to his experiences, therefore changing his perception and creating new maps and systems.

Mapping ourselves (life/ pathway) coexists with our perceptions. The mapping alters via our own personal perceptions which can be altered via our personal and ongoing experiences.

Mapping ourselves is a way of (subconsciously) reflecting on the now and our current placement, a stability... something to hold onto, to grasp onto the 'moment'... (Artist's viewpoint)

The viewer acknowledges the space between them at the artefact, a painting in this case (or the mapping of their experiences). Their perception of what they see or connect to... A feeling, a knowing, but a not knowing (something connects).

Language cannot articulate an embodied experience of how an unexplained feeling...

Bertie - it's Bertie and his mapping... He is a genius!

End result – why we do what we do...

Abstraction is a form of mapping ourselves.

The word map derives from the early 16th century: from medieval Latin *mappa mundi*, literally 'sheet of the world', from Latin *mappa* 'sheet, napkin' + *mundi* 'of the world' (genitive of *mundus*).

The activity or process of creating a picture or diagram that represents something.

Mapping... We are continually mapping our existence in the world we live in.

Creatively and expressively.

Ryman was mapping... the white paintings on the wall... previous marks...

Outside... memories (experiences)... Perception.

A photograph shifts and moves through time.

The childhood memories stay the same... recreates them.

Or recaptures them via image again and again.

A sensory language – primal...

The outside environment... sensory, feel, smell, touch... unexplained via words... walks and walks again... to keep feeling (catharsis)... and express through a language of colour.

Colour is his language.

Recognition imagery, photographic memory triggers... recognition, to feel it again...

Is it about looking to feel?

A sense of belonging? A sense of place?

To understand... always... reflection... acceptance.

My placement... who I am?

Is that not what we are all trying to establish... in a creative manner because the limits of language cannot explain our in-depth and subconscious selves?

Painting is knowledge... I learn from doing.

Creates the storytelling (the experiences).

Every time they step outside... it fills 'anew'... their perception has changed and they see something anew.

It is why we keep doing the same thing... like Bob Law... the same space but time has shifted forward...

Our perception has changed because we have to move forward.

But we go back out again... The changes are not so significant (Claxton,) but enough for us to do it all again.

Paper and Painting 2025

Using implicit knowledge by doing and incorporating ethnography as a way of documenting my thoughts enabled me to understand how I worked between both paper work and painting and how they influenced each other yet still work within their own autonomy.

I have to take breaks from painting. I put them away and create a new blank space. Then I go back to paper... It's like a manual reset, I think I have always worked in this way. A process of reflection and learning to understand what I have been doing so that I can move forward. I cannot repeat or do the same thing with paint, yet with paper, I always go back to something familiar... Perhaps paper provides a form of stability and paint is to express?

Yet working with the paper informs a sense of clarity required to move back into painting.

I never work between the two, I work with paper or I stop and work with paint, they are linked but not together physically but mentally they work in tandem.

I wrote a research paper about what abstract painting could be...

It was never about the end product; it was about how and why we got to that point.

The paper is not stuck down, it can be re-positioned...

It's like it's never supposed to be fixed down but moveable, free flowing.

So, the frame (to show its current position) needs to be temporary.

I like being me. Hemmed in by paint... it does my head in.

Like I am supposed to be a painter.... I am not.

I ask questions and I work out the answers... whatever that surface is?

I feel obliged to write this over my disappointment and a tad of frustration for not knowing 'enough' in the understanding of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical theories up to this point. Yet at the same time, how would I have known prior to my studies, meaning that I had to do the work (implicit knowledge) to understand the work I have done. To then see the entire relevance of Merleau-Ponty's theories in reference to my own research. Yet I know that I want to learn more, there is so much more to understand and I have used what I can, yet also knowing that what I perceive now as being relevant (current) could also change with regards to how I read Merleau-Ponty's writings in another point of time. I am confirming to myself, that I can only write what I know at this present time and expect that my interpretation of my own current perceptions may have changed after this time has elapsed. As, what I perceive now, I may not perceive later dependant on my own life experiences that I will have encountered since I wrote this paragraph, at 1:03 p.m. on March 7th, 2025.

10<sup>th</sup> March 2025

I cannot paint. I do not want to paint. Too much has happened and I am writing up. As I write I reflect (again), from what I know or have come to know from this research, is that I cannot paint because I am at the beginning of another stage or process in my life. I am experiencing something new, something that I have never experienced before. I cannot paint because that experience is what I am living through now. I am not ready to release... so perhaps 'catharsis' is not just an immediate release, that it can take time to reach that point?

I also think, with regards to implicit knowledge (thoughts)... that up to this point I understand enough. And for me to learn any more... the research needs to end, and I need to spend at least a year or so just painting and maybe a few notes. Like I will need to rest, to let my mind settle to just relax and reflect, I am tired of words, using words, finding words to use. This thesis will hit 40k words and no more. Why do you need to go on? Enough words to understand... more words have yet to be discovered after this end.

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2025

Fragment. Fragmentary. Disjointed yet still connected.

Fragmentation – memory (to me). Disjointed but connected.

5th April 2025

Defragmentation. To defrag. I used to watch them 'defrag' on a Windows 98. I always wondered why it fascinated me. I am no computer whizz but this always stood out. Sorting out, shifting through, tidying up. It's only now I see it on my studio wall, my version of my own defragmentation.

6th April 2025

Silence is an underestimated tool... Silence is in essence the unveiling of truth.

11th April 2025

I should not complain about it being quiet... Quiet is what I need.

Maybe I just feel quiet in myself?

I have not felt quiet in myself for quite a long time.

Maybe I have just forgotten what it feels like...

I do remember this feeling.

Quite bizarre...

I used to feel this a lot.

30th April 2025

*How can an object... enable a feeling?*

Coffee matters.

As do memories (the ones you wish to keep).

There are plenty I wish to keep... hence the images and objects around which the memories reside...

the feeling of these things... (To grasp and perceive... to give meaning too...as objects...)

Objects become a vessel of our own embodiment... to remember... the feeling of these things...

21st May 2025

Painting...

An abstract painting is a painting, and the painting is what you perceive it to be at the temporal moment. If you have assigned words to describe it, then they are your words and your words alone.

To understand what an abstract painting is about, you need to look within yourself, for only you hold its meaning.

25th May 2025

I paint to understand myself.

What that painting is or to understand its meaning is temporal. The painting can have many meanings depending on when I see it.

It is not for me to tell you what the painting is; it is for you to decide what the painting means to you.

To look within yourself and find meaning – if meaning is applicable.

My paintings hold no words; only, you assign it words, and those words are yours and yours alone.

My paintings are seldom titled because they can mean different things at different points in time, depending on me and how I currently feel. I worked out why I do stuff and wrote about it. Now, I have even less to say than I did before. Now I understand it's better that way.

29th May 2025

What defines an artist?

An artist is not defined through the life they have lived (not cause and effect – quote Ponty).

An artist is defined by how they express themselves through their own individual experiences of a life lived, by way of mapping their own individual and unique positioning (placement) within the world we live in.

5th June 2025

What defines who we are?

What makes us who we are?

Painting... as my research has informed me.

I paint intuitively, I paint to feel and to express something (Catharsis).

I am not always aware of what I have painted, and it can take time for it come into being, if at all.

How I perceive the painting can alter depending upon the temporal moment of seeing the painting and my current and individual experiences.

20th June 2025

*It's never about the end.*

*It's always about a new beginning.*

*PAINTINGS*



Figure 41 Untitled oil on canvas, 50 x 50cm, 2025



Figure 42 Untitled, oil on canvas, 9" x 12", 2025



Figure 43 Untitled, oil on canvas, 6" x 6", 2005



Figure 44 Untitled Acrylic and oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2024



Figure 45 Untitled acrylic and oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2024



Figure 46 Untitled, oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2024



Figure 47 Untitled, acrylic and oil on canvas, 50 x 50cm, 2024



Figure 48 Untitled, oil on canvas, 9" x 12", 2025



Figure 49 Untitled, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2024



Figure 50 Untitled, oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2024



Figure 51 Untitled, oil on canvas, 100 x 100cm, 2024



Figure 52 Untitled, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2024



Figure 53 Untitled, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 50 x 50cm, 2024



Figure 54 Untitled, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2024



Figure 55 Untitled, oil on canvas, 9"x 12", 2024



Figure 56 Acrylic and oil on canvas, 30cm x 30cm, 2024



Figure 57 Acrylic and oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2024



## *GROUP SHOWS*

## *Group Shows*

During this research, I participated in two group shows:

*Gesture to Geometry*, Platform A, 2022.

The practice of non-objective painting that erupted in the early 20th century was soon divided into two camps; gestural abstraction, that built upon the loose compositions of the post-impressionists, and geometric abstraction, that was inspired by Euclidean geometric shapes and rejected the notion of gesture and the trace of the artist's hand. The opposing lineages of both the refined vocabulary of geometrically organised forms and the painterly gestural signature of the artist remain today and reflect a deeper philosophical understanding of human behaviour. (Platform A, 2022)

*No Last Dance*, Newcastle Contemporary Art, 2024.

A group exhibition and one-day symposium exploring how time is intrinsic to the act of making and viewing painting. The exhibition will showcase exciting approaches to painting that will be a stimulus for discussion about how artists sustain a motivated and ambitious practice with or without public recognition. (NCA, 2024)



Figure 58 Gesture to Geometry, Platform A, 2022

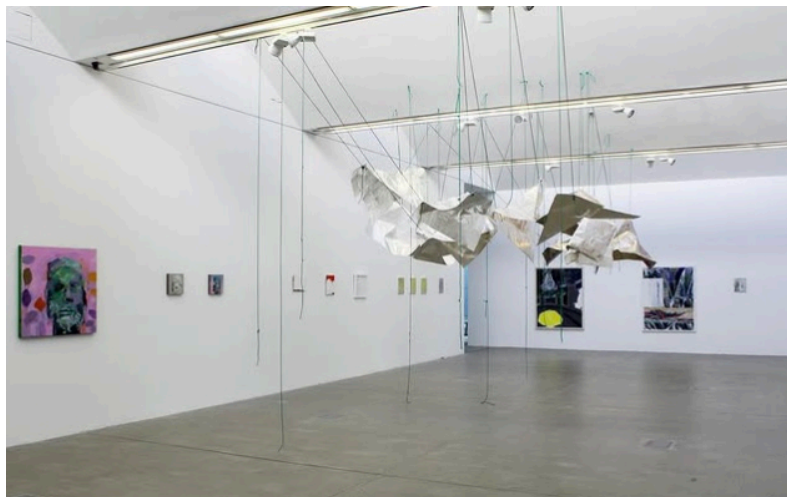


Figure 59 No last Dance, NCA, 2024

## *CONCLUSION*

## *A Novel Methodology*

My first contribution to knowledge has been by way of synthesising a novel methodological approach, an insight into the presented pieces of abstract art as a form of language which can be used to explore and contextually situate “why I do what I do.”

An individual process of creative mimesis informed story-making for storytelling as a mechanism of learning through difficult experiences and ascribing meaning to those experiences. Meaning-making is a process wherein one imbues a particular event or phenomenon with a sense of personal significance, where the consequent subjective meaningfulness reflects the experience of feeling in instances of perceived personal significance (Dishon et al., 2018).

Storytelling via reflective narrative and the articulation of this personal process of meaning-making enables a way of reflexive learning through difficult experiences and finding meaning within those experiences as a way of overcoming them and being able to develop the resilience necessary to move beyond them.

There is also a potential for the transferability of experiential learning from this process of personal mimesis, in terms of how we might better understand self and look towards helping others who may have similar situations and experiences. This, in turn, could potentially convey or determine and shape a wider collective set of experiences or phenomena of therapeutic value to those who experience them.

I believe I have encompassed the aims of this thesis by contextually framing this methodology as a unique contribution to knowledge through the attribution of a novel methodological approach to contemporary art practice which relates directly to my research question: Abstract Painting: An Idiosyncratic Form of Language.

## *Abstract Painting: A Fragmented Memory Cluster*

This contribution to knowledge proposes that abstract painting could be considered as a fragmentary memory cluster. Fragmentary could be described as incomplete or made up of pieces; it defines something that is not whole and only existing in fragments. Memory is an essential cognitive function that permits individuals to acquire, retain, and recover data that could define a person's identity (Zlotnik & Vansintjan, 2019). Cognition refers to all the activities and processes concerned with the acquisition, storage, retrieval and processing of information, regardless of whether these processes are explicit or conscious.

Merleau-Ponty stated that a perception or memory, for example, is not just a mental state, but a perception or memory of something (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 16).

Time is not abstract or detached, but a constant part of the way we live, think, and interact with our surroundings. Merleau-Ponty argued that temporality is not a series of isolated moments strung together but an ongoing and interrelated process. Past, present, and future are interconnected, with each shaping and influencing the other. For example, our understanding of the past is always tied to our current perspective, and our thoughts about the future are influenced by both past experiences and present circumstances".

(PhilosophiesOfLife.org, 2025)

Kahneman states that the way in which we perceive and remember an experience can be significantly influenced by our memories (Kahneman, 2011, pp. 408-410). He also explores the concept of the two selves: the 'experiencing self,' which lives in the present moment, and the 'remembering self,' which looks back on experiences and forms memories (Kahneman, 2011, pp. 380-381).

Within the context of myself as an artist who paints abstract paintings, I paint in clusters (see Fig. 39). Through *doing* (implicit Knowledge), I have come to understand that my paintings are akin to my own individual fragmented pieces of memories and experiences (past, present, and future). Like a cluster or group of canvases (surfaces) that work together to store, manage, and connect my individual memories and experiences, Kahneman states that while you are living an experience, you are also

simultaneously creating memories that will influence your future decisions (Kahneman, 2011, pp. 380-381).

I would like to suggest that we ought to consider abstract painting as *a fragmented cluster of memory*, where a person's identity is defined by their memories (Zlotnik & Vansintjan, 2019) and the '*remembering self*' which looks back on experiences and forms memories (Kahneman, 2011, pp. 380-381).

I propose to considering that Abstract painting could be viewed as a cognitive process of fragmented memories and experiences, which could fill in gaps or leave gaps open. In this unique way, abstract art, like our memories and our identity, can be both the seen and the unseen, the finished and the unfinished, the visible and the invisible.

## *Asemic Writing: A Form of Abstract Art*

I would like to propose the notion of *asemic writing as a form of abstract art* as a unique contribution to knowledge by considering 'marks' that are created because speech itself would not suffice. These 'utterances,' are the beginnings of an idiosyncratic form of language. Throughout this thesis I have questioned: how is this dissimilar from creating a piece of abstract art?

In order to answer this question, I have suggested that abstract art is something which ultimately evades description through words and is possible because it can only be informed *visually* – through acts of seeing and the production of visual marks. I have repeatedly interrogated the difficulty in associating creative expression with spoken language and words because it ultimately leads to the predicament that if we cannot articulate words to express ourselves, what do we do?

As Eveleigh suggests within her own work, it takes time for clarity to form and to make sense of our thoughts and how we start to articulate those feelings onto a surface. Could we therefore consider Clarity as *the thought before the mark*, an array of lucidity, a moment of, or a prevalent time, where the makings of the *mark* prevail. A feeling, a readiness of anticipation that everything just feels right. A gut feeling, a listening to oneself, yet still not consciously attuned to exactly what? Yet enough to utter and create utterances that compel us to create a mark, or a scribble, or a scratch.

Through this research I aim to demonstrate that asemic writing is a form of abstract art. The beginnings of language form itself as thought via clarity, where language itself cannot fully articulate itself and where we form a bodily gesture to apply marks on a surface, not necessarily knowing why or what they may mean. A visual mark is due to the suggestion of thought, a physicality between self, object, and surface with the body becoming a shared site of embodied meaning through gestures, expressions, and actions.

As Berger stated:

If the new language of images were used differently, it would, for its use, confer a new kind of power. Within it we could begin to define our experiences more precisely in areas where words are inadequate (Seeing comes before words). (Berger, 2008, p. 26)

Abstraction painting ultimately evades description through words and is possible because it can only be informed *visually*, through acts of seeing and the production of visual marks. Berger is himself suggesting that seeing comes before words. A new language could take place which could define our experiences where words themselves are inadequate. Is that not a clear and concise definition of abstract painting?

## Mapping

Could an artist be identified as a person who maps, meaning the experiences themselves cannot easily be put into words? It is my argument that an artist creates work which expresses itself within a space, or a surface, or an object through sound or movement by way of mapping their placement within their world.

Mapping ourselves coexists within our experiences. the process of mapping alters depending on our own personal perceptions. In this way, we (subconsciously) reflect on the present and our current placement within the world, perhaps mirroring a sense of belonging or stability. An artist does not necessarily need to confirm that art is created as some form of map to hang on the wall. I use both the floor and walls to paint onto surfaces, and naturally presume that a painting should hang on the wall. Yet if I myself placed a painting on the floor and viewed it from above, how would that alter my perception, and would the concept of *mapping* present itself more easily if this were the case?

Perhaps Law was finding himself? Each and every day, Law would go outside and would repeatedly position himself in the same spot, like a pin on a map, recording what he saw. Fogle suggests that this act of repetition, of artistic record-keeping, also enabled Law to find his position within it all, and thus to find himself (Law, 2015, p. 8).

Roth's essay states that Flusser himself describes Schendel's work as a form as a map: "The overall impression is one of a completely meaningless text, yet one that can be deciphered at any point if one focuses attention on just that point. In this sense the sheet is a map of the world" (Roth, 2014).

I would like to propose the notion of mapping as a unique contribution to knowledge. As I have stated within my research, mapping coexists within our unique lived experiences, where mapping is shaped via our own individual perceptions as a way of (subconsciously) reflecting on the present and our current placement within the world and arguably provides an anchoring sense of belonging or stability.

## *What Defines an Artist?*

How or why does someone self-identify as an 'artist'? The definition of the word 'artist' means a person who creates. This contribution to knowledge is to consider that the definition of the phrase 'one who creates' is a rather limited representation of what describes an artist. An artist could be defined as a person who uses creativity as a way of expressing themselves to others because speech itself would not suffice. An artist could be considered a person who uses their creativity to map, as a way of (subconsciously) reflecting on their own individual experiences. An artist could be considered a storyteller, by way of creating art to make meaning from their individual memories and experiences. An artist could be considered both a researcher and the researched, as I myself have done throughout this thesis by trying to understand 'why I do what I do.'

Yet what I believe to be the *essence* of what defines the word 'artist' can be found within the words of Merleau-Ponty himself:

The style of an artist's life and the style of the artist's work may be intertwined, then, not because one explains the other, but because a projection of what the work will be offers the artist an interpretation of the way in which his life emerged against the background of its preconditions. (Gilmore, 2005, pp. 306-307)

I believe Merleau-Ponty is stating that life itself does not define the artist, but that the circumstances the artist lives within influence that life. What defines the artist *is their ability to use art to express their individual experiences.*

Through my research, I would like to propose that an artist is not defined through the life they have lived. Rather, they are defined by how they express themselves through their own individual experiences of a lived life. In my own experience, my life as a mother of two children with autism has influenced my life, but it is my unique experiences of *the life that I have lived* which has made me the artist that I am today.

"I believe it takes a long time to just  
'know' what you are searching for,  
And those searches can change you as you live  
your life and experiences change you.  
Memories re-shape you, and the ways in  
which we think and see things alters.  
Life is like one big journey of trying to  
make sense of the world around you and we  
*have had to live a life - to understand a  
life lived*". - *Diary entry, 2024*

## *What Is Next?*

Everything I have learnt in respect of answering my own curiosity is from living my everyday life, by doing and reflecting upon and since I have been writing, I have not been painting because articulating what everything might mean takes me a long time to do. So, what is next? I shall continue to live my *everyday* and in-between being a mother and an artist, I shall continue painting and doodling the *today's to do* lists on the back of old envelopes.

I have felt this disappointment in not knowing '*enough*' in reference to Merleau-Ponty philosophical theories up to this point. Yet at the same time how would I have known '*enough*' prior to my studies? Meaning that I had to do the work (tacit knowledge) to understand the work I have done. I had to go back and make sense of my life lived with regards to understanding its relevance, in respect of Merleau-Ponty's theories in reference to my research.

Yet I know that I want to learn more, there is so much more to understand and I have written what I can, yet also knowing that what I perceive now as being relevant (current) could also change with regards to how I read Merleau-Ponty's writings in another point in time. I am confirming to myself, that I can only write what I know at this present time and expect that my interpretation of my own current perceptions may have changed after this time has elapsed. Just the theory itself fascinates me and I suppose that is what it all about or what it has been about, to understand abstraction by using a montage of methodologies as a way to articulate my own curiosity, for it to make some form of sense and a new way of thinking about thinking.

What happens next in the studio I am unsure of? Yet I feel within myself that there is this sense of liberation, a freedom of thoughts and the restraints that I felt painting previously have loosened, so what I make next I do not yet know? That in itself is exciting for me because despite the '*knowing*' within this research itself, learning never stops, it gets better and I hope to look back upon this research and see it as; a beginning to a new way of thinking, by way of a new understanding of oneself and by accepting my own placement upon this ball of rock that we call Planet Earth.

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