Familiar beyond Recognition:
Translation in Contemporary Abstraction

Simon C. Degroot
BFA (Hons)

Queensland College of Art
Arts, Education and Law
Griffith University

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2017

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Simon C. Degroot 17 February 2017

Table of Contents

Abstract iii

Acknowledgements v

List of Illustrations vi

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 Modernist Shapes in Abstract Painting 15

1.1 Simplification, Construction, Design 17

1.2 Transcription and Translation 23

1.3 The Power of Shapes 37

Chapter 2 Samples and Shapes in Contemporary Painting 44

2.1 Shaped and Reshaped: Secondary Forms 45

2.2 Visual Poetics: Scale and Arrangement 60

2.3 Confusion and Complexity: Visual Grammar, Abstract Rhyme 63

Chapter 3 Familiar Beyond Recognition: Studio Methodology and Outcomes 81

3.1 *Select Reshape*, 2014, Spiro Grace Art Rooms, Brisbane 82

3.2 *Shallow Space*, 2014, Australian National Capital Artists, Canberra 84

3.3 *Hilton Mural*, 2014, Brisbane 86

3.4 *The Pillars Project Mural*, 2014, Brisbane 88

3.5 *Indirect Response*, 2015, Postgraduate and Other Projects, Brisbane 90

3.6 *Nundah Train Station Mural*, 2015, Brisbane 97

3.7 *Hard Graphics*, 2016, Spiro Grace Art Rooms, Brisbane 99

3.8 *Picture Building*, 2016, Kick Arts Contemporary, Cairns 102

Conclusion 105

References 109

Illustrations 119

Abstract

This research contributes to discourse on abstract art in relation to a contemporary context of image sharing and exchange. Many contemporary artists working with abstraction use visual elements from art history, popular culture, product design, the computer desktop and architecture in their work. The once unrecognisable non-figurative forms of Modernist abstraction have now become recognisable objects and forms in contemporary abstraction. Artists such as Charline von Heyl, Christine Streuli, Natalya Hughes, Peter Atkins, and Ryan Gander make visual reference to pre-existing forms in their work, shifting our understanding of abstraction as being based only in formal qualities. Translation as process and concept is a useful model to interrogate how particular abstract forms are re-employed in contemporary abstraction, how they are recognised, why they are familiar, and why this is important to understanding contemporary abstraction.

I argue that both a history of Modernist abstraction and a developing visual culture brought about by commercial printing techniques have popularised abstract forms, and that both favour techniques of visual communication that are expedient, direct, easily disseminated, and easily recognised. I consider what an analysis of translation in language is able to bring to the analysis of contemporary abstract painting. Translating an original text for dissemination to a wider audience is similar to the way in which contemporary artists use existing abstract forms to make new works. I compare theories of visual representation from W. J. T. Mitchell, Hubert Damisch and Arthur C. Danto to consider how particular abstract forms are reused in contemporary environments and how they are able to continue to evoke feelings of familiarity in different contexts while remaining abstract.

My own abstract paintings, which form the major part of this degree submission, make use of pre-existing visual elements from diverse sources, including architectural motifs and forms in the built environment. I take advantage of varying degrees of viewer recognition of these elements as I translate them into the context of my work. This is important in contemporary image ecologies where visual communication engages in a complicated process of recognition and identification, of image use and reuse. My artworks demonstrate that the most effective contemporary art is post-medium and anti-hermetic, where shapes from the history of abstract art are

recognised as they move between mediums and communicate in ways that acknowledge that history while also making new meaning that is relevant to their contemporary context. I explore this capacity in my work, translating and manipulating abstract forms from art history, technology, and the built environment into paintings and large-scale murals to engage the familiar in a way that moves beyond recognition into new meaning.

Acknowledgements

Sincere gratitude goes to my supervisors Assoc. Prof. Donal Fitzpatrick and Dr. Rosemary Hawker for their continued support and expertise. Their knowledge and critical feedback has been central to the success of my research. Thank you to Rachael for her continued support over the past three years and to Reuben, my most honest critic.

List of Illustrations

Figure 1 Kazimir Malevich *Black Square* 1915, oil on canvas, 53 x 53cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. 2.

Figure 2 Ellsworth Kelly *Black Square* 1953, oil on wood, 110 x 110cm. 2.

Figure 3 Pablo Picasso *Guitar and sheet music on a pedestal* 1920, gouache on paper, 22.8 x 29.1cm. Musee Picasso, France. 5.

Figure 4 Stuart Davis, *Egg Beater No. 1* 1927, oil on canvas, 73.9 x 91.4cm. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. 5.

Figure 5 Simon Degroot, sketch book page, 2014, graphite on paper, 21 x 42cm. 7.

Figure 6 Georges Braque, *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)* (*Violin and Pipe [The Everyday]*) 1913, chalk, charcoal, imitation wood, and pasted paper, 74 x 196cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. 17.

Figure 7 Pablo Picasso, *Head of a Man with a Hat* 1912, cut-and-pasted newspaper and coloured paper, ink, and charcoal on paper, 62.2 x 47.3cm. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. 17.

Figure 8 Kazimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension* 1915, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 44.5cm. MoMA, New York. 17.

Figure 9 Henri Matisse, *Le Lagon* (*The Lagoon*) 1947, screenprint for *Jazz*, plate XVIII, 41.6 x 64.8cm. The Art Gallery of New South Wales. 20.

Figure 10 Honoré Daumier after Charles Philipon, 'Les Poires' *Le Charivari,* 16 April 1835, lithograph, 33.3 x 25.4cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 34.

Figure 11 Marianne Brandt, *Tea Infuser and Strainer* 1924, silver and ebony, 7.3cm (h). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 40.

Figure 12 Liubov Popova, *Embroidery Design for the Artisan Co-Operative Verbovka* 1917, cut-and-pasted papers on paper, 12 x 17.5cm. Source: Margarita Tupitsyn, ed. *Rodchenko & Popova: Defining Constructivism* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 41. 40.

Figure 13 Dick Watkins, *The Fall No. 2* 1968, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 183 x 152cm. Private collection. 45.

Figure 14 Laura Owens, *Untitled* 2012, oil, flashe, resin, collage, and pumice on canvas, 275 x 213cm. Tate Britain, London. 45.

Figure 15 Charline von Heyl, *Untitled (Wall at WAM)* 2010, acrylic and latex paint, 518 x 2042cm. The Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts. 45.

Figure 16 Christine Streuli, *Ableger* (Offshoot) (installation view) 2013, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland. 45.

Figure 17 Ellsworth Kelly, *Black (Noir)* from *Suite of Twenty-Seven Color Lithographs* 1964–65, 89.5 x 61.1cm. MoMA, New York. 54.

Figure 18 Simon Degroot, *Shape Poems* (detail) 2017, laser-cut acrylic, 29 x 34cm. 54.

Figure 19 Ellsworth Kelly, *Concorde IV (State)* 1981, etching and aquatint on paper, 40.5 x 32cm. Tate Britain, London. 56.

Figure 20 Iran do Espírito Santo, *Twist 7A* 2011, pencil on photogram, 29.2 x 21cm. Sean Kelly Gallery, New York. 56.

Figure 21 Susan Kare, *New Blank Document* 1984, Apple Computer Inc., 32 x 32pixels. 56.

Figure 22 Natalya Hughes, *Looking Cute* 2013, acrylic on plywood, 140 x 240cm. Milani Gallery, Brisbane. 60.

Figure 23 Peter Atkins, *Talk + Text* 2012, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 61cm. Bett Gallery, Hobart. 60.

Figure 24 Wendy White, *No Pressure* 2016, edition of 2 + AP, dibond, rainbow webbing, nylon rope, ball chain, 127 x 152cm. Eric Firestone Gallery, New York. 67.

Figure 25 Wendy White, *Pleasure I* 2016, digital billboard. Override: A Billboard Project, Expo Chicago, USA. 67.

Figure 26 Ryan Gander, *Your Present Time Orientation (Second Act)—Random Abstraction* 2011, custom-painted glass, Perspex clip frames, 600 x 110 x 20cm (installation dimensions). Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands. 71.

Figure 27 Vincent Hawkins, *Untitled* 2015, monotype print on Fabriano paper, 42 x 29.7cm. 76.

Figure 28 Christopher Wool, *Untitled* 2011, silkscreen on linen, 304.8 x 243.8cm each. Luhring Augustine, New York. 78.

Figure 29 John Young *Moment III* 2015, oil on Belgian linen, 76.2 x 103.4cm. University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane. 79.

Figure 30 Simon Degroot, *Cloud #1* 2015, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm. 69.

Figure 31 Simon Degroot, *Cloud #2* 2015, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm. 69.

Figure 32 Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow* 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46cm. Kunsthaus Zürich, Switzerland. 71.

Figure 33 iPhone *iOS 7 User Interface* 2013, Apple Computer Inc. 73.

Figure 34 Allan McCollum, *The Shapes Project: 144 top parts* 2005–ongoing, dimensions variable. Rhea Anastas ed., *Allan McCollum* (Letzigraben, Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2012), 128. 73.

Figure 35 Simon Degroot, *White and Blue Flat Lay* 2017, oil on canvas, 198 x 137cm. 73.

Figure 36 Jason Fulford, *This Equals That* 2014. Source: Jason Fulford and Tamara Shopsin. *This Equals That* (New York: Aperture, 2014), n.p. 75.

Figure 37 Internet Meme, *Raw Chicken or Donald Trump?* 2016. Source: http://imgur.com/gallery/HUYPLX. 75.

Figure 38 Pablo Picasso, *Weeping Woman* 1937, oil on canvas, 60 x 49cm. Tate Modern, London. 76.

Figure 39 Apple 'iPod Silhouettes' 2000–2011, advertising campaign. Source: Sooke, Alastair. "Modern Masters: Why Modern Art Is Everywhere." *The Telegraph*, 27 April 2010. 77.

Figure 40 Henri Matisse *Icarus* 1943–44, screenprint for *Jazz*, 42.2 x 65.7cm. The Art Gallery of New South Wales. 77.

Figure 41 Ian Fairweather, *Pelléas et Mélisande* no date, synthetic polymer on board, 71.5 x 96cm. 79.

Figure 42 Simon Degroot, *Floating in a New Sky Design* (detail) 2014, pencil and acrylic on paper, 10 x 200cm. 82.

Figure 43 Simon Degroot, *Floating in a New Sky* 2014, synthetic polymer, 150 x 3000cm. Shaun Lockyer Architects and W22, Brisbane. 82.

Figure 44 Simon Degroot, *Floating in a New Sky* 2014, designs layered in Adobe Photoshop. 83.

Figure 45 Simon Degroot, *Cove Dupont* 2014, oil on canvas, 260 x 198cm. Moreton Bay Art Collection, Caboolture. 83.

Figure 46 Simon Degroot, *Shallow Space* (installation view) 2014, Australian National Capital Artists (ANCA) Gallery, Canberra. 84.

Figure 47 Simon Degroot, *Shallow Space #03* 2014, collage on paper, 25 x 35cm. 85.

Figure 48 Simon Degroot, *Shallow Space #04* 2014, oil on board, 25 x 35cm. 85.

Figure 49 Simon Degroot, *Vintaged Bar Mural* 2014, synthetic polymer, 500 x 900cm, Brisbane Hilton. 87.

Figure 50 Landini Associates, *Vintaged Bar Mural Design* 2014, digital file. 87.

Figure 51 William Jolly Bridge detail 2014, artist photograph, Brisbane. 89.

Figure 52 Simon Degroot, sketch book page, 2014, graphite and collage on paper, 21 x 26cm. 89.

Figure 53 Simon Degroot, *Pillars Project Mural Design* 2014, painted paper and collage on board, 19.5 x 15cm. 89.

Figure 54 Simon Degroot, *Pillars Project Mural* 2014, exterior acrylic, 900 x 600cm, South Brisbane. 89.

Figure 55 Lorna Jane, *Active Warehouse* 2016, printed flyer, 21 x 14.5cm. 90.

Figure 56 Lorna Jane, Instagram image to promote *Active Warehouse* 2016. 90.

Figure 57 Simon Degroot, *Composite Orders Green* 2015, oil on board, 20.5 x 15.5cm. 91.

Figure 58 Simon Degroot, *Composite Orders Magenta* 2015, oil on board, 20.5 x 15.5cm. 91.

Figure 59 Simon Degroot, *Indirect Response* 2015, installation view including, *Composite Orders Green Screen 1, 2,* and *3*, Postgraduate and Other Projects (POP) Gallery, Griffith University. Photograph courtesy Louis Lim. 92.

Figure 60 Simon Degroot, *Indirect Response* 2015, installation view, POP Gallery, Griffith University. Photograph courtesy Louis Lim. 94.

Figure 61 Lady Cilento Exterior Façade 2014 Lyons Architecture, Brisbane. Source: http://www.lyonsarch.com.au/lady-cilento-children-s-hospital. 95.

Figure 62 Simon Degroot, *Cilento* 2015, oil on canvas, 122 x 122cm. Lady Cilento Art Collection. 95.

Figure 63 Simon Degroot, *Indirect Response* 2015, installation and detail view of *Off Cuts* (2015), POP Gallery, Griffith University. Photograph courtesy Louis Lim. 95.

Figure 64 Simon Degroot, *Indirect Response* 2015, oil on canvas, 140 x 125cm. 97.

Figure 65 Simon Degroot, *Tint* 2016, oil on canvas, 183 x 167cm. Private Collection. 97.

Figure 66 Simon Degroot, *Nundah Train Station Mural Design* 2015, painted paper and collage, 12.5 x 40.5cm. 98.

Figure 67 Simon Degroot, *Nundah Train Station Mural* 2015, exterior acrylic, 900 x 2400cm. 98.

Figure 68 Simon Degroot, *Purple Additions* 2016, digital animation, dimensions variable. 100.

Figure 69 Simon Degroot, *Purple Additions* 2016, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm. 100.

Figure 70 Andy Warhol, *Ten Foot Flowers* 1967, synthetic polymer and silkscreen ink on canvas, 304.8 x 304.8cm. 101.

Figure 71 Simon Degroot, *Flower* 2016, digital animation, dimensions variable. 101.

Figure 72 Simon Degroot, *Flower* 2016, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm. 101.

Figure 73 Simon Degroot, *Picture Building* 2016 (installation view), Kick Arts Contemporary Artspace, Cairns. 102.

Figure 74 Simon Degroot, *Picture Building* 2016, oil on canvas, 244 x 183cm. 103.

Figure 75 Simon Degroot, *Sketchbook Page* 2014, graphite on paper, 22 x 20cm. 106.

Figure 76 Simon Degroot, *Shape Poems* 2017, laser-cut acrylic shapes, 50 x 35cm. 106.

Introduction

Much contemporary abstract painting is closely connected to the culture of rapid image circulation and exchange that we live in. This distinguishes contemporary abstraction from the abstraction of other periods because forms of art and previous details are now continually available and searchable by electronic devices. The once non-figurative forms of Modernist abstraction have now become recognisable and familiar because of our contemporary experience of image sharing. In contemporary art and visual culture, shapes from historical abstraction that typically resisted interpretation are isolated and recast as familiar shapes. Artists sort through and choose these familiar and contingent everyday shapes for reuse in their own work. I refer to this process as a translation of form, which takes place from the original artwork to its digital dissemination, then into contemporary abstract painting.

This exegesis investigates artists who have selected particular visual elements from art history and used them in their work. Of course, artists have a long history of using everyday image forms. For example, in 1863, Charles Baudelaire observed that artists "distil the eternal from the everyday" and advocated the 'sketch' as the most appropriate way to capture the "ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent".[1] This sketch initiates a fundamental abstraction of everyday visual forms, an abstraction of shapes that is reflected in the studio practice of Modern artists. I propose that this rapid sketch embodies a methodology of translation through which one can investigate how artists distil images from the everyday, and how they use and reuse abstract forms in their work, creating a legacy of familiar abstract forms.

In this thesis, this legacy is explored through two recent exhibitions in New York that compared and contrasted specific abstract works from art history with contemporary works to identify formal similarities and artistic influence. *Picasso and American Art* (2007) at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and *Malevich and the American Legacy* (2011) at Gagosian Gallery, brought together physical artworks at a time when one can see similar (virtual) comparative searches being easily performed by

[1] Charles Baudelaire writes that early Modern artists turn away from historical and mythical themes to focus on urban life and everyday activities. See Jonathan Mayne, ed., *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays by Charles Baudelaire* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995).

anyone using the Internet and image search software.[2] Today, artists can search online and select, copy, and match isolated image details with their own work and in the process reanimate art historical and cultural forms and introduce them to new audiences. While comparisons such as these have always possible, it is now infinitely easier to see and search a broad range of images due to the power of search engines.

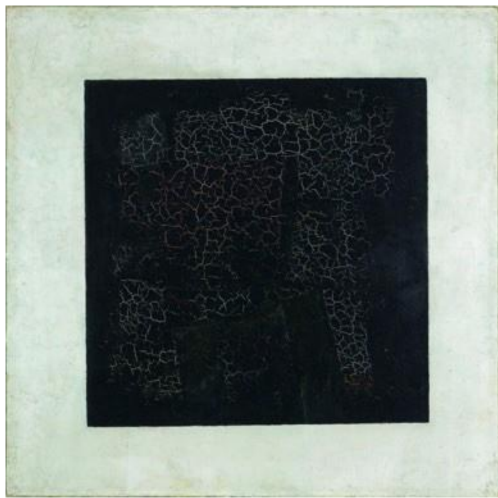


Figure 1 Kazimir Malevich *Black Square* 1915, oil on canvas, 53 x 53cm.

Figure 2 Ellsworth Kelly *Black Square* 1953, oil on wood, 110 x 110cm.

While comparing artworks and images online is fast and superficial, comparing abstract artworks in the gallery is slow; however, doing this reveals subtle similarities and differences between artworks, highlighting a perceptual process of recognition. This process is a key concern for this research, which asks to what degree are painted forms recognised in abstract painting. In *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (1983), Norman Bryson writes, "Recognition involves a direct comparison between two terms, the anterior and the posterior occurrence. An act of recollection is performed: the new or present datum is referred to and placed alongside an earlier datum retrieved from memory."[3]

Bryson assigns recognition to a model of communication where details are matched according to degrees of resemblance. Comparing art historical works in the gallery reinforces their similarities and encourages us to recall other similarities from

[2] For example, artist Paul Kremer uses Google Image Search for his series IMG_SRCH. Paul Kremer *James Turrell Red* 2016, digital print on canvas, no size. http://imgsrch.tumblr.com/.
[3] Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (London, UK; New Haven, USA: The Macmillan Press Ltd; Yale University Press, 1983), 43.

memory. For example, the two exhibitions referred to above bring together Pablo Picasso's *Three Musicians* (1921) with Stuart Davis's *Colonial Cubism* (1953), and Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915, figure 1) with Ellsworth Kelly's *Black Square* (1953, figure 2) to outline the various ways that artists have interpreted Picasso and Malevich or been influenced by them.

Understanding the way that artists interpret images from art history is particularly pressing in our global environment because "so much of the art that interests us was produced in distant places and times",[4] so in order for it to transcend time and space—to communicate to our contemporary lives—it must be interpreted, understood, and recognised. However, as Bryson writes, "recognition involves the activation of socially constructed and maintained codes".[5] Recognition is particularly complicated in a contemporary global environment of mixed cultural codes.

This research explores how abstract forms are recognised and perceived as they are translated using different technical and social codes. For example, Stuart Hall's communication model, "Encoding, Decoding" (1999) "inserts a semiotic paradigm into a social framework". Hall writes that for effective communication to occur, there must be some "reciprocity between encoding and decoding moments",[6] and that any image (sign, text, or message) is recognised according to "the structure of social practices".[7] That is, images are interpreted and sometimes transformed by a social and cultural performance of codes.

This performative process of interpretation and decoding similarly occurs in literature. Hans-Georg Gadamer writes, "reading with understanding is always a kind of reproduction, performance and interpretation",[8] a process that is active and prejudiced. Because a translation is a work of approximation and likeness, one who translates must have "a talent and some experience to perform it well".[9]

---

[4] Karol Berger, *A Theory of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 214.
[5] Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (London, UK; New Haven, USA: The Macmillan Press Ltd; Yale University Press, 1983), 39.
[6] Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," Chapter 36 in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 515.
[7] Ibid., 509.
[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 160.
[9] Ibid., 216.

Translation is normally understood as a literary process of rewriting an original text, an historical process of substitution and a search for equivalence. In "The Task of the Translator" (1923), Walter Benjamin writes that translations are in fact where "the life of the originals attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding".[10] In *Translation/History/Culture* (1992), André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett similarly write of an increasing process of exchange and manipulation in texts of all kinds and they also argue that translation is influenced by other cultural texts. As such, we can understand their account of translation as expanding on Walter Benjamin's ideas. Lefevere and Bassnett write "translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live".[11] It is toward this awareness that this research is directed.

A theory of translation can also be applied to the reuse and manipulation of abstract shapes. For example, painted shapes are reformed and manipulated by Modernist artists to different effect. Abstract forms that share an approximate or exact likeness do not always share the same meaning. In the catalogue essay for *Malevich and the American Legacy*, Yve-Alain Bois makes this point by discussing the different circumstances surrounding the development of Malevich's Suprematist *Black Square* and Kelly's *Black Square*, explaining that while they share a visual affinity, they are "entirely unrelated from a genetic point of view".[12] Bois diagnoses this developmental difference as a case of *pseudomorphosis*, a term used by Erwin Panofsky to describe two analogous or identical forms that are entirely unrelated in their genesis.[13] As this example suggests, a comparison of art historical painted shapes that share formal similarities is complex, prone to confusion, but also open to the production of meaning.

---

[10] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 255.

[11] André Lefevere, *Translation/History/Culture*, ed. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), xi.

[12] Bois classifies Ellsworth Kelly's black square as a "transfer", where "the artist mechanically records something flat from the world at large". Yve-Alain Bois, "The Availability of Malevich," in *Malevich and the American Legacy* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2011), 23.

[13] Erwin Panofsky describes pseudomorphosis as "the emergence of a form A, morphologically analogous to, or even identical with, a form B, yet entirely unrelated to it from a genetic point of view". Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture* (New York: Harry N Abrams, 1964), 26–27.

Translation can negotiate this complexity and account for the formal similarities between these works and any number of other black squares. Craig Owens writes that in postmodernism, we must negotiate a plurality of different cultural forms. Pluralism, he writes, "reduces us to being simply an other among others; it is not recognition, but a reduction of difference to absolute interchangeability".[14] In postmodern culture, abstract painted forms are interchangeable—individual difference is absorbed in such a way that one black square is exchanged for another. However, when comparing abstract shapes reproduced online and in books, these kinds of subtle differences are important because they maintain the integrity and individuality of the work.

The popularity and availability of Modernist reproductions, as well as everyday encounters with architectural forms in the built environment, have prepared contemporary audiences with the visual acuity to identify minor differences between abstract forms. Looking again at the example above, differences become exaggerated. The painted black squares exhibit many differences that separate their shared geometry. They differ in size, paint application, and their edges are different—Malevich's are irregular and imperfect while Kelly's are clean and exact. These differences are important because they connote a tightening or stiffening of abstract form from Modernism into postmodernism.

Figure 3 Pablo Picasso *Guitar and Sheet Music on a Pedestal* 1920, gouache on paper, 22.8 x 29.1cm.

Figure 4 Stuart Davis *Egg Beater No. 1* 1927, oil on canvas, 73.9 x 91.4cm.

---

[14] Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1992), 167.

Other comparisons are less straightforward. In the catalogue essay for *Picasso and American Art*, Michael C. FitzGerald charts the influence of Picasso's paintings in America. For example, he notes that Stuart Davis's paintings in his 'Egg Beater' series are "based on the flat, brightly coloured geometries he had seen in Picasso's gouaches at the Whitney Studio"[15] (figure 3) and that he employs a "playful combination of flat colours, patterns, and representational fragments" in his work (figure 4).[16] Davis's Synthetic Cubist shapes are enriched by reference to other art "past and present" and contribute to building new American traditions albeit against criticisms of not being "original".[17] These two works share many similarities in composition, shape overlay, colour relations, and technique. However, it is important to note that their differences are just as pronounced. For example, like the painted edges of Malevich's *Black Square*, Picasso's gouache shapes are imperfect while Davis's shapes have clean and exact painted edges. As with the Malevich and Kelly examples above, these comparative differences communicate an emerging precision in abstract painting.

My research explores the comparative differences between abstract shapes as they are translated from Modernism into contemporary abstract painting. My discussion of translation is based loosely around the painted flat shapes found in Russian Constructivism, Synthetic Cubism, Henri Matisse's paper cut-outs, Hard Edge Painting, graphic design and computer desktop graphics. Also, I observe abstract shapes in architecture and the built environment to highlight how and where specific shapes appear and reappear in contemporary abstraction. While the strategies of translation described in this exegesis could be applied to a wide range of contemporary artistic practice, this research aims to locate repeated formal similarities and to consider how a concept of translation can assist in unpacking how contemporary abstract painting makes meaning through the use of shapes that recall earlier art and design from often diverse sources.

I started this research to try to understand why some shapes in contemporary abstract painting can seem familiar to me even when I have not seen them before. While this

---

[15] Michael C. FitzGerald, *Picasso and American Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2007), 73.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 119. In a 1929 article for the *New York Sun,* "Attractions in the Galleries", Henri McBride criticised Stuart Davis for "painting French".

description might sound vague, this search set me on a path of investigating my painting practice and interrogating the visual world around me. This exegesis explores how I have tested my perception and visual literacy in the studio and in large-scale murals, and what I have discovered about the relation of forms across time and space as expressed in abstract painting.

Reflecting on my practice, I noticed that I paint shapes as a way to examine existing forms and respond to the world. I discovered at an early age that I had an interest and faculty for copying, and that drawing and painting were a good way to communicate. I observed and copied everyday childhood images of the sort that appear in cartoons, computers, magazines, art reproductions, and architecture. I observed and made simple drawings of things that appear like ideograms in my journal, arranged as a visual rebus (figure 5). Later, using these drawings to make paintings, I arranged individual elements on the canvas to tell a visual story. In this way, my early drawings and paintings were not about exact copying but about engaging particular image details from the world so as to build a visual vocabulary and to communicate through using these similar abstract shapes.

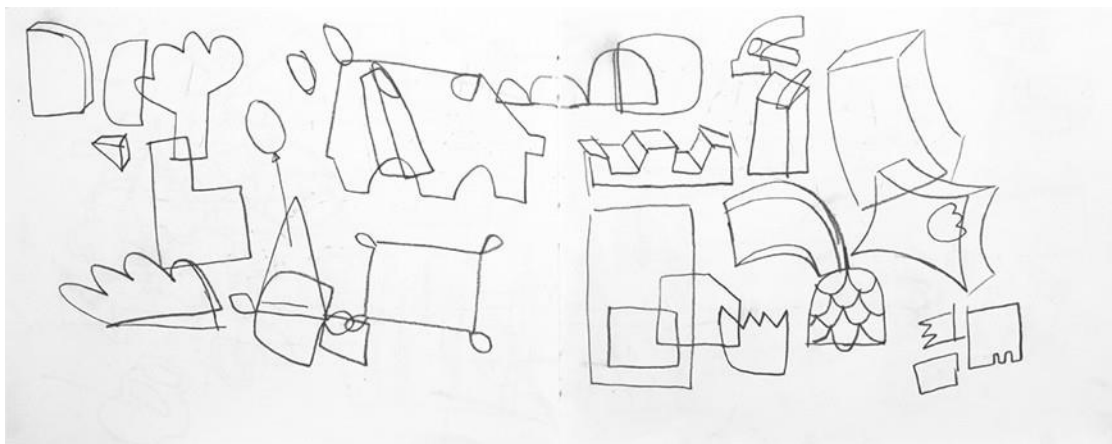


Figure 5 Simon Degroot *Sketch Book Page* 2014, graphite on paper, 21 x 42cm.

However, it is simplistic, even irresponsible, to suggest that shapes that share a visual and formal similarity in contemporary painting all communicate to audiences in the same way. Because the way we understand and decipher visual elements is culturally and socially determined,[18] this research will explore only visual affinities in the

[18] In *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen study translations of Western visual designs that interact with "the specificities of locality, wherever global

translation of visual shapes from Western art history, visual culture and the built environment, and how they appear in my contemporary context.

Finding shapes that look similar and have shared formal elements is an important part of this research. I think back to my early artistic development in the 1980s and Fredric Jameson's famous description of reflexive copying in a superficial pastiche of surface and style; describing how in postmodernism, artists can only imitate "other styles".[19] Thirty years later, contemporary culture is engaged in complex visual interactions. Artists and makers of visual culture wear "stylistic masks"[20] and reference other images, styles, or periods of the "imaginary museum".[21] In this environment of cultural production, artists complicate a range of always-already mixed sources using processes, such as sampling, remixing, and remaking, to combine visual texts.

This postmodern pastiche is complicated in contemporary visual culture when artists paint abstract shapes and where these forms are "contaminated"[22] with worldly concerns. In postmodern practices of hybridity and heterogeneity, artists identify, select, and use shapes in their work. In my early art practice in the 1990s, I experimented with visual samples: I copied and combined images and shapes from reproductions and paid special attention to the formal qualities of colour and shape. This copying was further galvanised when I worked as a commercial offset printer, mixing and matching colours and learning the mechanical processes of image reproduction.

Throughout this time, I was laying the foundations for what seemed to be a practice of appropriation, of combining different image details to make new work. Indeed, an artistic program of appropriation and copying was closely aligned with Australian art practice at this time. In 1982, Paul Taylor curated *Popism* at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), which focused on artists working in "the second degree";[23] that is,

---

Western culture is the dominant culture". Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4.

[19] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *Postmodern Culture,* ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 113.

[20] Ibid., 114.

[21] Ibid., 115.

[22] Homi Bhabha, "Culture's in Betweens," *Artforum* 32, no. 1 (September 1993): 167.

[23] Rex Butler describes appropriation as a postmodern art form that is particularly aligned with Australian culture and identity, since our experience of the world is often through mediated images. He outlines this in response to Paul Taylor's seminal exhibition *Popism* at the NGV in 1982; Rex Butler, ed., *What Is Appropriation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s & 1990s*, 2nd ed.

artists who were engaging with popular culture as a source of styles to be "superficially scavenged and redeployed".[24] Artworks were made in response to an expanded field of visual culture and artists foregrounded their sources so as to emphasise meaning. Like their Pop Art predecessors, these artists "boldly use the most recognizable quotations",[25] taking images and fragments from art history and visual culture and using them in their own work.

The way these artists made use of image details developed alongside the rise of technology and methods of image reproduction. Artists accessing the emergent capabilities of the Internet and its always-accessible archive of images made contemporary art that, according to Hans Belting, "manifests an awareness of a history of art but no longer carries it forward".[26] This decline of the forward momentum of the Western art historical narrative is liberating because it opens a space where artists can play with, rearrange, and remake images and details from art history in order to create new work.

This exegesis discusses artists who emerge from this art-historical-narrative decline, appropriating decontextualised image fragments to recreate and make works that are newly relevant with changed meanings. Arthur C. Danto confirms "it is part of what defines contemporary art that the art of the past is available for such use as artists care to give it".[27] This opens the possibility for contemporary art to become post-historical, to be made, as Belting argues, "without the benefit of a reassuring sort of narrative in which it was seen as the appropriate next stage of the story".[28] This exegesis locates the post-historical in contemporary abstract art that engages in the "philosophy or logic"[29] of appropriation rather than adopting it as a style. That is, appropriation needs to be redefined for contemporary practice as more accurately belonging to a process of translation, because, while artists continue to use existing images, they are also changing these cultural texts and representing them in novel ways.

(Brisbane: IMA Publishing, 2004). See also Paul Taylor (ed.). *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, (Melbourne: Art & Text, 1984), and Anneke Jaspers, "Art of the Second Degree: Post Pop and Popism," In *Pop to Popism* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2014).

[24] Jaspers, "Art of the Second Degree," 234.

[25] Jean Lipman and Richard Marshall, *Art about Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978).

[26] Hans Belting in Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4–5.

[27] Danto, *After the End of Art*, 5.

[28] Ibid., 4–5.

[29] Butler, *What Is Appropriation?*, 15.

Nicolas Bourriaud redefines a methodology of appropriation for contemporary art. In *Postproduction* (2002), he describes how contemporary artists create work using "objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market".[30] He writes that artists are working "well beyond" appropriation to erode distinctions between "production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work".[31] In *The Radicant* (2009), he further elaborates these ideas, proposing that contemporary artists should "set themselves the task of effacing their origin in favour of a multitude of simultaneous or successive enrooting".[32] Bourriaud focuses on strategies of meaningful exchange, a contemporary responsibility that is explored in this research as artists search for ways to translate images and ideas in a communicative exchange.

The possibility of painting after appropriation occurred to me serendipitously one day in 2004 when I was working as a commercial printer. At the time, the press I was working for was printing the second edition of *What Is Appropriation? An Anthology of Writings in Australian Art in the 1980s & 1990s,* Rex Butler's anthology of essays on Australian postmodernism. While reading the book's introduction at the printing press, I took note of the following point made by Butler: a work of art does not record an original experience, but rather presents "a translation of this experience from one language to another".[33] This quotation—relying heavily on the semiotic meaning of images and recalling Roland Barthes's "ceaselessly deferred" identity of form from his essay "Is Painting a Language?" (1985)[34]—resonated with me at the time and it informs the central argument of this exegesis. That is, by introducing translation as a term to describe a process of visual abstraction, I am aligning abstract painting with a visual communication from 'one language to another'.

Translation is not a neutral process, but embodies a type of manipulation where the painted artwork both recreates existing meaning and creates new meaning. This is one of the arguments that Jacques Derrida makes in *The Truth in Painting* (1987) where he writes, "it is the principal example, the unique specimen which gives meaning and

---

[30] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, trans. Jeanine Herman, ed. Caroline Schneider (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), 13.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009), 22.
[33] Ibid., 18.
[34] Roland Barthes, "Is Painting a Language?" trans. Richard Howard, in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1985).

orientates the multiplicity".[35] This creates potential confusion, however, because the translated form is separated from any concepts "which belong to it or are specifically reserved for it";[36] in other words, it is decontextualised.

Translation in abstraction necessarily requires a review of the semiotic value of formal shapes, to think further about what they mean. Abstract painted shapes are seldom arbitrary; rather, as pointed out by Kress and van Leeuwen, they are motivated signs created by the artist during the act of making. They describe that "sign-makers use the forms they consider apt for the expression of their meaning".[37] Even the abstract circular shapes drawn by children have meaning and metaphorically 'stand in' for something else. Indeed, when discussing a translation of abstract shapes in my own work, I argue that metaphors are particularly useful.

However, the most common type of image translation is not metaphorical but rather a literal one enacted through technically or mechanically mediated image reproduction; for example, by the computer screen (digital) or printed media (analogue). This kind of reproduction is particularly useful in contemporary abstraction and implicates Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936),[38] Marshall McLuhan's *The Medium Is the Massage* (1967),[39] and John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972).[40]

These texts, among others, provide an important introduction to the various ways that audiences navigate a dynamic circulation of visual image forms where shapes and 'texts' are not fixed but 'float'. For instance, of televisual images, Susan Sontag writes that the "image-glut keeps attention light, mobile, relatively indifferent to content. Image-flow precludes a privileged image."[41] Similarly, in *Convergence Culture* (2008), Henry Jenkins writes that today "content flows across multiple media channels",[42] releasing contemporary culture from any medium specificity. This

[35] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 42.
[36] Ibid., 41.
[37] Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 8.
[38] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin Group, 2008; orig. pub. 1936).
[39] Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Massage* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1967).
[40] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Great Britain: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books Ltd, 1972).
[41] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 94.
[42] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 254.

statement is important to my research as it maps the complex interactions that artists have with existing images that are simultaneously present in the studio, online, and in the built environment, suggesting how abstraction is disseminated in contemporary visual culture.

Being able to navigate, organise, and arrange multiple texts, and to search, identify, retrieve, and connect discrete cultural objects in a visual ecology is identified by many as critical to understanding contemporary visual culture.[43] Looking at, or 'reading' visual images, produces a considerable visual vocabulary of images and shapes. As Jacques Rancière argues, "'abbreviated forms' are, in their very principle, an aesthetic and political division of a shared world without hierarchy where functions slide into one another".[44] For Rancière, visual literacy and an ability to identify the relevant mix of sources that make up cultural outputs is a foundational skill in contemporary culture.

Identifying and recognising intertextual visual references in images from art history and broader Western culture is dependent on many factors (including cultural exposure, age, education, and interests). I use the term 'recognition' to describe the relative degree of figured meaning in translated shapes and extend this term when meaning becomes confused beyond recognition—for example, in mistranslation. Hall's televisual model is particularly useful here again, suggesting that there are "degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding'",[45] which are attributed mainly to a lack of equivalence between encoding and decoding 'moments' in a communicative exchange.

Translation occurs in the studio as pre-existing and rapidly moving shapes and image forms are arrested and reformed in new work. In many ways, art historical examples of appropriation and reproduction are antithetical to the practice of translation of abstract shapes described in this exegesis. The former deals in discrete image details

---

[43] See Barthes, "Is Painting a Language?"; Jean Baudrillard "The Ecstasy of Communication," trans. John Johnson, in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 126–34; Bourriaud, *The Radicant*; Bourriaud, *Postproduction*; James Elkins, "What Are We Seeing, Exactly?" *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 2 (1997): 191–98; Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society"; David Joselit, *After Art*, ed. Sarah Whiting (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013); and W. J. T. Mitchell *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[44] Jacques Rancière, "The Surface of Design," in *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2009), 107.

[45] Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," chap. 36 in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 510.

while the latter apprehends fleeting and sometimes virtual image impressions. Translation as a process and concept is a useful model to explore how these rapidly moving image forms change in a culture of image sharing and exchange.

This discussion is organised into three chapters. Chapter 1 surveys abstract shapes in Modernism and considers four abstract paintings from art history. I discuss how early Modern artists recreate the real and imaginary as contoured flat shapes that are assembled, out of context, on the surface of their work. I align this process with a strategy of manipulation where abstract shapes are decontextualised and estranged from their original use and recognisability. This abstraction of the figurative is similar to processes adopted by early commercial printmaking for the purpose of visual communication and the dissemination of images, including political commentary and satire in the popular press. Demonstrating the similarity of these techniques, I propose that the abstracted forms in Modernist painting increasingly became part of an emerging visual culture centred on the communicative image. I also argue that abstract shapes change as they transition between painted and printed material states and that translation is an appropriate metaphor for this change. I expand this metaphor of translation to include ways that abstract shapes were manipulated to advance ideas of authority and power at the time of early abstraction.

Chapter 2 discusses how samples and shapes from Modern abstract painting find their way into contemporary painting and are recognised as familiar. I consider more recent artwork examples to illustrate how contemporary artists employ a methodology of translation in their work. I explain how translation is different from other more conventional types of image quotation or copying associated with appropriation art, in that artists assert their own authorial presence while reconstituting an existing author by making use of already existing imagery. I expand my discussion of the dissemination of images in commercial printing from Chapter 1 to include abstract shapes within contemporary global image ecologies. I describe how artists interact with and incorporate architectural shapes from the built environment and screen-based images using software in new paintings and large-scale murals. I explore why some abstract shapes are more popular than others in visual communication and put forward a hypothesis that translated shapes can feel familiar without being easily recognised in contemporary abstract painting.

Chapter 3 details my studio methodology and outcomes. I argue that artists employing contemporary abstraction use formal strategies of visual rhyme and metonymy as a kind of referential game with artists from other time periods. I propose that an appropriate studio methodology for this cultural production consists of identification, selection, and translation of visual elements in contemporary abstraction. In my practice, I turn existing visual elements from diverse sources into painted motifs as a way to reanimate shapes from art history and visual culture. I extrapolate these ideas in the context of my studio practice, outlining key projects that explore methods of translation to create new work.

I conclude with a detailed summary of my research and how an approach to contemporary art through the metaphor of translation in language can assist in the analysis and production of contemporary abstract painting in the studio. In particular, that a methodology of translation is ideally placed to communicate with contemporary visual culture because the best contemporary abstraction is expedient, seductive, playful, and communicative in ways that privilege exchange and multiplicity.

Chapter 1

Modernist Shapes in Abstract Painting

...my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different.
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1948[1]

It is after all possible for two things to resemble one another with radically different meanings...
—Arthur C. Danto, 1974[2]

Things objectively unlike can strike us as very similar, and things objectively rather similar can strike us as hopelessly unlike. There is no way of finding out except by trial and error, in other words, through painting.
—E. H. Gombrich, 1977[3]

Abstract painting is such a large field of study that it is useful to approach it as a series of narratives. The purpose of this discussion is not to document the history of abstract painting but rather to explore some narratives of abstraction to provide an art historical context for my own studio practice. It is organised into three sections. In the first section, I discuss the art-historical process of abstracting real world forms into simple shapes, and then discuss how these shapes become vehicles for meaning. I turn to a 'materialist formalism', which Yve-Alain Bois notes, "seeks to grasp the means of production in its slightest detail".[4] In the second section, I consider how the commercially printed replica affects Modernist painting. Informed by my experience of working for a time as a commercial offset printer, I propose that when artisans transcribed paintings into printed replicas, they inadvertently helped to develop a common visual literacy for abstracted forms. I then introduce translation as a more accurate metaphor for this process and in the third section describe the power of abstract shapes in a process of visual translation.

Early Modern painting is intimately connected with industrial development and cultural change. European and American artists simultaneously challenged imitative illusion while undertaking a new kind of painting that quickly developed in many new

[1] In Maurice O'Connor Drury, *The Danger of Words and Writings on Wittgenstein*, ed. D. Berman, M. Fitzgerald, and J. Hayes (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1996), 157.
[2] Arthur Danto, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33, no. 2 (1974): 140.
[3] E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study of the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), 279.
[4] Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: October, 1990), xix.

directions: towards a reduction of natural appearances to essential forms, towards a construction of formal non-representative elements, and later towards spontaneous expression. Alfred H. Barr captured his view of these developments in a diagram created for *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936) at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. Artists working toward abstraction transformed the visual grammar of painting, graphic design, illustration, commercial art, and architecture. This chapter details some of this transformation and interrelation by way of art historical analysis in order to reveal the repeated use of particular forms.

The following four paintings from the early history of Western abstraction use the type of flat shapes that are important in this research: Georges Braque's *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien) (Violin and Pipe [The Everyday])* (1913–1914, figure 6); Pablo Picasso's *Head of a Man with a Hat* (1912, figure 7); Kazimir Malevich's *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension* (1915, figure 8); and Henri Matisse's *Le Lagon* (1947, figure 9).

During the early years of the twentieth century, Picasso and Braque worked together and developed their *papiers collés*. These include semi-abstracted flat shapes, charcoal drawings, cut and pasted paper, and newspaper clippings.[5] The Cubist shapes in these works overlap and connect with one another on the white surface of the paper. These Cubist collage techniques were also a partial influence for Malevich's small Suprematist paintings, where he painted flat shapes as if they are cut and pasted. Removing all figurative elements, Malevich pursued non-figurative colour and shape relationships, aiming for "the reality of existence: pure feeling".[6] It could also be said that Matisse captured pure feeling in a similar way as he cut and pasted his memories of Tahiti, resulting in an approximation of form. He used the abstract organic shapes of his late oeuvre to illustrate a screenprinted page for the publication *Jazz*. I have chosen these works because they reveal the beginnings of a visual repertoire of shapes in visual culture that look the same or similar, but on closer inspection do not signify or mean the same thing.

[5] See Leah Dickerman, "Inventing Abstraction," in *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*, ed. David Frankel (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 12−37.
[6] Larry Gagosian, *Malevich and the American Legacy* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2011), 11.

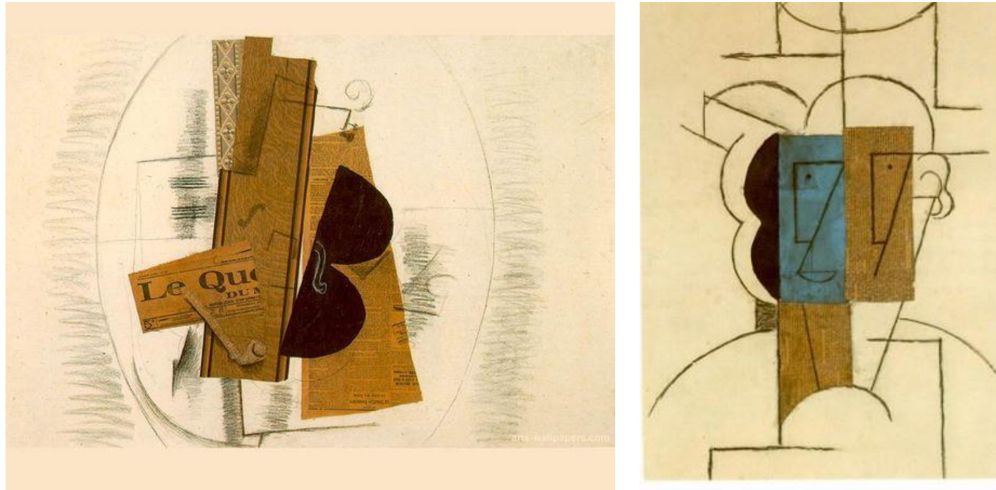


Figure 6 Georges Braque *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)* (*Violin and Pipe [The Everyday]*) 1913, chalk, charcoal, imitation wood, and pasted paper, 74 x 196cm.

Figure 7 Pablo Picasso *Head of a Man with a Hat* 1912, cut-and-pasted newspaper and coloured paper, ink, and charcoal on paper, 62.2 x 47.3cm.

1.1 Simplification, Construction, and Design

These abstract artworks share common formal strategies of simplification, construction, and design that were developed and sustained in Modernism. Early European Moderns were finding new ways to conceptualise and represent the fast-paced and increasingly fragmented nature of early modern life. In particular, artists responded to the developing technology of the camera and film, questioning the nature of vision and turning their attention to established traditions of painting. Arguably, the most established tradition attacked by Modern artists is the nature of mimetic representation, as demonstrated by Picasso and Braque in their search for new ways to represent the visible world.

Braque's *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)* introduces fundamental challenges to representation during the early years of Synthetic Cubism by collaging fragments and painting simplified details to represent still life objects. An abstract shape or a real piece of fabric in an artwork is sometimes meant as a stand in for the whole object, a metonym. Krauss observes that cut and collaged fragments from real things in fact become a synecdoche for real life, that "the slightest representational

information…[gives] more rather than less information about the world".[7] The individual components of the work together communicate meaning.

Along with Picasso, Braque pioneered the construction of new *papier collés* techniques. Through their works, Braque and Picasso attacked traditions of painting, particularly by making use "of 'prefabricated' stuff and the most ordinary, everyday materials".[8] In *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)*, Braque has attached real objects such as newsprint, imitation wood veneer, and coloured paper. As the title of this work suggests, Braque aimed to leave representation behind to achieve a greater intimacy with real life and the everyday. Braque elevates the status of everyday materials in this work by including different papers and imitation wood, cutting them into shapes, and arranging them on a drawing of an oval table. Each of the cut shapes separately signifies something in the still life. The imitation wood is understood as 'table', the piece of wallpaper is understood as 'tablecloth', the newspaper headline cut out refers to the whole newspaper, and, finally, the black paper shape signifies 'violin'. This abstracted and flattened still life leaves behind traditional modes of representation, conventions such as the depiction of light, the modelling of three dimensions, and, perhaps more importantly, the representation of the illusion of space.

Braque famously remarked, "To be pure imitation, painting must make an abstraction of appearances."[9] While this might seem a pithy statement about attempts to make sense of the rapidly changing landscape of the early twentieth century, it also reveals something of the nature of painting and its long history of imitation. Abstracting the appearance of everyday objects meant that Braque could reconstruct individual forms in his collage. This is a useful development for this research because it liberates everyday objects from their physical materiality and allows the artist a kind of agency to reconstruct the world on the surface of the canvas by way of abstracted appearances.

---

[7] Dickerman, "Inventing Abstraction," 29.
[8] Serge Fauchereau, "Papiers Collés," in *Braque* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1987), 19–21.
[9] Edward F. Fry, "Georges Braque: Thoughts on Painting 1917," in *Cubism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), 147.

The way that *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)* communicates is by exploiting the readability of "pictorial signs",[10] elements in the work that operate together as a series of symbols to be 'read'. Bois cites Picasso and Braque's dealer and art historian, Daniel Henri Kahnweiler, who writes,

> These painters turned away from imitation because they had discovered that the true character of painting and sculpture is that of a *script.* The products of these arts are signs, emblems, for the external world, not mirrors reflecting the external world in a more or less distorting manner.[11]

Understood in this way, the abstracted shapes in Braque's *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)* are not to be understood as a picture of a violin or a picture of a pipe but rather as individual signs that refer to 'violin' or 'pipe'. This separates the *papier collés* from questions of painterly verisimilitude and instead locates them squarely in the field of visual semiotics, aligning their imagery with the readability of the visual and visual literacy.

Picasso also challenged pictorial representation in his Synthetic Cubist *papier collé*, *Head of a Man with a Hat*. Picasso saw the semiotic potential of abstracted shapes to be 'read' by the spectator. In *The Picasso Papers* (1999), Rosalind Krauss locates this semiology in the flatness of collage and the "level of the sign: *front, solid, shape; behind, transparent, surround*".[12] Writing about the abstract forms of *Head of a Man with a Hat,* Krauss (adopting the semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure) describes a binary paradigm where "the 'same' physical shape"[13] has two opposite meanings.

In *Painting as Model* (1990), Bois writes that Picasso systematically reduced "his plastic system to a handful of signs, none referring univocally to a referent, caus[ing] their value to meet with numerous significations".[14] In these works, the black shape signifying 'hair' is visually similar to Braque's black shape that signifies 'violin'. This is important to this research where similar abstract forms reappear in different contexts and with altered meanings.

---

[10] Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: October, 1990), 82.
[11] Daniel Henri Kahnweiler in ibid., 74.
[12] Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 28.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Bois, *Painting as Model*, 90.

Figure 8 Kazimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension* 1915, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 44.5cm.

Figure 9 Henri Matisse *Le Lagon (The Lagoon)* 1947, screenprint for *Jazz*, plate XVIII, 64.8 x 41.6cm.

Malevich's painted geometric shapes embody the numerous significations of Synthetic Cubism; however, because they are less specific or particular than the shapes used by Picasso or Braque they exacerbate the polysemy of abstract form. For *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10* (1915–1916), Malevich assembled coloured planes in a desire to surpass the conceptual breakthroughs of Cubism, "on Suprematist canvases, 'painterly masses' translate into pictorial planes, which derive from Cubist collage but have acquired a generative autonomy".[15] Malevich asserted that his geometric shapes surpassed mimetic illusion, arguing that they constituted "New Painterly Realism",[16] which held supremacy over the forms in nature.

For *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension*, Malevich composed a black square and a red square painted on a white background. Malevich used the title of this work to encourage audiences to 'read' the painting in a particular way. This work challenges representation because the painted squares do not easily align with the artwork's title – the two painted squares may indicate the boy and his knapsack but do not share a figurative resemblance. This painting, like the collage works described above, is formed by the interrelationship of individual component parts. Malevich's individual shapes do not refer to signifiers that are external to the work but are a direct presentation of painterly masses.

[15] Masha Chlenova, "0.10.," in *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925* edited by David Frankel (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 208.
[16] Ibid., 207.

This directness of painterly mass is an important foundation of abstract painting, foregrounding the material properties of the painted form, Malevich rejects any reference to things in the world, turning instead to numbers and semiotics. Writing about this work in *Picture Theory* (1994), Mitchell describes the “language game of abstract art”, making a distinction between “there *is* a … red square” and not a “picture of a red … square”.[17] Mitchell argues that the real world becomes a narrative surrounding abstract painting. He writes that in order to understand abstract painting, “language, narrative, and discourse can never—should never—be excluded from it”.[18] The fundamental difference here separating Picasso and Braque’s abstract paintings from Malevich’s abstract painting is that Malevich paints less-readable pictorial signs. In Malevich’s *Painterly Realism*, the red and black painted squares become a simplification and construction of a new world—one that would soon provide its own pictorial references in, for example, the rectilinear architecture in the International Style.

In the collage *Le Lagon*, Matisse also used simplified forms to evoke a memory of his travels to Tahiti. As with the works discussed above, for this work, Matisse arranged individual coloured shapes on a white background so that meaning emerges from their interrelation. The shapes in this work are more suggestive than Malevich’s black and red squares and, like Picasso’s handful of shapes that meet “numerous significations”, they adopt “a multitude of significations”.[19] The shapes constitute a suggestive and semi-abstract “visual language”.[20] For example, the undulating curves recall natural vegetal forms. They become part of a “repertory of cut forms”[21] used by Matisse in his late works.

Similar abstract shapes can be made to mean different things. In *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Ludwig Wittgenstein introduces the notion of “family resemblances” to highlight the way that language is sometimes a “complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing”.[22] We use these similarities to

[17] W. J. T. Mitchell “Ut Pictura Theoria: Abstract Painting and Language,” chap. 7 in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 225, original emphasis.
[18] Ibid., 226.
[19] Samantha Friedman, “Avant La Lettre,” in *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*, ed. Nicholas Cullinan, Karl Buchberg, Jodi Hauptman, and Nicholas Serota (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), 89.
[20] Ibid., 87.
[21] Ibid., 89.
[22] See sections 66–67 of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997; orig. pub. 1953), 32e.

classify individual things that are connected by a common name. Wittgenstein emphasises that confusion arises in communication because language lacks clarity and precision. He argues that the same word can have different meanings depending on how it is used.[23] In a discussion with Maurice Drury, he says, "Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different."[24] Wittgenstein's comments are pertinent to my approach to art; my aim is to show that abstracted shapes, just like words, can have a multiplicity of meanings, depending on how they are used.

This brief outline of four works of early Modernism has helped to introduce the two fundamental concerns of this research. Firstly, that one path to abstraction is to simplify observations, memories, or ideas of things from the real world, creating abstract forms that continue to communicate meaning as they relate with other forms–both as symbols from the world and part of the world. Secondly, that individual abstract shapes can look similar to each other but not necessarily mean the same thing. This is because artists are selecting shapes made available due to the emerging visual ecology associated with the printed image. In the next section, I argue that the commercially printed image is central to creating an image economy of easily accessible forms.

Modernist abstract shapes are familiar features in contemporary design, architecture, and painting. As Mitchell notes, abstract art "probably has more institutional and cultural power as a rearguard tradition than it ever did as an avant-garde overturning of tradition".[25] That is, the utopian or spiritual aims embedded in Modernist abstract shapes have been abandoned as their superficial elements have been reassigned as stylistic form, influencing contemporary art and design. For this reason, it is important to develop a more nuanced understanding of abstract painting and to identify how contemporary artists have copied and changed abstract shapes over time.

[23] This is particularly evident in other non-English European languages such as French, which has fewer words but more potential meanings.
[24] Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 536.
[25] Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria," 214.

The history of painting is also a history of influences. It is an exciting path of discovery to observe and speculate visual similarities across works and to untangle this complex web. However, because abstract paintings are hard to "decipher",[26] it is more difficult to attribute their influences. Comparing artworks and identifying similarities to suggest that one may have influenced another is normally aligned with a postmodern understanding of appropriation. According to the catalogue for *Art about Art* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1978, an appropriation artist is one whose methodology is to "boldly use the most recognizable quotations" in their work in order to "deliberately encourage the viewer to participate in discovering the genesis of the work".[27] This aligns a practice of appropriation with recognisability and a conspicuous display of already painted forms. However, as discussed here, the visual similarities between Picasso and Davis, or Malevich and Kelly, are not conspicuous, easily recognisable, or bold, and are therefore not aligned with a postmodern understanding of appropriation.

Contemporary artists are similarly engaged with a practice that engages sources that are not easily recognisable or conspicuous, by using multiple forms that are easily accessible through devices searching the Internet. This allows for greater interpretation and manipulation but also ensures that the artist becomes part of what Leo Steinberg calls "the historic relay".[28] Using the Internet, artists reference the once-unrecognisable elements of Modernist abstraction, turning them into recognisible objects and forms in contemporary abstraction.

1.2 Transcription and Translation

Abstract shapes relate to one another, sharing a visual similarity that is separate from postmodern appropriation. There are many ways to describe artistic copying; for example, homage, reference, influence, transposing, stealing, etc. However, to better

---

[26] Leah Dickerman notes that for abstract artists such as Picasso and Picabia, "the work's indecipherability was played out in the press, the subject of jest". Dickerman, "Inventing Abstraction," 17.

[27] Jean Lipman and Richard Marshall, *Art About Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), 7.

[28] Leo Steinberg, "The Glorious Company," in *Art About Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), 9.

understand this type of practice, it is useful to look at a history of visual transcription and literary translation. I discuss these terms below with reference to Stephen Bann's *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in 19th Century France* (2001),[29] André Lefevere's *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992),[30] and Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" (1921).[31]

Visual transcription is a process of copying or recreating an otherwise ephemeral, discrete, individual event, utterance, or creative artwork into another medium for the purpose of dissemination. Bann describes transcription as an art-historical process, a tool for engravers to copy—or transfer—a painted artwork interminably 'inscribed' on copper for the purposes of producing commercially available prints.[32] To understand this art-historical practice of transcription, it is useful to consider the ways that printmaking, painting, and photography influenced each other in the nineteenth century as emerging processes of image reproduction. It is revealing to see how the printed replica resembles or deviates from the original artwork at a time when artists frequently made copies of their own paintings.[33] A history of the printed image is an ideal model with which to demonstrate how artists move from representation into abstraction.

Literary translation is a process of converting an original text into another language so that it becomes accessible to new audiences. Translation thus shares with transcription its intent to disseminate. Importantly, however, translation cannot be evaluated according to such ideals as equivalence or synonymy because, as Lefevere writes, "all rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way".[34] To translate is to exercise power and control over what should and should not

[29] Stephen Bann, *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in 19th Century France* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001).
[30] André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, ed. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (USA and Canada: Routledge, 1992).
[31] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 253−63.
[32] Bann, *Parallel Lines*, 2.
[33] This early exploration of the printed image represents a commitment to the later media theory of Marshall McLuhan who writes, "all media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms". Marshall McLuhan, "Media as Translators," chap. 6 in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 63.
[34] André Lefevere, *Translation/History/Culture*, ed. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (London and

be included in a translated work. Literary works are also changed when translated into other languages. For example, the translation of poetry is also a manipulation of meaning that results in a text where “something gets lost”.[35] I propose that translation is a useful metaphor to describe the way that contemporary abstract forms relate to one another.

1.2.1 Transcription and the Printed Image

The emerging middle class in nineteenth-century France represented a new and large audience for art. The development of the public art museum combined with increased leisure and disposable income of the bourgeoisie saw an emergence of a public appreciation for art. The increased popularity of exhibitions and artworks presented a challenge to printmakers and later photographers to accurately reproduce copies of paintings for publication in the popular press and for promotional sale. However, Bann describes reproduction as “first and foremost carried out by artists, whether it involves a process of conversion of the image … within a specified medium, or a transfer of the image from one medium to another”.[36] He describes this reproduction as motivated by an artist’s desire for an increased ‘diffusion’ of their work, to spread printed images of their work beyond the studio in order to reach new audiences. This is significant for my own research, as abstracted forms leave the studio in different material states.

Throughout history, artists have employed different types of reproduction techniques to disseminate copies of their works. In early guild-based atelier or studio training, pupils made replicas of their masters’ works by hand to practice their craft. These were often signed by the masters and sold as their own work creating confusion for contemporary historians.[37] It is not strictly studio training that concerns this research but rather the change from hand-made reproductions to mechanical reproduction introduced by mass printing techniques. Bann identifies how the printed image “from the primitive woodcut to the development of etching and engraving … has given

---

New York: Routledge, 1992), xi.
[35]Ibid., 99.
[36] Bann, *Parallel Lines*, 15.
[37] See Rembrandt Research Project (website), http://www.rembrandtresearchproject.org/.

progressively enhanced power of multiplication to the visual image over the centuries".[38] Walter Benjamin also describes how, with lithography, printing reached an irreversible stage of "growing intensity" in nineteenth-century France,[39] a time just before photography, where hand-made copies struggled to meet the demands of printing technology.

This irreversible stage in the development of the printed image exemplifies how a process of transcription and reproduction can function as a visual and cultural phenomenon. Importantly, in order to disseminate their work, artists engaged the services of skilled printmakers. Bann describes how, following the 1834 Paris Salon, Paul Delaroche (1797–1856) engaged the art publisher House of Goupil and printmaker Paul Mercuri to produce a painstaking burin engraving of his painting *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* (1833). At the same time, rival publishers Magasin pittoresque and Magasin universal also rushed to produce copies of Delaroche's popular exhibition for publication and sale in the catalogue. These secondary versions, both of which are titled *Jane Grey* (1834), "sacrificed the nuances of physiognomy in the interests of a crude, but visually effective, distribution of highlights".[40] Because each of these printers needed to move quickly in order to be at the front of the market, these reproductions of the painted artwork are derivative or poor copies of the original.

The printer took liberties with the reproduction in order to distribute the copies of the artwork as soon as possible. In the wood engraving for the catalogue, tonal areas are flattened, and outlines are transcribed as flat shapes. While Bann cites many examples where the printed engraving achieves a status as the "definitive reproduction" of a painting, it is "the very 'fecundity' of the proliferating modes of image-making"[41] that concerns this research. The modes of image making that Bann describes made it possible for artists such as Delaroche to be a new kind of artist, one who always works "with a view to reproducibility".[42] New printing and publishing avenues enabled artists to disseminate their work reproduced as simple lines and flat shapes.

[38] Bann, *Parallel Lines*,15.
[39] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin Group, 2008; orig. pub. 1936), 3.
[40] Bann, *Parallel Lines*, 33.
[41] Ibid., 30.
[42] Ibid., 39.

Therefore, the nineteenth century saw a new kind of artist emerge—one who considered the bourgeoning printing technologies while making paintings in the studio. The Modern artists introduced at the start of this chapter had access to a new type of image: the reproduced, derivative, and relatively abstracted copy. Printed reproductions of images reproduced as simplified outlines and flat shapes—abstracted images that share similar techniques as those used by avant-garde artists who produced artwork at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Accompanying the newly expanded audience for art also existed “a great French culture press”, new publishing avenues that represented an alternative to the salons and dealers as a way to disseminate artworks and ideas.[43] Indeed, it is in this “self-consciously avant-garde” press that Louis Vauxcelles coined the title ‘Cubism’.[44] This enlarged and complex market offered painters a variety of ways to relate to their cultures, and, as Bann describes, it is toward this market that Picasso directed his efforts.

In addition to the cultural press, Michael Baxandall explains the historical importance of “widely and visually circulated”[45] engravings in securing commissions. However, as Bann writes, the reproduced artwork image should also be understood for the way it effected a change in the artwork’s “philosophical and social identity”.[46] What is noteworthy here is that, from the nineteenth century onward, the transcribed image became liberated from the studio. As it moved from painted image to printed replica, the image becomes an interdisciplinary object that is also more autonomous.

The transcription of engravings for publication in the popular press occupies a unique position in the developing technological accuracy of the reproducible image. This unique position is at the threshold of change because, as I have described, the reproduced or transcribed image differs from and changes the original. The ‘abridged’ transcription detailed above that sacrifices detail in the name of expediency is particularly interesting. There is discrimination between the replica and the copy in nineteenth-century France: “replicas sometimes show slight differences with regard to

---

[43] Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 52.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 53.
[46] Bann, *Parallel Lines*, 3.

the original, but if these differences are quite important, one should speak rather of a new version".[47] These visible differences were described as "bad copies", "derivative images", and "line drawings".[48] The implication is that these transcribed images are inferior 'translations' of the original paintings.

That paintings were abridged and simplified for reproduction in the emerging commercial printing industry in nineteenth-century France is particularly useful for this research of the abstracted image form, as it provides an opportunity to observe how transcribed images differ from the original and to what degree they are abstracted. The printed transcription replaced the individual painting in a new cultural age of popularised reproductions and prompted the move toward today's image economy of seemingly endless exchange.

The popularisation of the image was achieved using modern means of commercial printing. A substitution of the multiple for the singular is the topic of Benjamin's seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, where he welcomes a loss of aura and authenticity for the sake of reproducibility.[49] However, as Bann importantly notes when observing a printmaker's preparatory drawing of the *Mona Lisa* in 1859, "for the visitors to the studio, 'aura' was temporarily invested in an object that epitomised one of the specific stages of the reproductive process".[50] For the printed image of the nineteenth century, perhaps aura and authenticity are relative. In this example, aura is independent of the individual painting and momentarily embodied in the abstracted and transcribed form.

The popularisation of images that occurred because of transcription is worth exploring; Mitchell describes it as 'the pictorial turn', whereby the visual image became the dominant vehicle of communication in modern society.[51] This pictorial turn includes drawings and caricatures that appeared in the popular press of nineteenth-century France. For example, while the printed copy of *Jane Grey* abstracted the image and 'sacrificed the nuances of physiognomy' in the name of expediency, David Summers observes an opposite exaggeration of the image in

---

[47] Leo Ewals, cited in Bann, *Parallel Lines*, 26.
[48] Bann, *Parallel Lines*, 31.
[49] Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.*
[50] Ibid., 17.
[51] Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria."

caricature which "is closely related to physiognomy".[52] Like the expedited reproductions of high art, caricature is rooted in Modernist problems of visual representation and popular visual communication.

The developing mass media in France employed artisans to recreate popular paintings as engravings for popular consumption. At times, these artisans took liberties with the image to expedite its reproduction or, as I shall show, to adjust the reproduction toward the idealised or aesthetic—or, as is the case with caricature, toward the individualistic, ugly, and arrestingly singular.[53] In other words, acts of transcription are not accurate reproductions at all but contain the personal style of the artisan. No matter how practiced the artisan is in their craft or how considered the reproduction, a work will always include the individual temperament and 'point of view' of the maker: the hand-made replica is always a subjective reaction.[54] I call this changed hand-made replica a translation of the original. As with translating from one language to another, when an image is manipulated and changed in this way, something gets lost.

1.2.2 Translation: From Representation to Abstraction

As indicated, translation is normally associated with a literary process of rewriting an original text. At first, the terms 'translation' and 'abstraction' do not seem to be related. The quality of a translation is commonly judged against criteria of equivalence, fidelity, and synonymy. Thus, translation, like the transcription in print processes, is about trying to attain an accurate reproduction through a process of change so that the new object looks similar to but also differs from an original.

Like the processes of transcription described above, literary translations are similarly manipulations that reflect certain ideologies. In *Translation/History/Culture*, Lefevere notes that translation manipulates literature to function in society in a given way. As a positive force, translations can introduce "new concepts, new genres, … and

---

[52] David Summers, "The Conditions of Western Modernism," chap. 7 in *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 2003), 593.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 594.

innovation", but they can also "repress innovation, distort and contain".[55] Translation is a process of recasting, of rewriting the original, at times "in terms of the poetics of … [one's] own culture, simply to make it pleasing to the new audience".[56]

Lefevere goes on to describe translators who rewrite texts to reflect the "objects, customs, and beliefs" of their own culture. This is captured in an introductory paragraph to an eighteenth-century translation of Homer's *Iliad* by Houdar De la Motte who wanted his translation to be palatable to his eighteenth-century French readership: "I have tried to make the narrative faster than it is in Homer, the descriptions larger and less burdened by details, the comparisons more exact and less frequent …".[57] These larger descriptions "less burdened by details" are the literary equivalent of the transcribed images of *Lady Grey* that "sacrificed the nuances of physiognomy", which reveals something of the discretionary power wielded by translators of literary texts and printmakers alike.

This unburdening of details for simplicity is something like what occurs to the individual collaged elements in Synthetic Cubism. Traditional still life objects are simplified by translation into abstract shapes that sacrifice nuances of representation in favour of faster communication. For example, compare the painted violin in Pieter Claesz's *Vanitas with Violin and Glass Ball* (1628) with the violin in Braque's *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)*. It is clear that the violin in Braque's work—simplified to an abstract shape—is familiar because it is associated with the still life genre and anchored by the artwork's title. This shape is not recognised as such and is vulnerable to future mistranslations.

Poetry is particularly vulnerable to translation where an exchange of individual words effects a change of meaning. A substitution of one word for another effects a mistranslation of the original, where the actual meaning of the text is partly deleted.[58] This mistranslation is visible when an individual shape is used to represent different objects in *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)* and *Head of a Man with a Hat.* Like the mistranslated text, the abstracted image opens a space where we might similarly

[55] Lefevere, *Translation/History/Culture*, xi.
[56] Ibid.,10.
[57] Cited in Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 89.
[58] For example, consider the translation of Friedrich Hölderlin's, "Da ich ein Knabe war ..."by David Constantine as "When I was a boy" and Michael Hamburger as "In my boyhood days…".

misrecognise ourselves,[59] a vulnerable space in abstraction where ideology can assert its influence.

Written text is itself something of an abstraction. The Roman alphabet evolved from "image-based scripts" through a series of steps, "where each step involved considerable abstraction".[60] Letters developed from iconic hieroglyphs, becoming signs that are combined using grammar and syntax to give indirect meaning through an act of writing. Written text, like the abstract shapes in Modern abstraction, communicate indirectly. Roland Barthes writes that, in painting, as in language, the "identity of what is 'represented' is ceaselessly deferred".[61] Similarly, Benjamin Buchloh writes that the work of art "can never be restored to an original level of a primary functional language";[62] it can only reveal its impact 'indirectly'. Written language and artworks are never primary or direct, like the forms in nature, but are rather secondary and manipulated mediations that communicate indirectly.

One form of mediation is translation. Like literature, the painted world is a manipulation that is looked at, interpreted, and 'read'.[63] The painted surface represents a fictional translation of the world that is likewise an opportunity to innovate or distort. The painted surface is a translation of the world, never the original. The work of art is therefore a form of communication to be read and understood. As Hans-Georg Gadamer argues in *Truth and Method* (2013), "aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics"; that is, for Gadamer, art is about interpretation.[64] Karol Berger adds that "all we have access to are translations; the originals are not available",[65] which means that for abstract painting, communication is also a matter of translation.

---

[59] This is a reference to Jacques Lacan's "méconnaissance", a misrecognition of the self in order to develop a mature identity. See "Jacques Lacan," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online), 2 April 2013, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/#MirStaEgoSub.
[60] Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* (London: Routledge, 1996), 21.
[61] Roland Barthes, "Is Painting a Language?" trans. Richard Howard, in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1985), 150.
[62] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Formalism and Historicity," chap. 1 in *Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth Century Art* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2015), 2.
[63] Karol Berger, "Hermeneutics: Interpretation and Its Validity," chap. 6 in *A Theory of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 213.
[64] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (Bloomsburg, NY: Seabury Press, 2013), 164.
[65] Berger, "Hermeneutics," 214.

Modernist abstract painting engaged this methodology of translation: abstract artists communicated with a "talent" for translation and "some experience to perform it well".[66] Berger writes that historical artworks can only be "interpreted" by comparing the formal similarities of their metonymic parts to reveal something illuminating. Identifying and comparing abstract forms with one another is a useful exercise in recognition, which reveals aspects "one might not notice otherwise".[67]

Translation is similarly a process that is anchored in recognition. As in poetry, visual similarities allow abstract shapes to be communicated through metaphor. If the translation is to be successful, metaphors "must be fitting, which means they must fairly correspond with the thing signified".[68] The once unrecognisable non-figurative forms of Modernist abstraction have now become recognisable objects with an almost limitless array of comparable shapes in contemporary culture. This means that recognising the abstract painted form is particularly problematic, since, as Mitchell writes, "we feel overwhelmed and embarrassed by the number of things it can be made to say".[69] The challenge is to identify the familiar in abstract art so as to make connections and open discussion about what particular shapes may communicate.

Today it is easy to see that abstract art "leads back to the ordinary world":[70] shapes from paintings are used in advertising and popular design elements are recycled and reused, like "the dynamic movement in automobile styles or dress fashions".[71] By contrast, Clement Greenberg denied recognisability in Modern abstraction and resisted any association with popular culture, instead appealing to a medium purity that is simultaneously scientific, religious, and ethical-political.[72] According to various critics, Modernist abstraction was an "aristocratic form made by and for a tiny elite in the cosmopolitan centers of advanced capitalist countries",[73] promoting a visual language that was not universal but rather "culturally specific".[74] Modernism

---

[66] Ibid., 216.
[67] Ibid., 218.
[68] Aristotle, *Rhet,* 1414a8–11 cited in ibid., 219.
[69] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria," 223.
[70] Ibid., 236.
[71] Ibid., 230. Also consider Leo Steinberg's "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 55–91.
[72] Clement Greenberg cited in Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria," 229.
[73] Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria," 229.
[74] Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 4.

was complicit with the developing hegemony of Western capitalism where its abstract forms have become echoed in graphic and industrial design.

This means that as Modernist practitioners emerged in the international space of visual culture, abstract forms were particularly problematic, and, like metaphors, prone to misunderstanding. As mentioned in my Introduction, abstract shapes are complicated in a contemporary global environment of mixed cultural codes. This begins with Synthetic Cubism, when abstracted, abbreviated, and simplified shapes share multiple meanings that are exacerbated by abstracted images in the popular press.

Like the printed transcriptions of the painting *Lady Grey* described above, printed cartoons and caricatures in the popular press are "typically abbreviated, achieving resemblance through the least of means".[75] This economy of means creates the simplified and abstracted shapes that are also a comic exaggeration of particular characteristics. Leaving humour aside, it is interesting to consider how caricatures might be considered as a translation of representation; how an image can continue in its resemblance beyond the transcribed artwork-replica into something more subjective and abstract. Caricatures are often seen in political cartoons as "deeply democratic", as a levelling of hierarchy and status, and in the case of mass media, "places us in a position superior in some way to the caricatured".[76] In his research, Alan Krell explores how caricature was used by the popular press to ridicule the work of Manet and other early Modern artists of the *Salon des Refusés* of 1863.[77]

---

[75] Summers, "The Conditions of Western Modernism," 594.
[76] Ibid., 596.
[77] See the caricature by Gillot depicting Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, among others, in Alan Krell, *Manet and the Painters of Contemporary Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 44.

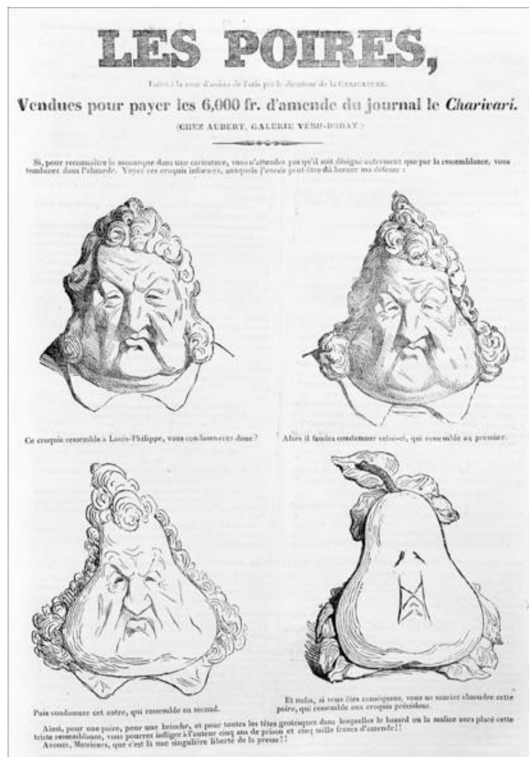


Figure 10 Honoré Daumier after Charles Philipon, 'Les Poires' *Le Charivari,* 16 April (1835), lithograph, 33.3 x 25.4cm.

The printed caricature, like the printed artwork-reproduction, moved from élite circles to popular mass formats in nineteenth-century France. Consider Honoré Daumier's caricature of King Louis Philippe becoming a pear (figure 10).[78] This caricature is exaggerated, distorted, and abstracted as Louis Philippe undergoes a series of changes in the press from King to pear, a "metamorphoses as much determined by earlier images in the series of caricatures as by resemblance to the King".[79] Thus, the caricature is part of a temporal process of abstraction, where the image of the King is ultimately replaced with an image of a pear over the course of several installments, much like the simplification from representation into abstraction in Pablo Picasso's later series of eleven lithographs *The Bull* (1945). Such a process represents a kind of teaching through images.[80]

[78] *Le Charivari* was a daily satirical periodical issued in Paris from 1832 to 1937. "Le Charivari began publishing caricatures satirizing daily life after the 1835 ban on political satire. Artists including Honoré Daumier and Cham contributed lithographs and wood engravings." "Le Charivari, December 1, 1832–May 31, 1835," Metropolitan Museum of Art (online), http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/347359.
[79] Summers, "The Conditions of Western Modernism," 597.
[80] Teaching in this manner is consistent with the Church, whose "images may serve to teach the illiterate", and is integral to directing the opinions of a rapidly developing body politic. Summers, "The Conditions of Western Modernism," 599.

The image of the King as pear is performing a form of cultural production by developing visual literacy among the population, and even wielding power over them. In short, the abstracted caricature is influencing ideology. The caricature, like the stereotype and the cliché, is popularised and made possible by printing. In order to communicate quickly, the caricature makes use of visual shortcuts, or a *synecdoche*, in which a part is made to stand in for a whole. The caricature combines these visual shortcuts in a synthesis, so that if Louis Philippe "'looks like' a pear … other similarities may 'spring to mind' and extend the metaphor; the king is soft, easily bruised, green, yellow, ripe, overripe, perishable, quick to corrupt".[81] The public image of the king is irrevocably changed by the power of caricature, made possible by an act of translation, abstraction and metaphor.

The abstracted image often shares a visual resemblance with other abstract forms. Krauss discusses Picasso's and Braque's *papier collés*, noting "the slightest representational information…[gave] more rather than less information about the world".[82] In the same way, Berger notes that "a fragment discloses, or rather, suggests, a larger whole, a whole world".[83] This helps us to understand how abstract artworks can interrogate and communicate with the world using a visual synecdoche and a translation of forms into abstraction. The difficulty, however, is to understand how a representation is abstracted, how exactly artists use visual shortcuts and the simplest of means to signify meaning, and in particular, how the artists introduced at the beginning of this chapter manipulated images in their paintings by using translation and metaphor.

By understanding the techniques employed by the caricaturist, one can begin to take account of the strategies employed by early abstract artists, who retain a visual referent in their work. As in the work of the caricaturist, Braque's *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)* and Picasso's *Head of a Man with a Hat* employ metaphor; it "is a matter of moving the mind where one wants it to go", writes Danto.[84] Just as Daumier leaves a few vestigial facial features of the King for people to still identify a face, so Picasso permits two black dots for eyes and the curve of an ear. Similarly, Braque inscribes

[81] Ibid., 597.
[82] Dickerman, "Inventing Abstraction," 29.
[83] Berger, "Hermeneutics," 221.
[84] Arthur C. Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in a Post-Historical Perspective* (Berkley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1992), 74.

the scroll and tuning pegs of a violin before leading the eye down to the more abstract black shape onto which he draws an F Hole using white chalk. These small additions allow an entry point into the work, providing signposts for how the abstracted form should be recognised.

Through images and metaphor, the caricature and the collages both teach us something about the world. The image of Louis Philippe as a pear teaches us through a sequence of drawings to see metaphorically the King as a pear. This occurs through a formal appeal to the shape of a pear, as if Daumier "had seen a pear inscribed in Louis's head, and taught us to see it through steps".[85] The collaged works similarly appeal to shared shapes and similar forms. However, these works do not teach us through a series of steps; only the finished abstracted form of translated objects from the world are presented. These works therefore use metaphor to teach us to see such flat shapes as three-dimensional objects.

In the Suprematist work of Malevich, a more complex metaphorical relation exists between real things of the world and their translation as flat-painted shapes. Malevich considered his geometric-painted shapes to have no reference to the outside world, famously declaring to have "escaped from the circle of things".[86] His paintings extend beyond the particular object or figure (as in Picasso and Braque) toward the more general non-figurative, or non-objective. In *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension*, the red and black painted squares become a simplification and construction of a new world, a world that is more real than mere representation because the painted shapes are foregrounded as solid objects; they do not refer to something outside of themselves.

The simplified geometry present in Malevich's work has now been made concrete for contemporary eyes. The black and red squares in this work appear almost as prototypes for later developments in minimal art, architecture, and graphic design. Thus, the abstract geometric relations in Malevich, which were once a search for the absolute, have now become engaged in the relative. When it comes time to explain this work, we are often at a loss for words and so return to formal descriptions of colour, line, and form.

[85] Arthur C. Danto, "Metaphor and Cognition," chap. 6 in ibid., 75.
[86] Kazimir Malevich, "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting," in *Essays on Art 1915* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1971), 19.

Such a loss for words is due to the ideology of silent meditation surrounding abstract art. As previously mentioned, "language, narrative, and discourse"[87] should never be excluded from abstract art, and it is towards this task that many practitioners of contemporary abstraction direct their research. For the meantime, it is important to note that flat-painted shapes are common features of early Modernist abstract painting and are central to this research.

Arguably, the most articulate flat shapes in Modernism are found in the work of Henri Matisse. In his late oeuvre of coloured paper 'cut-outs', Matisse expanded his practice with the help of studio assistants, who painted large sheets with gouache colours from which he cut organic abstract shapes. For Matisse, "the act of cutting was inextricably intertwined with the almost playful process of constantly adding new shapes and removing others, of rearranging and re-pinning".[88] This productive period of work culminated with the reproduction of several works published in *Jazz* (1947). One of these works, *Le Lagon*, is a composition of abstracted shapes recalled from memories of travel to Tahiti. This work represents a developing "vocabulary of forms",[89] a group of simplified shapes that Matisse used to communicate. The flat-cut-shapes were perpetually rearranged in different configurations in the studio. This deferred commitment to the composition suggests a playful approach. Matisse likened the movement of his collage shapes to a game of chess, where the "meanings of the pieces can change throughout the course of a game".[90] The next section explores how this game, where shapes change meaning through translation, can be one of authority, legitimacy, and power.

1.3 The Power of Shapes

How abstract shapes are used and who has the authority to use them developed into a complex and powerful game during Modernism. As I have already described, the translation of the painted image into the printed replica is also a movement from representation into abstraction for the purpose of expediting visual communications that are direct, quickly disseminated, and easily recognised. Painted shapes began to

---

[87] Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria," 226.
[88] Buchberg et al., *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*, 258.
[89] Ibid., 17.
[90] Ibid., 129.

operate as a popular visual language directed toward the initiated and privileged. During Modernism, the early abstraction introduced in the beginning of this chapter becomes an important cultural export.

Many commentators have rightly accused Modern artists of using so-called ‘primitive art’ as a way “to consolidate Western notions of quality and feelings of superiority”.[91] These notions were reinforced in Modernism, as artists working with abstraction co-opted shapes from other cultures and used them in the context of their own work. Artists have, however, always made use of existing image-forms and are forever “foraging”, “quoting, imitating, transposing, and echoing”.[92] This tendency was accelerated in the expanding colonisation of Modernism, where abstract artworks and their copies were disseminated across borders and between languages.

The flat shapes of early Modernist painting were well suited to this dissemination. The shapes of Synthetic Cubism galvanised themselves in simplicity and flatness, forms simultaneously demoted from the realm of high art and repositioned in the everyday of visual culture. Robert Morris identifies this as a “removal process”, an act of sublation in the Modernist program, preparing the art object in readiness to pit itself against the world.[93] As such, painting became “combative”, the flat shapes of early abstraction became lean, agile, and ready to compete with the impending “massive increase in the flood of imagery across a vast array of visual reproduction modalities”[94] of twentieth-century visual culture—Mitchell’s ‘pictorial turn’. Abstract shapes in painting as well as design were employed in the service of Western hegemony wherever it could reach.

Abstract shapes in visual culture performed a role of cultural production in Modernism. Reflecting on the philosophy of Michel Foucault and Louis Marin, Craig Owens writes that the importance of artworks lies not in what they say but rather in what they do. He identifies that just as artworks “perform” cultural production, they

---

[91] See Thomas McEvilley, “On ‘Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief: “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984,” *Artforum* 23 (1984): 54–60.
[92] Steinberg, “The Glorious Company," 25.
[93] Robert Morris, “Toward an Ophthalmology of the Aesthetic and an Orthopedics of Seeing,” chap. 15 in *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice*, ed. Francis Hasall, Julia Jansen and Tony O’Connor (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 228.
[94] Ibid.

also take part in "differentiation, exclusion, incorporation, and rule".[95] They are socially active agents in culture.

Successive Modernist movements and avant-garde artists attempted to be still more socially active. Abstract painted shapes slowly migrated from the confines of the studio into graphic design, typography, commercial art, and architecture. Modern artists with utopian "communal aspirations"[96] worked to develop new ways to merge art with technology and redefine modern living. In *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), Peter Bürger laments the aims of art historical avant-garde movements to adapt art to what Hegel describes as a "sublation of art … to the praxis of life".[97] For Bürger, the "only sublation of art in life is a false one: commodity aesthetic and popular culture".[98] Nevertheless, contemporary art has inherited Modernist abstract shapes in a variety of changed material forms.

The Bauhaus and the Vkhutemas incorporated these Socialist utopian aims into their teaching, which rapidly developed a widespread following as artist-teachers fled persecution during the Second World War. The gridded armature of Piet Mondrian's *Compositions* (1920–1942), the colour swatches of Joseph Alber's *Homage to the Square* (1950–1976), the rounded corners of Herbert Bayer's *Proposal for a Universal Type* (1925–1930), and the similarly rounded curves of bent tubular steel in Marcel Breuer's *Wassily Sling Back Chair* (1925–1926), are all exported shapes that have gained traction in the wider context of visual culture and the built environment due to the combined efforts of advertising, marketing and advances in technology.[99] Given the shapes already discussed, perhaps the most interesting commercial form is the black semi-circular ebony handle of Marianne Brandt's *Tea Infuser and Strainer* (1924, figure 11), manufactured at the Bauhaus metal workshop.

---

[95] Craig Owens, "Representation, Appropriation, and Power," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994), 91.

[96] Margarita Tupitsyn, "Being-in-Production: The Constructivist Code," in *Rodchenko & Popova: Defining Constructivism*, ed. Margarita Tupitsyn (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 13.

[97] Peter Bürger, "The Negation of the Autonomy of Art by the Avant-Garde," chap. 3 in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw. Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: Manchester University Press, 1984), 49.

[98] Ibid., 54

[99] This has been the topic of several publications and exhibitions; for example, Dominic Bradbury, *Mid-Century Modern Complete* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014); Campbell Bickerstaff, *Interface: People, Machines, Design* (NSW: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, 2014), and John MacArthur, Deborah Van Der Plaat, and Janina Gosseye, *Hot Modernism: Queensland Architecture 1945-1975* (Queensland: Artifice Books on Architecture, 2015).

Modern artists seemed to share abstract forms with one another. Flattened abstract shapes play what Mitchell calls the "language game of abstract art".[100] Consider how similar the abstract shapes are in Braque's *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)*, Picasso's *Head of a Man with a Hat*, Marianne Brandt's *Tea Infuser and Strainer*, and Liubov Popova's *Embroidery Design for the Artisan Co-Operative Verbovka* (1917, figure 12). As I have already noted, Picasso saw the semiotic potential of abstracted shapes to be 'read' by the spectator; for example, in his work, the black shape is the signifier for 'hair'. However, in Popova's design, this similar shape forms part of a "non-objective pictorial lexicon".[101] Picasso's black 'hair' and the blue rectangle are remade as impersonal Constructivist elements to be used in the reorganisation of everyday life of the Russian revolution.

Figure 11 Marianne Brandt *Tea Infuser and Strainer* 1924, silver and ebony, 7.3cm(h).

Figure 12 Liubov Popova, *Embroidery Design for the Artisan Co-Operative Verbovka* 1917, cut and pasted papers on paper, 12 x 17.5cm.

This ability to reach 'everyday life' almost finds its possible fulfilment in Brandt's *Tea Infuser and Strainer*, which, along with other Bauhaus designs, has had an incalculable influence on subsequent artists. Like Popova's, Brandt's design foregrounds a relationship between formal elements: the "D-shaped slice of ebony … provides a strong vertical contrast to the object's predominant horizontality".[102]

As shapes were moved from abstract painting into commercial and industrial production during Modernism, they became powerful carriers of meaning. The

[100] Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria," 225.
[101] Tupitsyn, "Being-in-Production," 13.
[102] See "Tea Infuser and Strainer," Metropolitan Museum of Art (online), http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/491299.

utilitarian and optimistic nature of this movement, however, was brief and bound to the early twentieth century. In *Writing Back to Modern Art* (2005), Harris cites Greenberg, who observes that, for Modern artists, "the suspicion arose that capitalism … no longer commanded perspectives of infinite expression".[103] Artists quickly realised that their work could no longer compete with the economic imperatives of capitalism. Abstract art needed to either turn towards the metaphysical (such as in Mondrian's work) or engage firmly with events in the physical world in a way that exceeded previous utopian ideals, and become something like Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), "ideological-propagandistic".[104]

Therefore, abstraction, which began as a challenge to art historical representation and materialism, quickly became a tool communicating ideology in Modernism. Matisse's flat shapes embody this ideological communication and as such became a model for American abstract art in the decline of European Modernism. As Matisse predicts, "by creating these coloured, paper cut-outs, it seems to me that I am happily anticipating things to come".[105] This thing to come is nothing less than an international space for culture. Frank Stella describes a new 'working space' where abstract artists "need ambition to drive abstraction out of its miasma of self satisfied materialism".[106] Ever since 1863 where Charles Baudelaire observes, "a rapidity of movement which calls for an equal speed of execution from the artist",[107] artists have worked toward this rapid response through abstraction. For example, Picasso generated an "outpouring" and "repetition" of "hundreds of 'preparatory studies'";[108] and Matisse employed his paper cut-outs to expedite his work in the studio.

Through Modernism, abstract-painted shapes left the surface of the canvas to engage in the real world. For example, Matisse's paper cut-outs were used to realise commissioned work "in another medium",[109] such as his mural *The Dance* (1932–1933). The flat shapes that comprise this work exist simultaneously in two material

[103] Jonathan Harris, "Cubism's Complexities," chap. 4 in *Writing Back to Modern Art: After Greenberg, Fried and Clark* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 125.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Buchberg et al., *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*, 23.
[106] Frank Stella, *Working Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 66.
[107] Jonathan Mayne, ed. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays by Charles Baudelaire* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 4.
[108] Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Im/Pulse to See," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Washington: Bay Press, 1988), 68–69.
[109] Friedman, "Avant La Lettre," 91

states: as a coloured paper collage (original) and a painted mural (translation). In a strange way, however, something is lost when the collaged vignette is translated as a painted mural—something poetic. The abstract shape here has an excess meaning that cannot be translated into the painted mural.[110]

To understand how abstract shapes gain agency to move between mediums in Modernism, it is again important to turn to a metaphor of translation. Benjamin speaks of translation as a “form”, and that “translatability is an essential quality of certain works”.[111] While he admits that there are certain qualities that exceed translation, such as the ‘poetic’–the element in the work that is beyond mere communication–he writes that “a real translation is transparent”.[112] Sarat Maharaj challenges this view of translation in the “international space” of contemporary culture, arguing that we presume translation to occur imperceptibly and with transparency, “like stacking panes of glass one on top of another”, but that in reality, translation “creates something different, something hybrid”.[113] It is this ‘something different’ that occurs as painted shapes are translated in abstraction.

How meaning is communicated with abstract shapes is not clear, but rather opaque and difficult. Abstract shapes have a power and influence that originated in Modernism but that quickly became involved in social history. Artists employ methods of visual translation to engage and form a dialogue with the world around them through images, objects, and design. For example, shapes from other cultures as well as emerging capitalism influenced the early abstraction of Braque, Picasso, Matisse, and Malevich.

As abstract-painted shapes were translated in Modernism by the artists and designers who employed them, so they became a kind of visual currency. They became involved in the styling of manufactured goods in the name of capitalism, for example,

[110] The difference between Matisse’s vignette and the finished mural might be more accurately described as a *différance.* See Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Jacques Derrida Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Great Britain: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982).
[111] Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 254.
[112] Ibid., 260.
[113] Sarat Maharaj, “Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other,” in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press in association with the Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994), 28–35.

Marcello Nizzoli's *Olivetti Lettera 22* (1949) typewriter design which drew "heavily" upon Modernism and "the organic fluid forms of artists such as the sculptor Henry Moore".[114] They also began to represent the absolute in science, for example Bern et al. *N=8 Supergravity Diagram* (2007) is sometimes referred to as a "Mondrian" diagram.[115] Lastly, Modernist abstract shapes were also used to illustrate the symbolic arrangement of knowledge in information technologies, such as in El Lissitzky's *Prounen* drawings of the 1920s, which today seem "like a precursor to computer graphics".[116] Unsurprisingly, then, the decline of the Modernist project, alongside an increased development of the digital, has resulted in an increased use of abstract shapes in postmodernism.

[114] Campbell Bickerstaff, *Interface: People, Machines, Design* (NSW: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, 2014), 14.
[115] See Hermann Nicolai, "Viewpoint: Vanishing Infinity," *Physics* 2, no. 70, 17 August 2009, http://physics.aps.org/articles/v2/70.
[116] Alessandro Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Onomatopee, 2012), 35.

Chapter 2
Samples and Shapes in Contemporary Painting

One may often search through two or three hundred men without finding amongst them more than one or two points of beauty. You therefore ... must take the head from some and the chest, arm, leg, hand and foot from others.
—Albrecht Dürer, circa 1500[1]

...I'll turn that one element into a painting. Instead of looking at the art, the totality of the artwork... I'll take little pieces, and I think of that as a more personal and interpretive quality that's coming from within.
—Laura Owens, 2003[2]

Identifying instances of translation in abstract painting through art history is complex. I am not interested in exact copies but in degrees of recognition and a scale of resemblance in contemporary abstraction. Unlike the appropriated copy, where artists "boldly use the most recognizable quotations",[3] the origins of translation explored in this research are more difficult to attribute. Four examples from recent years illustrate how translation is different from a more conventional use of image quotation or copying associated with appropriation art: Dick Watkins's *The Fall No. 2* (1968, figure 13); Laura Owens's *Untitled* (2012, figure 14); Charline von Heyl's *Wall at WAM mural* (2010, figure 15); and Christine Streuli's *Ableger* (*Offshoot*) (2013, figure 16). Each of these artists translate shapes from the work of other artists and uses them in their own work. These practices of translation in abstraction are the antonym of image quotation used in postmodern appropriation; rather, contemporary translated shapes communicate in a self-determined and motivated forward momentum. By adopting a methodology of translation, contemporary abstraction can use painted shapes to reanimate existing forms and build new ones.

[1] Wolfgang Stechow, *Northern Renaissance Art 1400-1600: Sources and Documents* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 114.
[2] Rachel Kushner, "Laura Owens," *The Believer* 1, no. 2 (2003), http://www.believermag.com/issues/200305/?read=interview_owens.
[3] Jean Lipman and Richard Marshall, *Art about Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), 7.

Figure 13 Dick Watkins *The Fall No. 2* 1968, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 183 x 152cm.

Figure 14 Laura Owens *Untitled* 2012, oil, acrylic, flashe, resin, collage, and pumice on canvas, 275 x 213cm.

Figure 15 Charline von Heyl *Untitled (Wall at WAM)* 2010, acrylic and latex paint, 518 x 2042cm.

Figure 16 Christine Streuli *Ableger (Offshoot)* (installation view) 2013, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland.

2.1 Shaped and Reshaped: Secondary Forms

The way contemporary artists use existing images expands the quotation and copying normally associated with appropriation art. However, it is important first to note the influence of 1980s' Australian appropriation-art on my practice. In 2014 the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) curated *Pop to Popism* examining the legacy of 1960s' Pop Art in Australian appropriation-art of the 1980s. This exhibition was informed in part by Paul Taylor's group show *Popism* (1982) at the NGV, outlined in my Introduction.

When *Popism* opened, I was twelve months old. That is to say, the postmodern temperament of this exhibition is a good place for me to start when thinking about how I approach my own practice. The catalogue from the *Pop to Popism* exhibition recounts themes of "appropriation and pastiche, repetition, mediation, and relative meaning".[4] The exhibition acknowledged Taylor's observation that the local artist's "experience of Australia is mediated by images—and images principally generated overseas".[5] This establishes a kind of creative position for Australian artists and an approach to art-making that is particular to an Australian identity.

In the first chapter, I explored how early Modern artists developed abstraction as a method of translating elements of the real world into flat shapes. I also considered the ways that these shapes were translated into other mediums, objects, and designs to become a kind of visual currency used to develop Western capitalism. In the global reach of contemporary visual culture, this currency becomes a multinational commodity because abstract shapes are used and reused to style goods, as visual devices to simplify and arrange complex knowledge in the digital, and as templates for architectural forms.

2.1.1 Printed Shapes, Screen Shapes

Contemporary built environments are configured using a multitude of shapes. Printed media and screen technologies mostly use shapes that have a long history. It is once again important to establish some parameters around what types of shapes I am referring to here. As I explained in my Introduction, I am interested in painted flat-shapes that are decontextualised from their source in a process of abstraction. I am interested in how these shapes are represented in contemporary visual environments and how they have been used and reused in art history. I use my practice to explore how shapes can represent individual or discrete units of information, how shapes form an abstract visual language, and how they can communicate using a type of visual translation.

[4] Anneke Jaspers, "Art of the Second Degree: Post Pop and Popism," in *Pop to Popism*, edited by Wayne Tunnicliffe and Anneke Jaspers (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2014), 235.
[5] Rex Butler, ed. *What Is Appropriation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s & 1990s*, 2nd ed. (Brisbane: IMA Publishing, 2004), 17.

Abstract-painted shapes can connect works across time and space. In a similar way to *Picasso and American Art*, *Pop to Popism* arranged and compared paintings to make formal and thematic connections. It included Dick Watkins's painting *The Fall No. 2*, which consists of simplified flat shapes and abutting planes. Wayne Tunnicliffe describes the painting as an abstraction that is working through "cubist" and "constructivist" influences.[6] Again, it is interesting to observe the shapes in this work as transformations of shapes from early Synthetic Cubism. These shapes seem to have come from somewhere but it is difficult to know where; they appear to refer to art historical and design elements more generally.

Against the criterion of originality associated with the avant-garde, it is easy to malign the work of Watkins, along similar lines as Stuart Davis's work, as an inauthentic example of provincial abstraction. His work is representative of an art-historical period where abstract shapes and cultural forms were exported from artistic centres to colonial outposts. Watkins's work, like Davis's, embodies a strategy of importing undeclared forms morphed and synthesised into local abstraction. In its exhibition, the AGNSW positioned the purloined shapes used by Watkins as a precursor to Australian appropriation art, however I argue that this work more accurately embodies an act of translation.

It is important to identify how art-historical instances of reuse in translation operate in a different way to appropriation art. Acts of quotation span Western art history in a complex way in which appropriation is only a part. Leo Steinberg outlines some of this history in his catalogue introduction to an exhibition about appropriation in *Art about Art* (1978) at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He describes several printed etchings from which artists have sourced details for use in their own work.[7]

Two printed images provide particularly useful examples. It is often cited that Manet "translated" the seated picnickers in *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) from a detail in

---

[6] Wayne Tunnicliffe, "'The Easel Did Not Go Pop: It Went Bang!' Australian Pop Art," in *Pop to Popism*, 144.
[7] Leo Steinberg, "The Glorious Company," in *Art about Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), 17.

Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael for *Judgement of Paris* (1515).[8] Similarly, Gustave Courbet's *The Meeting* (1854) is "unequivocally based upon a source in popular imagery";[9] in this case, *The Wandering Jew* (1826–1830), Épinal print and broadside frontispiece of Champfleury's *Histoire de l'imagerie populaire* (1784). These examples are important, as they reinforce my claims from Chapter 1; namely, that the popular print is responsible for the passage of certain forms into painting and establishing a visual economy of images.

Abstract shapes are part of this trafficking of visual communication. They can be found in many printed forms, such as pictograms, hieroglyphs, logos, and printer's ornaments. Steinberg further implicates commercial printing in the multiplication of abstract shapes when he describes Saul Steinberg's cover design for *The New Yorker* in 1964. This design depicts typographic ornaments—floral designs arranged as a "reflexive" and "historiographic"[10] open source garden of abstract shapes from which we can all share. In 1928, Fredric Warde described printer's ornaments as "opportunities for invention", especially "printer's flowers" such as quatrefoils that blur the line between letters and ornaments as they become part of the family of printing types.[11]

I am interested here in extending the simplification of shapes expressed in Chapter 1, with an aim to understanding how the printed image produces abstracted shapes that are popular, and how these popularised shapes are composed according to a particular syntax or arrangement. As I have already shown, commercial printing technologies helped to create visual culture in the early twentieth century. Artists make use of the printing process to disseminate their work and expand the possibilities of their practice, developing "a rich variety of visual forms … [and] also powerful emotions".[12]

---

[8] Alan Krell, *Manet and the Painters of Contemporary Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 28.
[9] Linda Nochlin, "Gustave Courbet's Meeting: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew," *The Art Bulletin* 49, no. 3 (1967): 209–22.
[10] Steinberg, "The Glorious Company," 20.
[11] It is important to note that "stereotypes" and "clichés" are terms that describe the solid metal cast of an original typesetting forme. In the history of printing, these were used to save time, labour and wearing of original types and were used to print reproductions. See Fredric Warde, "Printers Ornaments on the 'Monotype'," in *Typographers on Type: An Illustrated Anthology from William Morris to the Present Day*, ed. Ruari McLean (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995; orig. pub. 1928), 55–56.
[12] Alessandro Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894* (Rotterdam,

The printing process is particularly useful for contemporary abstraction as it encourages artists to redefine the constraints of the printed page and to reconsider the book as a dynamic object that has its own type of 'space'. In *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894* (2012), Alessandro Ludovico re-reads the history of media technology and implicates early Modern abstraction in its development. He notes that El Lissitzky viewed the future printed book as being a composite of visual effects, 'THE ELECTRO-LIBRARY'. This remarkable prediction of the future capacity of the book, which also resembles the computer and the Internet, goes some of the way to explaining how artists were thinking about graphic shapes during Modernism.

The legacy of Modernist design has enabled abstract shapes to communicate with art history and popular culture. El Lissitzky's work influenced the teachers of the Bauhaus who worked toward the "sublation of art … to the praxis of life".[13] The result is that similar graphic shapes now appear in painted artworks, graphic design, advertising, architecture, and computer desktop graphics. As demonstrated in the first chapter, abstract shapes rapidly gained traction in the wider context of visual culture. Shapes that appear in abstract painting were reshaped and recontextualised as they passed from art history into visual culture and are then returned in contemporary abstraction. This is particularly evident when comparing the histories of commercial printing, computer visuals, and abstract painting.

Postmodern and contemporary artists deliberately create samples, shapes, and secondary forms in their work in a pastiche that is often nostalgic and self-reflexive. Recreating images and image details from art history in new work is, however, "intergenerational"; as Steinberg writes, "artists find serviceable material and put it to work".[14] Artists at all stages in history have engaged image details for use in their work, so this is not an especially contemporary activity. What is contemporary, however, is an accelerated and altered relationship with past images that are now continually present in electronic devices.

Netherlands: Onomatopee, 2012), 34.

[13] Peter Bürger, "The Negation of the Autonomy of Art by the Avant-Garde," chap. 3 in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: Manchester University Press, 1984), 49.

[14] Steinberg, "The Glorious Company," 21.

The intersection of visual culture, technology, and painting practice represents a rapid change in how images are used. This is paralleled by the developments of personal technology in the last decades of the twentieth century. The rise of personal computers, digital cameras, image-editing software, and social media all cumulated and became available in a mobile phone during the late 2000s. In *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (2006), Anne Friedberg outlines the change in perception that occurred from this change, examining the window as another use of metaphor, where the computer screen is both a "page" and a "window". Friedberg writes, "the space mapped onto the computer screen is both deep and flat".[15] There is an obvious connection here with the painted shapes at the centre of this research.

Today, many contemporary artists paint abstract shapes and respond to the visual effects of the computer desktop in various ways. It is important to outline some of the ways that artists recreate or record desktop interactions in painting—such as in Miltos Manetas's *Internet Paintings (On)* (2002) or Albert Oehlen's *Computer Paintings* (2009)—or as a way of combining paint with digital media, such as in Michel Majerus's *Depression* (2002) or Michael Williams's *Maybe I Wiped A Boogie On Your Coat* (2014). Recent group exhibitions such as *Painting after Technology* at Tate Modern (2015), *The Forever Now* at MoMA (2015), and *Image Transfer: Pictures in a Remix Culture* at the University of Washington (2010) help to demonstrate that computer processes and the computer interface are changing how contemporary artists are approaching painting.

To focus on the formal effects that digital technologies have on contemporary painting is to misunderstand how artists engage with them. The change brought about by computer technologies is twofold: first, digital technologies change the way contemporary artists approach the painting surface; second (and arguably more important), contemporary abstract painting can influence the graphic interface of the screen. Neal Stephenson's *In the Beginning ... Was the Command Line* (1999) gives a short history of the development of computer interfaces, in which he charts a changing user-relation to abstracted forms on the computer screen. Stephenson

[15] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 227.

explains that abstracted icons are developed to short-circuit the "laborious, explicit verbal communication" associated with the command line of MS-DOS.[16]

This description finds its parallel in *The Interface Effect* (2012), where Alexander Galloway describes how the computer gaming interface contains both "diegetic" and "non-diegetic"[17] elements. Diegetic elements are those found within narrative fiction, whereas non-diegetic elements engage the reader or user directly. Non-diegetic elements in the computer interface are normally represented in a "thin, two-dimensional overlay containing icons, text, progress bars, and numbers. It deploys an entirely different mode of signification, reliant more on letter and number, or iconographic images rather than realistic representational images".[18] The graphical user interface conflates the illusion of space in the screen with an interactive anterior space.

This conflation of illusionary and interactive space has had an important effect on some contemporary abstract painting, which can be observed in works where the painting surface appears to be a proxy for screen technologies; for example, Trudy Benson's *For RL* (2013) or Laura Owens's *Untitled* (2012). In Owens's work, abstract shapes appear alongside painted calligraphic swirls; as Laura Hopton observes, here "manufactured marks, photo silk-screen and painting … coalesce".[19] Combinations of shapes float simultaneously on the surface of the canvas with *trompe l'œil* effect. An illusion of space projected outwards is created when individual shapes appear to float in front of the picture plane. This effect is caused by the various shadows or penumbrae painted to suggest physical layering.

It is wrong to attribute this painterly effect entirely to the influence of computer desktop aesthetics. Indeed, the opposite may be argued, as these kinds of floating abstract shapes find their art-historical precedence in Barbara Rose's "Abstract Illusionism"[20] of the 1970s and the paintings of Jack Lembeck or Michael

---

[16] Neal Stephenson, *In the Beginning … Was the Command Line* (New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1999), 52.
[17] Alexander R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012), 42.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Laura Hoptman, *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 49.
[20] Barbara Rose, "Abstract Illusionism," *Artforum* October (1967): 33–37.

Gallagher.[21] Made popular using similar strategies of dissemination as those described in Chapter 1, the shapes in these works were quickly appropriated by commercial and graphic design. For example, the squiggle shapes and shadow effects of Gallagher's *Seabedabbled* (1978) can be found in Nathalie du Pasquier's Memphis print and fabric designs of the 1980s, or animated in MTV music videos.[22] The abstract shapes used by the artworks in this chapter are also found in both postmodern artwork and popular visual culture.

The abstract shapes in my work undergo a material or physical change, as they are adapted for different types of interactions; for example, between the optics of the computer screen and the tactility of paint. Brenda Laurel discusses in *Computers as Theatre* (1991) how computer screen interfaces aim to impersonate the interactivity of paint on canvas. In her chapter "Interface Evolution", Laurel describes a kind of "conversationality" between human and computer, where the desktop shows "evidence of the task's evolution".[23] Laurel refers to a concept of "direct manipulation"; that is, a transfer of real world interactions into the virtual.[24] Because artwork images are increasingly transferred between material states, it is important to consider what these material differences might conceal.

When the early printmakers simplified images for print reproduction, they sacrificed nuances and detail for the sake of expediency. This loss of detail is exacerbated in a contemporary context of image circulation and exchange. James Elkins argues that where images are converted into digital code, we see "the disappearance of detail and the emergence of blur".[25] Importantly, he attributes the difference in the quality of images produced to each person's 'output device', whether a computer, television, phone, etc. Like the painstaking burin engraving of *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* produced by Paul Mercuri as discussed in Chapter 1, high-resolution digital images

[21] Nathaniel Lee, "Trudy Benson," *Artforum*, 3 June 2016, http://artforum.com/picks/id=60414.
[22] For examples of animated graphic elements using rotoscope, see music videos for INXS, Richard Lowenstein, "What You Need," 3:35 (Atlantic, 1985), and A-Ha, Steve Barron, "Take on Me," 3:24 (Warner Bros., 1985).
[23] Brenda Laurel, "Interface Evolution," in *Computers as Theatre* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), 7.
[24] Contemporary examples of this manipulation can be found in programs such as Sketchbook Pro that work with the Apple iPad Pro using the Apple Pencil.
[25] James Elkins, "What Are We Seeing, Exactly?," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 2 (1997): 192.

are restricted to the few, while low-resolution digital images are easily circulated using email and social media—a crude distribution of highlights.

Abstract forms favour techniques of visual communication that are expedient, direct, quickly disseminated, and easily recognised. We can see, however, that expediency and easy dissemination necessarily require some type of abstraction. Images are changed both during a process of transcription for print or conversion into the digital. Because they are translated in a process of abstraction, image forms are no longer easily recognised. Translating an original text for dissemination to wider audiences means sacrificing recognition. This also occurs in different modes in painting.

In *Painting as Model* (1990), Bois describes paintings as being organised and modelled on codes or "rules that govern the formation of an image and its interpretation".[26] He outlines four models of painting with different rules that govern their production and reception. For the 'Perceptive Model', Bois describes a mode of seeing in abstract painting where the perceptual meaning of a work is both "ambiguous" and "without assignable end".[27] This model gives rise to a disturbance of perception. Initially, this disturbance is between the figure and ground of abstract painting, such as in the work of Piet Mondrian and Jackson Pollock, which also aligns with the confusion of space in the graphical user interface of the digital screen.

In the fourth and final 'Strategic Model', Bois describes works of art as being "like chess pieces";[28] that is, a work has significance within a strategic system, which also includes other artworks, museums, and different modes of representation.
This way of thinking is important to this research because it confirms that abstracted image-details are translated between material states and accelerated in contemporary digital networks and social media. As an example, I will return briefly to a shape from Chapter 1, a black 'B' shape with one flat edge and two curves, which has been translated several times—initially being abstracted in Synthetic Cubism, then reappearing as a Constructivist fabric design, and then finally as a Bauhaus teapot handle.

---

[26] Hubert Damisch, "Syntactical Space," *A Theory of /Cloud/*, trans. Janet Lloyd (California: Stanford University Press, 1972), 87.
[27] Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: October, 1990), 248.
[28] Ibid., 254.

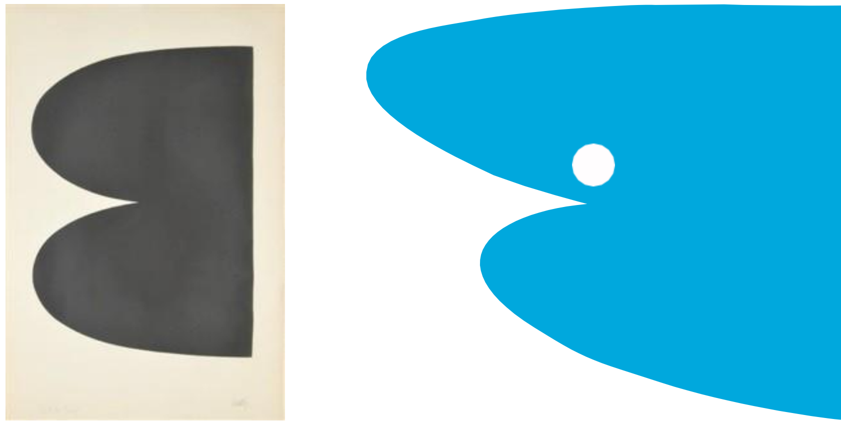


Figure 17 Ellsworth Kelly *Black (Noir)* from *Suite of Twenty-Seven Color Lithographs* 1964–65, 89.5 x 61.1cm.

Figure 18 Simon Degroot *Shape Poems* 2017 (detail), laser cut acrylic, 29 x 34cm.

Bois evokes the Strategic Model to clarify a movement and interrelation of artists and artworks, which applies to the translation of this 'B' shape. Most recently, and updated for contemporary audiences, this shape is translated into minimalist abstraction in Ellsworth Kelly's *Black (Noir)* (1964–1965) (figure 17). I have also translated this shape into my own work as an installation element for *Shape Poems* (2017, figure 18) so as to test the limits of recognition in translation.

2.1.2 Popular Artworks: Little Image Details

Some abstract shapes are more likely than others to reappear time and again. As I have already shown through the example of the 'B' shape, an abstract form is able to pass through several different art-historical and popular iterations. This abstract shape, like others introduced below, is particularly suited to translation. This is because shapes that are seductive, playful, iconic, or designed are more likely to reappear as translations in contemporary abstraction.

Discovering the legacy of Modern abstract painting in contemporary environments is made easier with Internet search engines. The abstract shapes first disseminated by commercial printing are now continually present in electronic devices. Contemporary painting distinguishes itself from these other periods by the speedy way that artists incorporate elements from visual culture; specifically, identifying, selecting, and

translating abstract form, turning them into painted motifs. Common visual elements can be easily identified and discussed using image-searching technology. As Steinberg observes, "the spotting of imported items requires little more than a superabundance of comparative images at one's elbow".[29] Technology grants access to such images.

Comparing component shapes between artworks reveals a preference for particular types of abstract shapes. Of course, this interrelation of fragmented image details is symptomatic of a wider postmodern understanding of post-structuralism. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Jean-François Lyotard describes a post-structuralist game of language where communication is also performative,

> …consider the form of popular sayings, proverbs, and maxims: they are like little splinters of potential narratives, or molds of old ones, which have continued to circulate on certain levels of the contemporary social edifice.[30]

If we replace 'popular sayings' with 'popular artworks' and 'little splinters' with 'little image details', it is easy to see how contemporary painting can circulate a particular artwork detail as a splinter across a social edifice—a construction that includes artwork, design, and electronic media.

The work of Ellsworth Kelly provides a good opportunity to analyse image details in isolation and compare them with other artworks. Kelly maintains that the abstract shapes in his work originate from observations in "nature".[31] While this is significant, it is arguably equally important for contemporary art that the shape in *Black (Noir)* is also "recognisable"[32] in other artworks and visual culture. Similarly, a right-angled trapezoid in Kelly's *Concorde IV (State)* (1981, figure 19) can also be found in art history and popular culture. This is important for contemporary artists who may see the work and incorporate the shape into their own practice.

---

[29] Leo Steinberg, "The Glorious Company," 12.

[30] Jean-Frâncois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse (United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1979), 9.

[31] The term "nature" is used here to refer to shapes in the built environment. For example, the *Concorde* series (1981–82) finds parallel shapes in Kelly's photographs of Place de la Concorde in Paris, or in the case of *Concorde IV (State)* (1981), "Doorway to Hangar, St Bartholemy," 1977.

[32] Andrew Graham-Dixon, "Like Memories That Haven't Quite Gelled," *The Telegraph*, 2006, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3651351/Like-memories-that-havent-quite-gelled.html.

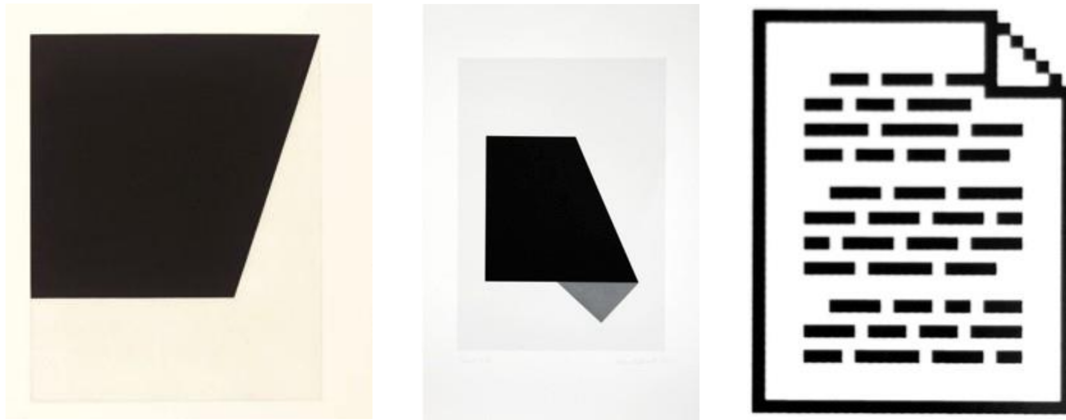


Figure 19 Ellsworth Kelly *Concorde IV (State)* 1981, etching and aquatint on paper, 40.5 x 32cm.

Figure 20 Iran do Espírito Santo *Twist 7A* 2011, pencil on photogram, 29.2 x 21cm.

Figure 21 Susan Kare *New Blank Document* 1984, Apple Computer Inc, 32 x 32pixels.

Arthur C. Danto considers how these formal similarities are to be understood. In "The Comedies of Similarity", Danto, citing Joseph Masheck's "A Humanist Geometry" (1984), writes:

> It is as though there might be a lexicon of forms—squares, half-moons, trapezoids, circles, triangles—with the names of artists and works of all periods which have the shapes in question as the lexicon's entry. It is as though all these works are affines with one another, and the erudite art historian is then positioned to survey the landscape of forms and "to be reminded" of distant affinities. I think the art history lecture, with its quantity of slides that underscore resemblances, that enable the lecturer to use post-structuralist idiom and speak of Palladio and "inscribed" in Mangold, is somewhat responsible for this way of thinking, which may be legitimate, but only pending what no one has given us, namely a good analysis of *affinity*.[33]

This way of thinking is legitimate in contemporary environments because shapes are available in a context of image sharing and exchange. Artists have individualised their experiences with pre-existing images and how they use these to make new work. Artists can identify formal relationships and affinities in the work of others and develop these into causal relationships in their own work. For example, an artist may view a particular abstract trapezoid in Pablo Picasso's *Three Musicians* (1921), or Henri Matisse's *The Snail* (1953); or Robert Mangold's *Attic Series #5* (1991), or Iran do Espírito Santo's *Twist A* (2011, figure 20), and insert this into their own work. The

[33] Joseph Masheck, "Mangolds Humanist Geometry," cited in Arthur C. Danto, "The Comedies of Similarity," chap. 4 in *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in a Post-Historical Perspective* (Berkley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 50.

meaning of this shape is then multiplied because it is shared and made common in contemporary visual culture. Even Susan Kare's computer icon, *New Blank Document* for *Apple Computer Inc*. (1984, figure 21) seems relevant in this context.

Specific shapes reappear in art history as well as in visual culture with a certain amount of regularity. In *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Kress and van Leeuwen note that abstract shapes have a degree of "interchangeability" and are used and combined into meaningful compositions using visual "grammar".[34] As already noted, the abstract shapes from early Modernism have reappeared in subsequent artworks, designs, and architecture to build a visual culture. For instance, the avant-garde rectangles of De Stijl may have started as abstractions from nature, but they very quickly became templates for a 'new reality' in the designs of Gerrit Rietveld. It is easy to see how abstract shapes became popularised through the built environment of Modernism.

Another flat shape that appears in several iterations is an ancient stylised floral arrangement known as a quatrefoil. The four-leafed floral design has a long history associated with Gothic architecture and is used in artwork, design, and commercial printing. This stylised flower appears as a paper cut-out maquette in Matisse's *Chinese Fish* (1951), as a partial element inspired by Art Deco design in Watkins's *The Fall No. 2* (1968),[35] as a screenprinted example of Pop Art in Andy Warhol's *Ten Foot Flowers* (1967), as a work of reimagined neo-pop art in Takashi Murakami's *KaiKai KiKi* flowers, and as a painted steel sculpture in Christopher Hodges's *Garden* (2013). A stylised floral design, the quatrefoil is also crucial in the history of print such as in *Printers Ornaments on the 'Monotype'* (1928),[36] as well as a form of tracery in architecture and stained glass.

Ornamental designs were printed in reference books in the nineteenth century as inspiration for designers and architects. For *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856), which became extremely popular, Owen Jones visited the Alhambra Palace, where he observed the quatrefoil. He instructed its correct use according to the following

[34] Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images* (London: Routledge, 1996), 57.
[35] Wayne Tunnicliffe observes that *The Fall no 2* shows Watkins working through "a cubist, constructivist and Fernand Léger-inspired abstraction, part of an international resurgence of interest in the art of the 1920s and 30s, and in art deco design". See Tunnicliffe, "'The Easel Did Not Go Pop: It Went Bang!'," 144.
[36] Warde "Printers Ornaments on the 'Monotype'."

proposition: "flowers or other natural objects should not be used as ornaments, but conventional representations founded upon them sufficiently suggestive to convey the intended image to the mind…"[37] This conventionalised ornament is sufficiently suggestive in Frank Stella's *Flin Flon* (1970), where intertwining curves and vaulting arcs have a "close relationship"[38] with Islamic ornament. Here, the quatrefoil is identifiable as a shape that undergoes a visual change as it is translated into painting.

The above shapes demonstrate how image details become familiar through reuse and a process of translation. In the book *Working Space* (1986), Frank Stella observes that "the excitement of the pictorial past haunts the invention of the pictorial present";[39] that is, shapes maintain something of an echo as they enter into the context of his practice. As such, righ- angled trapezoids and quatrefoils are used for different reasons in abstract painting. These different contexts produce shapes with multiple meanings that become generally familiar and 'haunt' contemporary painting.

A contemporary and globally networked visual economy is an ideal environment for the spectres of abstract shapes to frequently manifest. David Joselit observes that images "possess vast power through their capacity for replication, remediation, and dissemination at variable velocities" to form connections with one another.[40] As I have already described, this power begins with the printing process and is expanded by television and digital media giving even more power to images and shapes by inserting them into popular culture.

Televisual images communicate in a series of 'distinctive moments'. Stuart Hall writes that for messages to "'have an effect', influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade",[41] they must first be decoded by social practice. However, Susan Sontag also writes that television is "organised to arouse and to satiate by its surfeit of images [which] keeps attention light, mobile, relatively indifferent to content";[42] that is, light and ephemeral images are at the same time influential and persuasive.

[37] Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (New York: DK Publishing, 2001; orig. pub. 1856), 25.
[38] Anthony White, "Frank Stella: Discussion of the Work," National Gallery of Australia (website), 2002, http://nga.gov.au/International/Catalogue/Detail.cfm?IRN=37841&BioArtistIRN=15599 &MnuID=SRCH&GalID=1.
[39] Frank Stella, *Working Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 99.
[40] David Joselit, *After Art*, ed. Sarah Whiting (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), xiv.
[41] Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," chap. 36 in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 509.
[42] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), 94.

What better example of this compound-complex televisual form than a "show about nothing",[43] *Seinfeld*, in which Stella's *Flin Flon* appears in an episode titled "The Red Dot".[44] This contributes both to the dissemination of Stella's work and makes the quatrefoil shape even more familiar. Numerous artists redirect the power of television to produce a familiarity in their work, among them David Reed, who inserted his painting *#328* (1990) into Alfred Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* (1958) and Rodney Graham who, inversely, reconstructed his own Modern abstract wall installation *Psychomania* (2010), "reconfiguring the composition of the original paintings whilst maintaining a basic vocabulary of form" from a British low-budget zombie film of the same name.[45]

Artists make visual selections from familiar images and image details and translate these in their work. For example, when Laura Owens borrows image details from a variety of sources, she selects things that "when you pick them and maybe rearrange them, look like other things".[46] This suggests that Owens is searching for shapes that have ambiguous meanings. Abstract forms are like objects that interact on the surface of the canvas which "is a container that people are shifting things into".[47] Artists translate details from art-historical images, architecture, and design into contemporary abstract painting. This kind of process can be observed in the practices of some contemporary Australian painters. Consider Natalya Hughes's reinterpretation of a detail from Tsukioka Yoshitoshi's nineteenth-century ukiyo-e print in *Looking Cute* (2013, figure 22) and Peter Atkins's translation of the design from a Telstra print advertisement in *Talk + Text* (2012, figure 23).

---

[43] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "About Nothing," chap. 2 in *Seinfeld*. BFI TV Classics (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 19.
[44] "The Red Dot," *Seinfeld*, Season 3, Episode 12, 02:26.
[45] "Painter, Poet, Lighthouse Keeper," Lisson Gallery, http://www.lissongallery.com/exhibitions/rodney-graham-painter-poet-lighthouse-keeper.
[46] Kushner, "Laura Owens."
[47] In conversation with Laura Hoptman *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 50.

Figure 22 Natalya Hughes *Looking Cute* 2013, acrylic on plywood, 240 x 240cm.

Figure 23 Peter Atkins *Talk + Text* 2012, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 61cm.

Both of these works show how artists translate popular image details into their own practices. Of *Looking Cute*, Hughes says she is, "interested with the way people engage with things that might otherwise be overlooked, like decoration".[48] Similarly, Atkins describes how he selects "what I am attracted to, what I find beautiful at a particular time".[49] These shapes undergo a translation upon entering the context of the new painting and are changed by the artists. These works promote an ambiguity in which the origin of the abstract shapes is difficult to identify. Thus, by adopting a methodology of translation, contemporary abstraction can use painted shapes in a dialogue with visual culture to reanimate existing forms and build new ones.

2.2 Visual Poetics: Scale and Arrangement

For contemporary abstract painting to form a dialogue with wider visual culture, it must move outside the studio in some way. In addition to commercial printing and digital reproduction, this can be achieved by recreating studio works as large-scale murals in a mode of expanded painting. Murals connect abstract forms with the built environment so that artworks become monumental in scale and accessible to new audiences. Murals–including graffiti and public art–have recently moved into a more mainstream cultural position, partly due to "the forces of commodification in

[48] Saskia Edwards, "Natalya Hughes at Milani Gallery: Warping the Woodblock," http://www.aestheticfixation.com/2014/06/natalya-hughes-at-milani-gallery.html.
[49] Peter Atkins, "Painting and Drawing," Greenaway Art Gallery, http://www.greenaway.com.au/Artists/Peter-Atkins.html#essay2011PAtkins.

fashion, music, publishing and architecture”.[50] Therefore, contemporary murals feature in museums, galleries and urban design.

Expanded abstract painting formed a close relationship with the built environment during Modernism.[51] With a combined interest in formal qualities, the rectilinear shapes, flat surfaces, and free plan of the International Style provided increased mural opportunities for artists and architects.[52] To take advantage of these opportunities and with the increased scale of mural work, artists often painted small maquettes to work out composition and colour. As described above, Matisse employed his cut-outs as maquettes in this way. Artworks created in the studio form the initial designs–the blueprints–for translations into a different medium and a larger scale.

Images and details from art history, architecture and design, are scaled up when artists apply methods of translation to large-scale murals. A small-scale translation of design elements in the studio is extended as artists align their work with architectural forms and the built environment. for example, Charline von Heyl’s *Wall at WAM* (2010) (figure 15) for Worcester Art Museum in the US mirrors the arched entries that lead into the gallery below.

This mural is connected with the architecture of the building but is also based in part on Ellsworth Kelly’s *Orange White* (1963) from the museum’s collection. In an interview about the use of this image, von Heyl says that, “it was a two second decision” and that she wanted to make something decorative “that gives an immense satisfaction”.[53] Selected from a brochure at the museum, Kelly’s work is translated from its original context and enlarged by von Heyl into a mural design and a background template for an Abstract Expressionist landscape. When selecting the

---

[50] Alison Young, *Street Art, Public City: Law, Crime and the Urban Imagination* (Oxford & New York: Routledge, 2014), 151.

[51] This is a renewed relationship, as artists have painted the walls and ceilings of buildings since antiquity. For example, consider Michelangelo’s ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (1508–1512).

[52] For example, Eileen Gray’s *E1027* modernist house at Roquebrune–Cap Martin proved irresistible to Le Corbusier who vacationed there without Gray’s knowledge and painted murals on the walls. Le Corbusier’s *Sgraffite à Cap Martin* (1938) recreates his architectural “technique of *mariage de contours* to a figurative subject”, applied as a mural depicting a black painted outline of three intertwined and abstracted figures. See Peter Adam, “Building for Others,” in *Eileen Gray: Architect / Designer: A Biography* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000), 291–314.

[53] Charline von Heyl “The Man Podcast: Charline von Heyl,” in *The Modern Art Notes Podcast*, 17 November 2011, https://manpodcast.com/portfolio/no-2-charline-von-heyl-kristen-hileman/, 37:23.

Kelly image, von Heyl notes that she never saw the original work in the museum, and that in the studio, she "almost only works through books and printed images".[54] Thus, the six-leafed floral shape *Orange White* was initially translated from its original context into the printed brochure and then later by its reuse in the mural.

Abstract shapes chosen for their design or decorative potential are indicative of a wider tendency in contemporary painting–an attitude that is unique in a visual economy of surplus historical references. Artists take what they wish to make their paintings "without guilt, and equally important, without an agenda based on a received meaning of a style".[55] It is with this attitude that von Heyl selected Kelly's *Orange White* from a printed brochure. Reproduced as a printed image the shapes from this artwork enter a wider image network in order to perform the role of promotional image.[56] Printed images—and, by extension, images online—prepare the way for a type of contemporary artist to emerge, "who inserts things into a frame".[57] Entering this larger network, *Orange White* joins other images and shapes that are already circulating in popular culture, where artists may select whatever they want from all available images.

From within this context of image choice, artist Christine Streuli has selected one of a brushstroke, which she has repeatedly stencilled in her installation *Ableger (Offshoot)* (2013) at Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland. The brushstroke is applied across the surface of the canvas, spilling onto the wall of the gallery in an act of expanded painting where "paintings and wall are treated as equals in carrying colour".[58] The brushstroke, like Kelly's six-leafed floral shape, is removed from its historical context and given new meaning as a painterly installation arranged according to the specific requirements of the mural site.

---

[54] Ibid., 09:30–34.
[55] Hoptman *The Forever Now*, 13.
[56] Eshelman notes that the artist has the "unique power to renew value in the cultural archive". Raoul Eshelman, *Performatism, or, the End of Postmodernism* (Aurora: The Davies Group, 2008), 218.
[57] As an example, Eshelman cites the "collage like figures" in Neo Rauch's *Pfad* (*The Path*) (2003). Ibid., 225.
[58] Ibid., 49.

Like von Heyl's desire to create "immense satisfaction",[59] Streuli has selected the brushstroke image because of its capacity for seduction, "a term the artist repeatedly uses when talking about her own work".[60] Unlike von Heyl's quick selection however, Streuli's was a calculated continuation of a type of translation that can be traced to Roy Lichtenstein's *Brushstroke* (1965). Lichtenstein writes that his brushstroke, a Pop comment on the authorial mark in Abstract Expressionism, is a 'cliché', a visual shorthand, and 'archetype'. He describes that these kinds of archetypes are of the kind that can also be located in Cubist works by Picasso and cartoons by Walt Disney.[61] These are the values that Streuli trades on when she recasts the brushstroke as a stencilled shape that is painted across the installation.

In contemporary image economies abstract shapes are popularised and become easily recognisable. Indeed, while access to an abundance of images provides increased exposure, it also enhances the confusion and complexity about the origin, meaning, and use of abstract shapes. Contemporary artists benefit from this confusion, making use of particular forms from a circulating network of images and shapes. Von Heyl and Streuli translate specific shapes from this network, painting them in large scale, foregrounding their importance and reinserting them into contemporary visual culture. These works are examples of translation writ large: abstract shapes that have moved from the studio and fulfil the edifying potential of art.

2.3 Confusion and Complexity: Visual Grammar, Abstract Rhyme

Translating flat abstract shapes from art history is not limited to mural painting but also includes laser-cut plastic, digitally manipulated screenprints, and computer-assisted painting. The shapes discussed in this chapter have transcended their medium specificity and are extended by a practice of expanded painting described above. Like the textual translations of language considered in the first chapter, individual and discrete abstract shapes are mediated by contemporary visual culture. They are encountered indirectly and reanimated so that each shape exists like a photocopy, a

[59] von Heyl, "The Man Podcast," 37:23.

[60] Katja Blomberg, *Christine Streuli – Nonstop-Painting* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013), 51.

[61] Hal Foster, "Roy Lichtenstein, or the Cliché Image," chap. 2 in *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 91.

ghost that echoes alongside the artwork examples above. Each contemporary abstraction is haunted by previous contexts even as shapes enter into new contextual relations or are remade in other media.

Some artists visually rhyme abstract shapes in their work with existing forms, translating shapes from contemporary visual culture. These may include design elements, packaging shapes, architectural forms, and shapes from digital screens, such as that seen in Wendy White's *No Pressure* (2016, figure 24) and *Pleasure I* (2016, figure 25); Ryan Gander's *Your Present Time Orientation (Second Act—Random Abstraction)* (2011, figure 26); Vincent Hawkins's *Untitled* (2015, figure 27); Christopher Wool's *Untitled* (2011, figure 28); and John Young's *Moment III* (2015, figure 29).

Arranged individually or together in compositions, the shapes in these works communicate with audiences using a visual grammar that is provisional and flexible. Artists make use of this compositional flexibility in their work in three ways: by 1) treating the detritus of everyday visual culture as easily obtainable readymades to work with; 2) as a steady flow of images and details ripe for appropriation into new compositions; or 3) by scanning this same steady flow of images for particular details that can be used in abstract painting. These three approaches engage with other forms of visual culture and direct abstraction towards objects and images in the world.

The first technique of translation that artists employ when engaging with visual culture continues the legacy of Cubist collage. Artists make use of the designs and pictorial layouts of newspapers, advertising, packaging, and websites as a way to respond to the world around them. One strategy employed by contemporary practice is to use the structure of commercially produced shapes and designs as a readymade surface for the hand-drawn image or gestural painterly mark. Activating the newspaper and using other printed images as armatures for painting has a long history of political critique or dissent, ranging from Pablo Picasso's *Head of a Man with a Moustache* (1913) and Max Weber's *The Sunday Tribune* (1913) to the more recent examples of Robert Rauschenberg's *People for the American Way Print* (1991) and Arnulf Rainer's *Bible Overpaintings* (1995–1998).

A second technique that artists use to communicate with popular visual culture is to appropriate its images, collaging or repainting them. Artists approach popular culture in this way in a campaign of agency; to own images and use them. Artists who employ traditional appropriation techniques are at a disadvantage because their images will always refer to a source that has already set the parameters and terms of communication. By contrast, this research of familiarity in abstraction seeks to explore ways that contemporary abstraction can affect visual culture in a proactive way, how it might be able to initiate visual communication.

To do this, abstract painting must translate visual images in a third way. Artists scan visual culture to identify and select image details and shapes that they can recreate in their work in such a way that they carry with them an approximate similarity or resemblance; i.e., they make abstract forms that 'look like' some other existing form. Groups of shapes are then organised in compositions that resemble the visual grammar used in wider visual culture. This approach, like the others, has a long history in art. For example, shapes in abstract painting are sometimes organised in simple formal arrangements for pragmatic reasons, such as in Matisse's *The Heart* (1947), composed as a double-page layout for printing in *Jazz*. Compositional layout is sometimes used for ideological reasons, such as an hierarchy between top and bottom in Kazimir Malevich's *Painterly Realism Boy with Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension*, discussed above.

Abstract paintings composed using shapes are particularly useful when discussing a concept of visual grammar. Suprematist paintings such as Malevich's provide a simple illustration of the principles of Rudolf Arnheim's *Gestalt* psychology of visual perception.[62] Compositional balance, movement, dynamics, colour, and space are all important shared principles in Modern art and design. Importantly, I have indicated how this sharing results in a cross-disciplinary use of shapes where details appear and reappear in artwork, design, architecture, etc. This kind of sharing is accelerated in a contemporary visual ecology where abstract shapes are composed using a shared visual grammar.

---

[62] For further discussion about composition, see Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, rev. ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1974).

Contemporary painting sometimes adopts a visual grammar and syntax from other forms of visual culture. Artists attract attention with a "visually assertive"[63] and energetic attitude toward graphic elements employed and composed in ways that are shared with visual communication—graphic elements whose history is shared between painting, design, and architecture. For example, consider the starburst, a familiar shape from graphic design history used in advertising to announce sales or in comic books as a stylised explosion. This shape was initially appropriated in Pop Art as a wry comment on the American military and the Cold War. For example, in relation to *Explosion* (1965−1966) and *Whaam!* (1963), Roy Lichtenstein describes how he only "nominally" copied from an original image and that in his work, "the original acquires a totally different texture".[64] The starburst in these works acquires the value of a graphic full stop, a comically exaggerated exclamation that underscores and caricaturises any semblance of violence.

Familiar forms from advertising and graphic design are also used in contemporary abstract paintings. For example, the starburst is also used as a central abstract element in Jacqueline Humphries's *Untitled* (2009), or variously by Charline von Heyl as a violent comic bang in *Pink Vendetta* (2009) and a tenebrous outline in *P* (2008). In her work, von Heyl translates existing materials, "swaying from [the] recognizable to the intangible",[65] in a practice that seeks to invent something. Contemporary artists use elements such as the starburst in their work with a similar visual grammar or communicative quality as it might be used in wider visual culture because the painterly quotation "first singled out for completely different purposes is the essential first step in the stumbling, unmapped journey towards something never seen before".[66]

As objects carrying information, flat, abstract shapes are icons that shortcut the otherwise lengthy textual communications of visual culture. This is particularly useful for computer and other screen interfaces where abstracted graphics provide a quick access to a program or file. As noted earlier, Alexander Galloway has described an

[63] Susan Hudson, *Painting Now* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 70.
[64] Roy Lichtenstein cited in Nathan Dunne, "Wow! Lichtenstein: A Retrospective at Tate Modern Il." *Tate Etc.* Spring 2013, no. 27 (2013).
[65] Kirsty Bell, "Its Own Reality," *Frieze*, 5 May 2009, https://frieze.com/article/its-own-reality.
[66] Hubert Damisch cited in ibid.

effect issuing from computer icons, observing that “an interface is not a thing; an interface is an effect”.[67] This ‘interface effect’ can also be detected in contemporary abstract painting and visual culture where abstract icons are dematerialised and float like buttons in front of a background, much like the flat design of Windows 8 or Apple iOS7, where graphic abstract shapes communicate “without the need for any graphical parallelism to real world objects”.[68] This effect is particularly striking when used with recent games such as *Pokémon Go* (2016), where distinguishing a diegetic from a non-diegetic element becomes difficult. It is also important to consider how this effect is used in expanded practices of contemporary abstract painting.

Consider the iconic, laser-cut, black cloud shape used by Wendy White in her installation *No Pressure*. This cloud shape is a familiar presence in visual culture. It provides a key for weather forecasts on multiple platforms, the stylised background graphics from (the often appropriated) *Mario Brothers*,[69] and, most importantly, has become synonymous with the online storage and download of digital files. White uses this cloud and other iconic graphics in different material modes in her work. This cloud shape appears in several paintings, a billboard, as the face of a limited-edition smart watch, and as a support graphic alongside an image of Hillary Clinton for the 2016 American Presidential Campaign.

Figure 24 Wendy White *No Pressure* 2016, edition of 2 + AP, dibond, rainbow webbing, nylon rope, ball chain, 127 x 152cm.

[67] Alexander R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012), 36.
[68] Roman Po “A Look at Microsoft, Google and Apple’s Approach to Flat Design,” Hongkiat, http://www.hongkiat.com/blog/google-apple-microsoft-flat-design/.
[69] See Cory Archangel’s *Super Mario Clouds* 2002.

Figure 25 Wendy White *Pleasure I* 2016, digital billboard, Override: A Billboard Project, Expo Chicago, USA.

The cloud is also an important conceptual tool in art history, one that works against traditional two-dimensional linear perspective in order to create a new space in painting. In *A Theory of /Cloud/* (1972), Hubert Damisch argues that the cloud is used both as "pictorial accessory" and constructively as "gap filler".[70] For Damisch, the cloud is detached from representation and instead assumes the role of a pictorial sign that is distributed across the surface of a painting according to a pictorial system. He writes, "If such a thing as a pictorial system exists, that system has no reality, even of a theoretical nature, outside the products in which it can be instituted in various strict forms."[71]

This new space is important because it positions the cloud somewhere between the painted surface and the digital screen, a space that I explore in works such as *Cloud #1* (2015, figure 30) and *Cloud #2* (2015, figure 31). The way that abstract shapes are organised using visual grammar is culturally specific. For example, visual perception is "deeply affected"[72] by cultural experiences of reading and writing, which informs the organisation of pictorial elements in artwork and design. Looking again at the use and reuse of the cloud from *No Pressure*, it is interesting to note the different effects that are enacted as White changes the relative location and scale of the shape, where it is placed in each artwork installation, and how this plays a role in its reception.

[70] Hubert Damisch, *Theory of /Cloud/*, ed. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries, Cultural Memory in the Present (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 231.
[71] Ibid., 86.
[72] Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 4.

Figure 30 Simon Degroot *Cloud #1* 2015, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm.

Figure 31 Simon Degroot *Cloud #2* 2015, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm.

In contemporary visual culture, abstracted shapes are arranged or composed according to a particular logic. Shapes are liberated from their supports in a logical extension of Bois's "figure/ground opposition" that he says originated in the superimpositions and overlapping layers of Modernist painting. Abstract shapes are dematerialised as they are translated in contemporary painting, floating on and around the surface of the painting, the digital screen, the billboard, and the mural. This is clear in the installation view of recent exhibitions, including Wendy White's *Santa Cruz* at Eric Firestone Gallery, New York (2016), and Christine Streuli's installation *Ableger* in a group exhibition *Revolution: John Chamberlain, Ida Eckblad, Christine Streuli* at Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland (2013).

Liberated from their canvas supports, the shapes in these works are free to engage the built environment. In this situation, artists work as architects and construct their visual environments, translating shapes from a wide variety of sources to produce paintings, products, and popular culture. However, it is not my intention to provide an exhaustive list of translated shapes in contemporary abstraction but to demonstrate the shared way that abstract shapes are used. My aim is to show that contemporary artists work with a visual grammar that is shared by popular visual culture, using shapes that rhyme with existing shapes in a kind of intertextuality.

Using visual literacy to spot intertextual references is an important indication of social belonging and inclusion. Writing over twenty years ago, Kress and van Leeuwen foresaw that to understand and use images and to be visually literate "will begin to be

a matter of survival, especially in the workplace”.[73] This kind of literacy is not always made explicit when reading images in visual communication. For example, Barthes notes that while photographic images are implicitly understood and presumed to be easily read because of their verisimilitude, they are actually encoded at their “different levels of production”,[74] such as technical treatment, layout and framing. Contemporary abstract artists also encode their work with different meanings as they incorporate different technologies and types of production such as computer imaging, halftone screenprinting, and digital laser cutting.

Techniques of production and reproduction also constitute processes of translating images in this research. Photographic images are abstracted, stylised and conventional in their abstracted production or reproduction (similar to what occurs through copying or caricature, described above). They become “culturally produced semiotic resources” that are available to individuals—including abstract artists—who have the capacity to “transform” and “reshape” them.[75] This kind of reshaping is foregrounded in contemporary abstraction where artists employ strategies of translation to confuse and obfuscate the origins of painted shapes.

Photographic reproductions are particularly interesting when the photograph itself reproduces an abstract painting. For instance, Piet Mondrian’s original painting *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow* (1930, figure 32) has hand-painted uneven lines and modulated colours. However, in photographic reproductions, the lines often appear straight and the colours flat. This translation from hand-made unevenness into photographic exactness in reproduction acts to “reinforce and reproduce a particular (incorrect) version of Mondrian and a particular (ideological) version of abstract painting”[76] as exact. It is these ideologically-charged photographic reproductions of Mondrian that give rise to an interpretation that assumes his abstract rectilinear shapes to be exact.

Consider Ryan Gander’s *Your Present Time Orientation (Second Act)—Random Abstraction* where he dissects the paintings of Mondrian into “their solid blocks of

[73] Ibid., 3.
[74] Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *Image–Music–Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: FontanaPress, 1977), 17.
[75] Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 13.
[76] Ibid., 221.

colour",[77] recreating them in coloured glass. This work is described as a "meaningful recontextualisation of existing artefacts";[78] however, its coloured shapes leaning against the wall are crisp, reflective, and exact. Thus, instead of referring to the Mondrian painting, they more accurately refer to photographed reproductions of Mondrian paintings. The contemporary installation here denies the human touch and the hand-made.

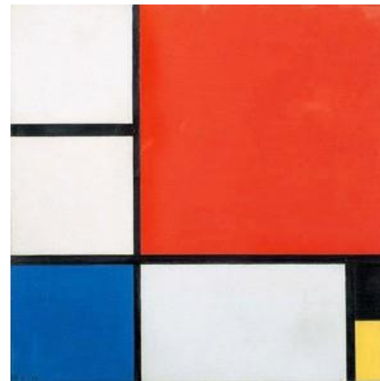


Figure 26 Ryan Gander, *Your Present Time Orientation (Third Act)—Random Abstraction* 2010, custom painted glass, Perspex clip frames, 600 x 110 x 20cm (installation dimensions).

Figure 32 Piet Mondrian *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow* 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46cm.

Contemporary abstraction works in a space of visual communication that it shares with advertising and computer interface technologies. In a 2012 article for *Artforum*, Claire Bishop describes how many artists use technology "at one if not most stages of … production, dissemination and consumption",[79] also suggesting that artists select, reformat, and recontextualise existing artefacts. Gander's rectangles can easily be imagined as icons on the computer desktop, or as design elements in visual culture.[80] Translation is used in contemporary abstraction as a way to stay connected with and engage a complex interconnected archive from art history and visual culture.

---

[77] Emily Stokes, "Ryan Gander," in *Illuminations* (Venice, Italy: La Biennale di Venezia, 2011), 192–93.
[78] Claire Bishop, "Digital Divide: Whatever Happened to Digital Art?" *Artforum International* 51, no. 1 (2012): 435–41, 534.
[79] Ibid., 534.
[80] For example, see the album cover designs: Hackett Films, "Silverchair: Young Modern," CD album artwork (Surry Hills: Eleven: A Music Company, 2007), and Steve Keene, "The Apples in Stereo: Tone Soul Evolution," CD album artwork (Burbank: Warner Bros. Records, 1997).

A methodology of translation is best suited to this dialectic of complexity. Contemporary artists use shapes from a variety of sources with a "new kind of freedom";[81] that is, they work without an anxiety of influence. Abstraction becomes something of a 'filter' through which "the recognisible passes and is transformed".[82] Artists work in a "compound-complex"[83] conceptual frame of mind, which is described by critic Jerry Saltz as an attitude that says,

> *I know that the art I'm creating may seem silly, even stupid, or that it might have been done before, but that doesn't mean this isn't serious*. At once knowingly self-conscious about art, unafraid, and unashamed, these young artists not only see the distinction between earnestness and detachment as artificial; they grasp that they can be ironic and sincere at the same time…[84]

This complexity is amplified when contemporary abstract-painted shapes are ambiguous in their representation. Gander's installed painted-glass rectangles are laid out in a semi-organised way so that each shape can be compared to the one next to it. This is indicative of the organised flat design of contemporary computer interfaces where abstract forms embody an interface effect. Abstract shapes such as those in White's *No Pressure* connote an interactivity inherited from computer technology.

Contemporary abstraction arranges shapes in parallel, aligned to an invisible grid in an organised display of difference.[85] For example, when comparing Apple's iOS 7 interface design with Allan McCollum's *The Shapes Project* (2005–6, figure 31) or Rebecca Shore's *15* (2008, figure 32), it is easy to see that abstract shapes painted in an organised way embody an interface effect from the computer screen.

---

[81] Bob Nikas, *Painting Abstraction: New Elements in Abstract Painting* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2009), 8.
[82] Ibid., 11.
[83] Jerry Saltz, "Sincerity and Irony Hug It Out: At P.S 1's 'Greater New York,' and New Union of Opposing Attitudes." *New York Magazine*, 27 May 2010.
[84] Ibid., original italics.
[85] This type of organisation is elsewhere connected as an arrangement of tools. In Frank Gehry's furniture fabrication workshop, Andrew Kromelow described this organisation as "knolling". Sophie Hay, "The History of Knolling," *The Long Lyst*, last updated 2015, www.lyst.com,https://web.archive.org/web/20160304064743/http://www.lyst.com/longlyst/art-knolling/.

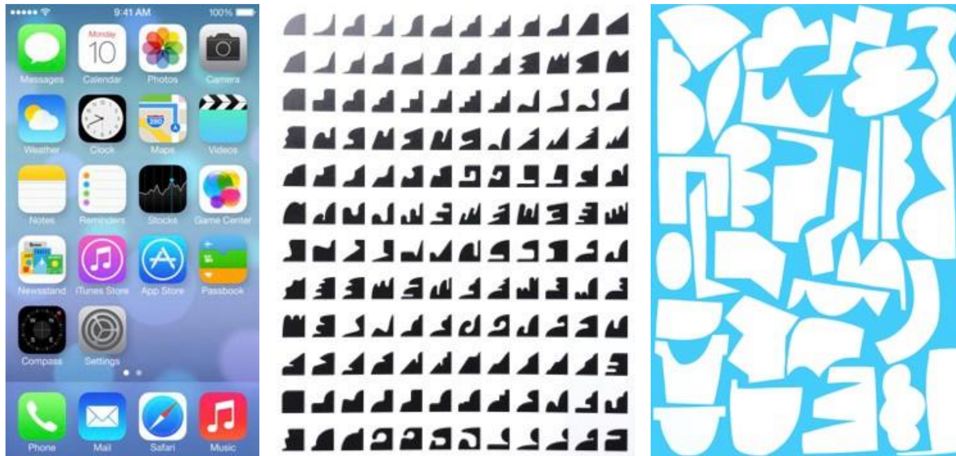


Figure 33 iPhone *iOS 7 User Interface* 2013, Apple Computer Inc.

Figure 34 Allan McCollum *The Shapes Project: 144 top parts* 2005–ongoing, dimensions variable.

Figure 35 Simon Degroot *White and Blue Flat Lay* 2017, oil on canvas, 198 x 137cm.

Flat abstract shapes like these are organised and arranged in a way that is different from the early-twentieth-century Cubist deconstructions of Picasso and Braque. Artists today take ownership of discrete individual shapes to use in their work, which they manage and arrange in a grid format with a visual order that seems to reflect the 'mapping' of the computer interface. Shapes are presented without a particular hierarchy; they are not composed, but are rather organised.

Modernist abstract painting makes extensive use of the grid to organise shapes on the flat surface of the canvas. Krauss argues that in Modernism, the 'grid' is an organised armature that "logically … extends, in all directions, to infinity".[86] This is important for contemporary painting that is anti-hermetic and outward-facing. The computer screen provides an updated version of the Modernist grid, an armature where shapes are 'mapped' in a space that is both deep and flat.[87] Krauss argues that any boundary of the grid—such as the edge of a painting—is only an arbitrary section. The grid also evokes the sublime and, in a repetitive sequence of successive parts, creates an "artificial infinite".[88] The Modernist grid reaches its ultimate form as the artificially

[86] Rosalind E. Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1985), 18.
[87] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 227.
[88] In 1756, Edmund Burke described infinity as an attribute of the sublime, "the 'artificial infinite' an effect produced by succession—that is, a repetitive sequence of identical parts". For a discussion of the sublime in photography, see Alix Ohlin, "Andreas Gursky and the Contemporary Sublime," *Art Journal* 61, no. 4 (2002): 22–35.

infinite armature for the computer screen desktop that extends into virtual space. Contemporary artists are exploring how abstract shapes can make use of this grid, employing what Krauss calls 'centrifugal' logic, extending outward from the painting or the screen back into the world. This is important to my research because it demonstrates an interactive space between contemporary abstraction and wider visual culture.

Abstract painting becomes a locus of activity for an expanded interaction with wider visual culture where already-existing shapes are selected and translated by artists and reinserted into a complex visual network. As Bourriaud observes, "to learn how to use forms … is above all to know how to make them one's own, to inhabit them".[89] The contemporary artists mentioned above collect abstract shapes from various sources in visual culture, making their own inventories of adopted shapes that they can use time and again in their work. For instance, this is reflected in the "repertory of cut forms"[90] created by Matisse or, more recently, the "inventory of components"[91] comprising Julie Mehretu's *Black City* (2007) paintings.

Artists identify and adopt abstract shapes from art history and visual culture for use in their own practice and reinsert them into contemporary visual economies. The painted shape in "the artwork is no longer an end point but a simple moment in an infinite chain of contributions".[92] When multiplied, these contributions confound recognition and complicate a categorisation of abstract shapes. Recent scientific research comparing a typology of objects suggests that "learning and experience" have important effects on "categorical perception".[93] Scientists argue that recent visual experience affects the perception of ambiguous objects.

Contemporary image economies exploit this phenomenon in a procedure known as 'priming'. Priming occurs when exposure to a stimulus induces an attraction or an

---

[89] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, trans. Jeanine Herman, ed. Caroline Schneider (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), 18.
[90] Buchberg et al., *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*, 89.
[91] Mark Godfrey, "Julie Mehretu: Black City," in *The Painting Factory: Abstraction after Warhol* (Skira Rizzoli, 2012), 115.
[92] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 20.
[93] Valentina Daelli, Nicola J. van Rijsbergen, and Alessandro Treves. "How Recent Experience Affects the Perception of Ambiguous Objects," *Science Direct* 1322 (2010): 81–91.

equivalence effect on a subsequently presented one.[94] Abstract shapes invite—or lead—audiences to use their own visual experiences and memories of similar shapes to make sense of what they see. This technique is often used in visual communication to achieve a particular outcome, or in children's books such as *This Equals That* (2014, figure 36) where each page is paired to establish conceptual associations. Simply put, priming is a formal relay where one shape influences the next.

Figure 36 Jason Fulford *This Equals That* 2014, Aperture Foundation book, n.p.

Figure 37 Internet Meme *Raw Chicken or Donald Trump?* 2016, www.imgur.com.

The computer accelerates this relay because it encourages a rapid scan or sweep through information. Artists share and compare painted abstract shapes using social media. Users of Instagram and Facebook are quick to point out formal similarities between painted flat shapes and other image shapes in popular culture.[95] Visual similarities between objects—where something also looks like something else (*pareidolia*)—is popular in Internet memes that show two images side by side to demonstrate their visual similarities. Some well-known examples include 'Dog or Muffin?' (2016), or the lampoon 'Raw Chicken or Donald Trump' (2016, figure 37)[96] which somewhat recalls the caricature of King Louis Philippe becoming a pear drawn

[94] Ibid., 81.

[95] One interesting local example can be found in the comments section of Melbourne artist David (Ghostpatrol) Booth's Instagram account. In 2016, Booth posted a progress photograph of a mural collaboration with Carla McRae at Melbourne café Manchester Press. The mural shows several flat painted shapes arranged, or *knolled*, on the wall of the café. Most are easy to recognise, a kangaroo, a horse and a reclining figure. There is also a yellow shape to the left that appears to be a four-legged animal, which, in the following photo with added black outlines is revealed to be a poodle. In the comments section of the first image, one person asks, "Do I see a ghost in the shell tank in there?" This question is understandable because the tank shares a comparable silhouette to the painted yellow shape. See https://www.instagram.com/p/BA27Rg9RA_V/?taken-by=ghostpatrol.

[96] See "Raw Chicken or Donald Trump," posted by Cerulean Blue, 11 March 2016, http://imgur.com/gallery/HUYPLXW.

by Honoré Daumier (1831), discussed in the first chapter.

Figure 27 Vincent Hawkins *Untitled* 2015, monotype print on Fabriano paper, 42 x 29.7cm.

Figure 38 Pablo Picasso, *Weeping Woman* 1937, oil on canvas, 60 x 49cm.

Comparing abstract shapes and artworks side-by-side is helpful for observing visual similarities. As noted, abstract shapes have increased potential for rapid circulation when they enter a virtually connected network.[97] Contemporary artists use social media as a platform to contextualise their work within art history. For example, in 2015, Vincent Hawkins used social media to highlight the ways that the shapes in his *Untitled* (2015) are analogous to Picasso's *Weeping Woman* (1937, figure 38). Viewing images of these works side-by-side on Hawkins's Instagram account, one can easily see that they are similar. Gombrich observes, "among the familiar things we can read into pictures, none may be more important than other pictures".[98] Hawkins uses social media to prime audiences and reveal the pareidolia in his work, positioning *Untitled* in the context of art history.

[97] Joselit, *After Art*.

[98] Ernst Gombrich, "The Image in the Clouds," chap. 6 in *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 202.

As I have already outlined, contemporary advertising design shares formal similarities with art-historical images. Companies align their products with particular values by reusing similar shapes, compositions, and colours. For example, the Apple 'iPod Silhouettes' (2000–2011, figure 39) campaign of "silhouettes of sinuous dancers against blocks of vivid colour" resembles Matisse's *Icarus* (1943–44, figure 40).[99] Of course, designers make use of these famous images to imbue products with cultural capital. Conversely, contemporary artists also make use of advertising design in their work. As such, we must always consider what coded messages—if any—are transferred in formal elements as they are translated from abstract painting into design and then back again.

Figure 39 Apple *iPod Silhouettes* 2000–11, advertising campaign.

Figure 40 Henri Matisse *Icarus* 1943–44, screenprint for 'Jazz', 65.7 x 42.2cm.

Abstract shapes become confusing and complex when they are translated in art and design. Identifying particular shapes becomes an intertextual game of recognition in image economies where, "when we look at something, we are unconsciously

[99] Alastair Sooke, "Modern Masters: Why Modern Art Is Everywhere," *The Telegraph*, 27 April 2010, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/alastair-sooke/7640258/Modern-Masters-why-modern-art-is-everywhere.html.

‘guessing’ or forming a hypotheses about what we can see”.[100] To make sense of painted shapes, we apply what we already know to ‘false guesses’ that we then correct until we find a reasonable solution.

Making sense of abstract shapes involves an individual dialectic of searching, locating, and identifying similarities. To understand this process, one needs to look to a philosophy of perception. In *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Ludwig Wittgenstein examines what he calls seeing in “aspect”[101] to describe an ability to see one thing in multiple ways. For example, he shows that the duck-rabbit can be “seen as”[102] either a duck or a rabbit, but not both at once. Such forms induce a phenomenon of “multistability in perception”,[103] confusing what is seen and confounding any ability to classify images and shapes.

Figure 28 Christopher Wool *Untitled* 2011, silkscreen on linen, 304.8 x 243.8cm (each).

Contemporary abstract shapes are especially confounding when artists remove them from previous contexts and change them by using mechanical and digital processes. For example, Christopher Wool’s *Untitled* is a selection of eight works depicting a

[100] Nicky Hayes and Sue Orrell, “Perception,” chap. 2 in *Psychology: An Introduction* (New York: Longman Inc., 1987), 185.
[101] Ludwig Wittgenstein, chap. 2 in *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997; orig. pub. 1953), 195.
[102] Ibid., 194.
[103] Fred Attneave, “Multistability in Perception,” chap. 9 in *Readings from Scientific American: Image, Object, and Illusion* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1971), 91.

screenprinted "blotch"[104] in black and sepia halftones. Wool asks, "is a painting based on another abstract painting itself abstract?"[105] He creates these works by selecting, then photographing, and enlarging details from "small old drawings".[106] These enlarged details are hard to decipher, which is the point of the work. Wool employs analogue and digital processes to estrange each shape, also enlarging them to billboard size. These works defy the readability of commercial billboards normally designed for advertising and branding. The shapes ghost across each work as "metaphors for consciousness or memory"[107] that are made familiar by their reproduction.

In these works, Wool retains an echo of resemblance to redirect attention from the real to the simulation. Like a hall of mirrors, these works only hint that they come from an original, confounding easy recognition. Damisch describes an eighteenth-century text which instructs that landscape painting should turn away from the imitation of nature and toward "the potential *information* to be derived from stains and blotting…".[108] Are these works in which we can make out other image-forms, such as clouds or Rorschach abstractions, or is it the stain, drip and splash that we recognise? Are these violent painterly splashes loaded with political charge, as in Kelley Walker's *Black Star Press (Rotated 90 Degrees)* (2006), or do they reference the stain of bodily fluids, as in Andy Warhol's *Oxidation Paintings* (1978)? Wool subversively uses a strategy of translation and "dedifferentiation"[109]—a reversion to simpler forms—in order to confuse and obfuscate. As such, his work only hints at some original; he keeps the narrative of this work a secret.

[104] Mark Godfrey, "Close Up: Stain Resistance," *Artforum* 49, no. 10 (2011), wool735.com/cw/essays_and_press/Godfrey%20Artforum_Summer_20110.pdf.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Damisch, *Theory of /Cloud/*, 185.
[109] Foster describes a problematised distinction between figure and ground in these works; however, that "dedifferentiation is explicit in all the *Camouflages* (1986) where the imbrication of figure and ground exists patently on the canvas". See Hal Foster, "Roy Lichtenstein, or the Cliché Image," 135.

Figure 29 John Young *Moment III* 2015, oil on Belgian linen, 76.2 x 103.4cm.

Figure 41 Ian Fairweather, *Pelléas et Mélisande* no date, synthetic polymer on board, 71.5 x 96cm.

John Young also employs a method of translation and a reversion to simpler forms in *Moment III.* However, whereas Wool creates an abstract work from blotches and details from his own previous work, Young translates the work of another artist–Ian Fairweather's figurative *Pelléas et Mélisande* (no date, figure 41)—using computerised digital processes. Young selects images from the Internet and manipulates them using a set of visual parameters in what he calls "the human–computer friendship". [110] The computer program turns the source image into an abstraction that can then be hand-painted. In this work, Young has translated Fairweather's linear figures into a "tangle of softly toned shapes and patches of colour".[111] This is an abstract translation that refers to an original painting from art history.

The processes detailed here represent the wide-ranging and accelerated relation that contemporary artists have with visual culture. They identify, select, and translate individual artworks and ephemeral visual elements into painted motifs. This chapter has shown that translation can be used to complicate and confuse abstract shapes. Contemporary abstract painting engages with visual culture, technology, and art history, using visual grammar in order to take part in a complex game of translation and recognition between art history and visual culture.

[110] Emily Poore, "New to the Collection: John Young," UQ Art Museum (website), https://uqartmuseum.wordpress.com/2016/02/25/new-to-the-collection-john-young/.
[111] Ibid.

Chapter 3

Familiar Beyond Recognition: Studio Methodologies and Outcomes

In the mark that a sponge leaves on a wall, just as in ever changing cloud formations, people see whatever they wish to see: configurations of their desires, images from their theatre of life, signs of their culture.

—Hubert Damisch, 1972[1]

...to learn how to use forms ... is above all to know how to make them one's own, to inhabit them.

—Nicolas Bourriaud, 2002[2]

My studio practice and research have developed through several exhibitions and mural projects that explore methods of translation to create new work. By considering translation as methodology, I make paintings that rely upon familiar but not easily recognised visual elements. Architectural shapes from the built environment are a key source of shapes for my new paintings and large-scale murals. This literal sense of the visual environment is at work alongside images from a virtual environment in my practice, which involves a movement between image forms and material states. I select image details with particular qualities (described above as being variously seductive, playful, iconic, designed), and then abstract and reuse them in my work. This movement underscores the dynamic capacity of abstract painting to respond to and engage with visual culture in real time and to arrive at new image forms with altered meanings.

My practice and research are informed by a general concept of expanded painting. Examining how contemporary painting can interface with broader visual culture, my practice aims for a reciprocal dialogue not dissimilar to that of socially networked and interfaced technologies. Studio paintings become a site of interaction where abstract shapes are translated from maquettes into paintings for exhibition, digital interactions,

[1] Hubert Damisch, *Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*. Cultural Memory in the Present. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries eds. (California: Stanford University Press, 2002. 1972), 185

[2] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), 18.

and large-scale murals. My practice is directed toward the anti-hermetic, and through the following outcomes, I engage with visual culture according to my contemporary context and the complexities and opportunities of its image economy.

3.1 *Select Reshape*, 2014, Spiro Grace Art Rooms, Brisbane

I started my research by tracking the passage of forms as they are translated from the real world into abstract flat shapes and between material states. I produced a suite of paintings and two collages for a solo exhibition titled *Select Reshape* at Spiro Grace Art Rooms, Brisbane (2014). The exhibition title refers to a studio method or procedure inherited from computer software. Selecting images and shapes from various sources, including popular media, architecture, and animation, I made simple line drawings that I then reshaped and reformed as abstract paintings.

In addition to sourcing imagery from visual culture, I begin my studio research by reviewing the considerable archive of abstract forms that I have accumulated in sketchbooks. For example, some of these early forms found their way into the design and installation of a thirty-metre interior frieze. This mural, *Floating in a New Sky* (2014, figures 42 and 43), is a composition of abstracted architectural fragments and clouds painted with bright colours along a corridor. I selected shapes from the built environment and then recreated these as abstract shapes in the mural, including architectural mouldings such as the cavetto and ovolo, stepped gables, and the ogee arch.

Figure 42 Simon Degroot *Floating in a New Sky* (detail) 2014, synthetic polymer, 150 x 3000cm.

Figure 43 Simon Degroot, *Floating in a New Sky Design* (detail) 2014, watercolour and ink on paper, 15 x 300cm.

Drawing and scanning this mural design, I used image manipulation software to make changes to the composition. The scanned image also enabled the expansive design to be viewed at once and in comparison to the finished work. The extreme length of this mural and the limitations of the space meant that I could not see the entire work at once. This frustration informed the initial premise for the exhibition and title artwork *Select Reshape*. That is, the incomplete but tantalising views of the finished mural provoked me to experiment with ways to condense the design and force all of the shapes into one smaller work.

Figure 44 Simon Degroot *Floating in a New Sky* 2014, designs layered in Adobe Photoshop

Figure 45 Simon Degroot *Cove Dupont* 2014, oil on canvas, 198 x 260cm

To do this, I assembled the abstracted shapes layer upon translucent layer, using the computer (figure 44). The hand-drawn shapes are reformed in the operating space of the digital and become endlessly manipulable and reproducible. This is important because it introduces a metaphoric relation between the painted canvas and the logic of the computer desktop. Arranged in the space of the computer screen, the designs use transparency and overlay to adumbrate space. Just as the computer places the working document at the front of the screen, anterior shapes are seen first in this suite of works. This sense of extended space informed the works that follow, especially *Cove Dupont* (2014, figure 45), where architectural shapes have been translated into abstract forms reassembled on the surface of the canvas.

The works for this exhibition were created with shapes that had already been liberated from their original context. For example, architectural and industrial forms, calligraphic and typographic ornaments, and other shapes that embody a particular capacity for translation, which, as Benjamin describes, is an “essential quality of

certain works".[3] It is in translation, writes Benjamin, that an original attains "its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding".[4] I explore how particular shapes continue to retain a sense of their origin through a process of translation, while at the same time are renewed by selection and being reshaped into abstraction.

3.2 *Shallow Space*, 2014, Australian National Capital Artists Gallery, Canberra

Reflecting on methods of translation in my research, I next explored how abstract shapes can translate between material states. I produced a new suite of works for a solo exhibition titled *Shallow Space* at Australian National Capital Artists (ANCA), Canberra (2014, figure 46). This exhibition included nine artwork pairs, an abstract collage, and a painted replica installed in a long thin gallery space. The works in this exhibition explore representation, illusion, and construction.

Figure 46 Simon Degroot *Shallow Space* 2014, installation view, ANCA Gallery.

Made using coloured paper and translucent cellophane to construct a shallow illusion of space, these works are a metaphor for the digital logic of the computer desktop. The collaged works are repeated as a copy in a second work. The painted double is produced using layers of paint, carefully applied in a specific order.

[3] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 254.
[4] Ibid., 255.

In both artworks, each shape partially covers another shape, creating an illusion of compressed space. The collages make this compressed space materially real while the painted replica is a flattened illusion of this same space. Each work supports and challenges the other as copy and material translation. Installed in the long-thin gallery space, each artwork (figure 47) faces its replica (figure 48) on the opposite wall of the gallery. Looking at one work means turning your back on the other. The after-image of the work informs the subsequent view in each pairing.

These cut-and-pasted shapes recall Matisse's cut-outs that he used as vignettes for other artworks or murals, and they embody what Bois's calls "architectural painting", suggesting an expanded "truly plastic space"[5] in the artwork. Because of their material construction, the collages retain and even foreground their potential mobility: at some time in the future, the cut shapes could be deconstructed and made to come apart, a potential mobility only suggested in the painted works.

Figure 47 Simon Degroot *Shallow Space #03* (2014), collage on paper, 25 x 35cm.

Figure 48 Simon Degroot *Shallow Space #04* (2014), oil on board, 25 x 35cm.

Because each work is viewed with the memory of just having seen the other, it promises something in excess of its literal materiality. For example, if the collage is viewed before the painted artwork, we can say that the painted work is 'read through'

[5] Yve-Alain Bois and Greg Sims, "On Matisse: The Blinding: For Leo Steinberg," *October* 68 (1994): 65.

the collage construction. In *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism* (1980), Craig Owens describes how when “one text is *read through* another”, it works allegorically. If an artist uses allegory, writes Owens, they do so in order to “add another meaning to the image” and in doing so, “the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one”.[6] This is useful when considering the role of translation in my works because it suggests that the translated image not only adds meaning to the image, but also has potential to replace it.

3.3 Hilton Mural, 2014, Brisbane

In 2014, I was invited to paint a large-scale mural for Brisbane Hilton’s Vintaged Bar (figure 49). Specifically, I was asked to recreate—to the best of my ability—the design put forward by the interior designer (figure 50), presented as a black photocopy of a Modernist design, Photoshopped, and superimposed onto a red background.

The design for the mural was sourced from local archives of paperwork from the hotel’s architect, the late Harry Seidler. An unidentified photocopied image was presented in the context of the commission as being the unrealised work of the architect. After some investigation, I found that the origin of the design was actually a detail section from a photocopy of Henri Matisse’s *Le Lagon* (*The Lagoon*). This work issues from *Jazz* (1947) a limited-edition artist’s book in which Matisse reproduced a selection of the paper cut-outs of his late oeuvre.

This misattribution reveals something of the cyclical relationship of translation. The mural design was based on a photocopied reproduction of another screenprinted reproduction of an original collage; this twice-removed reproduction was then removed a third time as I recreated the artwork design in a large-scale mural. This project provides an opportunity to observe instances of translation as they relate to my research. I have tested a relationship between different material states to observe the recognition of forms separated by temporal distance, and the confusion of image

[6] Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism,” *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 69.

details as they are removed from previous contexts and recreated at a large scale.

Figure 49 Simon Degroot *Brisbane Hilton: Vintaged Bar Mural* 2014, synthetic polymer, 500 x 900cm.

Figure 50 Landini Associates *Brisbane Hilton: Vintaged Bar Mural Design* 2014, digital file.

This work employs simplified forms to evoke an idea of tropical paradise. Matisse translated vegetal forms that connote nature as specific to Tahiti. This romantic re-imaging is evident in *Le Lagon*: the undulating forms float in front of a green and blue ground. My mural for the Hilton has replaced this natural ground with a violent red. The floating forms are recreated as a pattern of half-tone dots, so as to foreground the painted image as a copy.

As described above, the mural is estranged from its original context through three stages of translation. The natural forms are translated into Modernist abstraction by Matisse, then re-translated by the interior designer through ignorance as postmodern appropriation, then finally re-re-translated in my painted mural, an expression that reveals the fundamental tautology of this process. Using translation, I "invest the work …with renewed relevance".[7] The forms used by Matisse become so familiar as to be beyond recognition; yet my translation of these forms into half-tone dots spells out the debts owed, but so visibly as to be overlooked.

This movement beyond easy recognition began when the abstract paper-cut forms were translated into limited-edition screenprints for publication in *Jazz* (1947). Matisse laments that stencilled images lose their "charm" in translation; however, he accepts that "for someone who has not seen the originals it is the impression that is

[7] Leo Steinberg, "The Glorious Company," In *Art about Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), 25.

given by the book that is the main thing”.[8] What exactly does Matisse mean by ‘impression’? Perhaps he refers to the immediate impression of the forms on the page, that there is a reasonable approximation between the book form and the original in terms of immediacy. It is this immediate impression that most informs the reception of abstract shapes in this research.

3.4 The Pillars Project Mural, 2014, Brisbane

The Pillars Project was a joint project between the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and Queensland Rail for the G20 Cultural Celebrations. This mural involved a cultural exchange workshop to develop ideas and to unearth some of the historical significance of the artwork site. This process informed my abstract interpretation of local architectural details to highlight some of the overlooked history of the area and produce architectural forms on a larger scale.

I designed the artwork for this site to highlight the way that local identity and a sense of place are closely related to the built environment. Buildings, public art, and murals make important contributions to the cultural landscape, developing both a personal and collective sense of identity. This sense of place is well established in South Brisbane because of its long history. South Brisbane has a great *genius loci*; it is a place imbued with a magnetism that naturally attracts visitors and interactions.

My mural celebrates this attraction, referring both to the historical architecture of the local area as well as looking towards the future. Architecture and building design have a long history of incorporating organic shapes and curves. As discussed in Chapter 2, stylised details of plants including the arabesque and the quatrefoil have a long association with art history and architectural design where they are often used as decorative flourishes or motifs. Art Deco architecture, including “skyscrapers, commercial buildings, airports, civic structures, shops, hospitals, schools, universities, theatres, houses and apartments—even bridges!” [9] transform organic shapes into

[8] Karl Buchberg, Nicholas Cullinan, Jodi Hauptman, and Nicolas Serota, *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs* (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), 23.
[9] Robin Grow, *Brisbane Art Deco: Stories of Our Built Heritage*, ed. Kimberley Wilson (Brisbane: Jubilee Studio, 2015), 7.

streamlined and geometric and decorative designs.

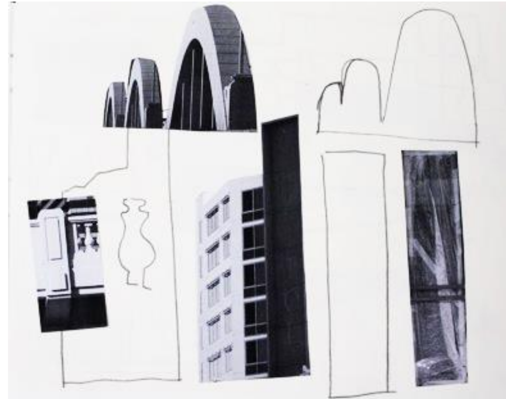


Figure 51 William Jolly Bridge Brisbane (detail) (2014), artist's photograph.

Figure 52 Simon Degroot *Sketchbook Page* 2014, graphite and collage on paper, 21 x 26cm.

Looking to the built environment of South Brisbane, I considered how to translate details from buildings and the William Jolly Bridge (figure 51) into shapes that I could use in my mural design (figure 52). My initial designs repeated previous studio methods of composing floating shapes on a white ground, although this approach was inappropriate for a public mural. While cutting the positive shapes from the coloured paper, I was struck by the remaining negative paper shapes. These negative shapes then went on to inform the final mural design, where layered collage elements were scaled up to the actual size of the architectural forms that inspired them (figures 53 and 54).

Figure 53 Simon Degroot *Pillars Project Mural Design* 2014, painted paper and collage on board, 19 x 15.5cm.

Figure 54 Simon Degroot *Pillars Project Mural* 2014, exterior acrylic, 900 x 600cm.

The *Pillars Project Mural* is reinserted into the circulation of popular visual imagery in an interesting postscript to this project. In 2016, it was used as a background image in a promotional campaign for sportswear brand Lorna Jane (figure 55) and shared on their Instagram account (figure 56).[10] This expanded use of the mural-image in a contemporary and globally networked visual economy constitutes an extended translation in this research. The shapes in this artwork are successfully redistributed across the contemporary social edifice, with the reuse of abstract shapes returning to haunt visual culture.

Figure 55 Lorna Jane *Active Warehouse* 2016, printed flyer, 21 x 14.5cm.

Figure 56 Lorna Jane Instagram image to promote *Active Warehouse* 2016.

3.5 *Indirect Response*, 2015, Postgraduate and Other Projects (POP) Gallery, Brisbane

My practice consists of the formal interrogation of shapes from architecture, animation, advertising, design and art history. Using processes of disassembly and reassembly, abstraction and fragmentation, I create layers of paint that refer both to my own training as a commercial printer and to our contemporary experience with digital image technologies. I am interested in arresting ephemeral and contingent shapes and then translating these in painting.

Until this point in my candidature, my research outputs had explored ways that real

[10] See Instagram account @lornajaneactive #simondegroot

shapes can be translated into abstract, flat shapes and how these can then be used in large-scale mural projects; how a contemporary practice of expanded-painting can communicate with visual culture and the built environment. This next suite of paintings considered ways that architecture and the computer desktop have an impact on the organisation of abstract shapes in painting. Before discussing the works in this section, it is important to first introduce two small experimental paintings from a series of works titled *Composite Orders* (2015, figures 57 and 58), exhibited at Rubicon Ari, Melbourne.

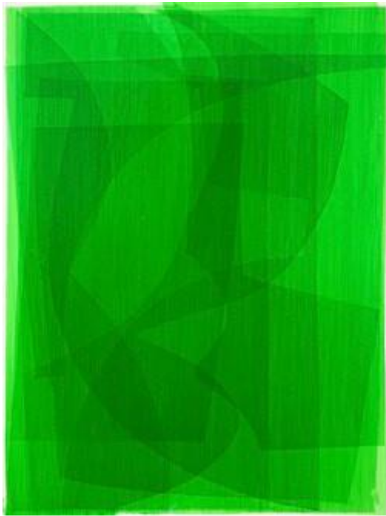


Figure 57 Simon Degroot, *Composite Orders Green* 2015, oil on board, 20.5 x 15.5cm.

Figure 58 Simon Degroot *Composite Orders Magenta* 2015, oil on board, 20.5 x 15.5cm.

‘Composite order’ refers to the delicate appearance of architectural columns used in churches during the Renaissance. They are a mixed capital design, combining and restructuring elements from previous orders in new ways and in a different order. This double use of the word ‘order’ is important here as it suggests an architectural relation and structural arrangement. I explore ordering in these works, the layering of abstract shapes in my paintings reflect a visual arrangement or grammar.

Arranging and ordering is reflected in layers of computer code, equations, and commands determining an order of operations. This ordering is often visually depicted using the phosphor green of early monochrome computer monitors where lines of text or code are written with green on a black background. In these works, I

have employed green to consider how contemporary painting can abstract, build, and combine visual structures to explore a space between the digital and the real. In particular, these paintings make visible what was previously hidden. Translucent layers of paint reveal what is behind pieces of collaged coloured paper and shapes underneath layers of paint that are otherwise present only as pentimenti. In other words, the translucent layers of paint in these works allow a visual penetration beneath the surface, something that I had not previously been able to achieve.

Figure 59 Simon Degroot *Indirect Response* 2015, installation view including, *Composite Orders Green Screen 1, 2,* and *3*, POP Gallery, Griffith University. Photograph courtesy Louis Lim.

These works of layered green monochromatic shapes also recall the digital special effects screen of contemporary film. The green connotes an invisible or liminal space, the updated curtain of the theatrical proscenium.[11] In this way, these works capture

[11] The curtain simultaneously veils and unveils the space of the stage; it is about representation and the illusion of representation. The proscenium has a doubled and unstable effect in contemporary culture, the theatrical curtain of the stage "covered and revealed the stage opening with ritual deliberateness that signaled the beginning and ending of performance". Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From*

and make visible a pictorial space that is normally associated with illusion and deceit. *Composite Orders Green Screen 1, 2* and *3* (2015) are the three acts in a visual and painterly performance captured on a metaphorical surface (figure 59). They employ a formal visual language of the digital as each abstract form is layered on top of one another deepening the monochromatic colour. This is similar in effect to the screen burn of early monochrome phosphor-based computer screens.

Like the spatial compression of visual information in the work for the *Select Reshape* exhibition, these paintings compress a temporal process of construction. Each green shape is a record of its construction and, as they build upon each other, so they conflate their temporal sequence into a single visual moment. This is something that photography can explore by using an extended exposure, as in Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Movie Theatres* (1976–). Hans Belting writes of Sugimoto's photographs that, because the screens are empty, they represent either "the everything of all possible images or else as their nothingness as vehicles of illusion".[12] Like the flat surface of the film screen and the misused phosphorous computer screen, the picture plane of the canvas has a similar all-or-nothing relation to the image.

Indirect Response represented an expanded investigation of the possibilities of visual penetration of the painted surface. Some of the abstract shapes that featured in the exhibition are translucent and invite a penetrating gaze, while other shapes resist this gaze by using opaque paint. Other paintings, such as *Composite Orders Green Screen* and *Indirect Response* (2015, figure 60), resist visual penetration by an accumulation of translucent veils, operating like tinted glass. This exhibition refined a process of translation in the studio as hand-cut sculptural shapes are used to make colourful abstractions and monochrome paintings.

Alberti to Microsoft (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006),163.
[12] Hans Belting cited in Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*, 166.

Figure 60 Simon Degroot *Indirect Response* 2015, installation view, POP Gallery, Griffith University. Photograph courtesy Louis Lim.

The studio environment at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, has had an unescapable influence on my work. Because I am surrounded by a rapidly developing urban environment, the shapes from new buildings have entered my work in the form of abstract shapes. For example, the shapes forming the exterior façade of the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital (2014, figure 61)[13] have found their way into my work *Cilento* (2015, figure 62). The green shapes of the hospital find a parallel in the painted shape in my painting. This literal sense of shapes in the visual environment is at work in this painting.

[13] See "Lady Cilento Children's Hospital," Lyons Architecture (website), http://www.lyonsarch.com.au/lady-cilento-children-s-hospital/.

Figure 61 Lady Cilento Exterior Façade 2014, Lyons Architecture, Brisbane.

Figure 62 Simon Degroot, *Cilento* 2015, oil on canvas, 122 x 122cm.

Observing and drawing architectural and advertising shapes in my journal, I combine these in paintings as a personal type of rebuilding. This initiates a process of translation that is important in this research. The difficulty does not seem to lie in what shapes to pick, but rather in what to do with them after they enter my visual journal. For *Indirect Response*, I decided to create a three-part cycle of shapes, large sculptural cut-outs, colourful abstractions, and monochromatic paintings.

Each of these three manifestations of shapes creates a cycle of communication between artworks in the exhibition. The shapes in these works are translated between different material states, expanding previous material translations; however, this time, with a greater potential for deferral. The *Off Cuts* (2015, figure 63) are presented almost as the building blocks of the coloured abstractions, while monochromatic works such as *Composite Orders Green Screen 1* become digitally mediated ruminations on those same colourful abstractions.

Figure 63 Simon Degroot *Indirect Response* 2015, installation and detail view of *Off Cuts* 2015, POP Gallery, Griffith University. Photograph courtesy Louis Lim.

This exhibition revealed a personal translation between different material states. The built environment informs the shapes in these works but they remain hand-made with a degree of human error and human decision. They are colourful imaginings for future works, much like the shapes in Robert Venturi's *Eclectic House Series* (1977), drawings that are not actually copies of buildings but are rather drawings that contain a particular personal inflection. In a similar way, there is an important personal element in my abstract translations.

The monochrome works in this exhibition highlight another important question in this research. That is, how can I highlight that the shapes in the work have come from elsewhere? To answer this question, it is useful to think about photocopies and how we know that they always refer to some other original. For example, when looking at Lindy Lee's *The Silence of Painters* (1987), it is clear that the work contains a photocopy of Rembrandt's *Self Portrait* (1629). What are the particular devices that signify this element as a photocopy? I have tried to employ the semiotic devices of the photocopy in my monochromatic work to highlight that these shapes have originated from elsewhere.

This is particularly evident in my black and grey monochromatic works that are in conversation with art-historical imagery. This conversation is most clearly articulated in the title piece to the exhibition, *Indirect Response* (2015, figure 64), which I revisited the following year with *Tint* (2016, figure 65). These works refer to a history of black and minimal painting, such as Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) and Ellsworth Kelly's *Black Square* (1953), but also contemporary references such as the origami-inspired design of Issey Miyake, or the misprinted black monochromes of Wade Guyton's *Untitled* (2011). In my research, the black square, which is usually associated with an end-point in art history, is used as a starting point from which a new series of paintings can be explored.

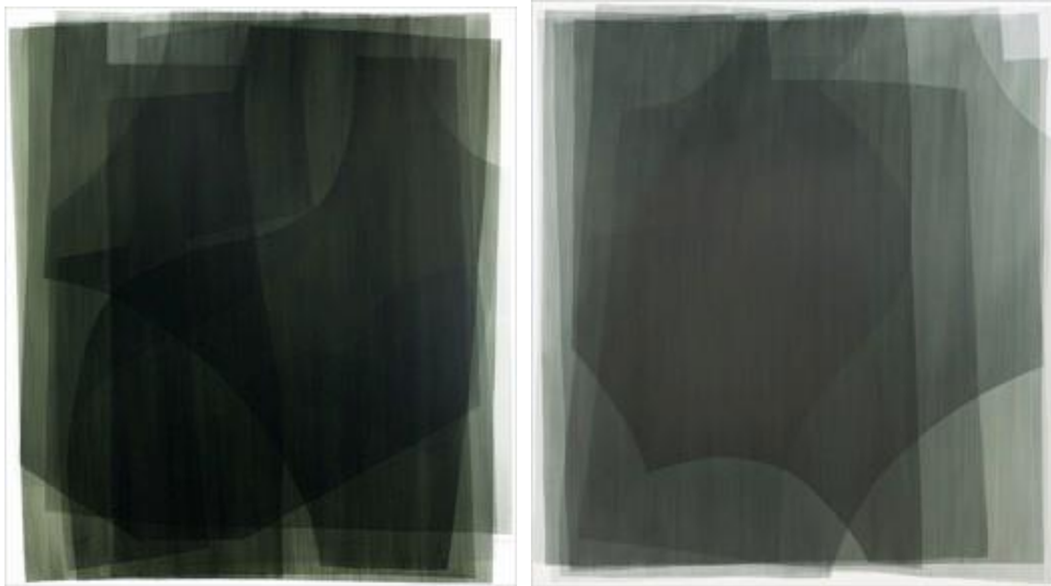


Figure 64 Simon Degroot, *Indirect Response* (2015), oil on canvas, 140 x 125cm.

Figure 65 Simon Degroot *Tint* 2016, oil on canvas, 183 x 167cm.

3.6 Nundah Train Station Mural, 2015, Brisbane

In the exhibition described above, I employed a metaphor of building to describe the potential for painting to influence visual landscapes. This next mural project made this metaphor real by impressing large abstract shapes on the visual landscape. Painted on the side of a building and viewed by passengers on the passing train, this design translates illustration into contemporary abstraction. I have used abstracted shapes of people and place to highlight the way that local identity and a sense of place are closely related to the built environment.

Buildings, public art, and murals make important contributions to the developing cultural landscape, both in terms of a personal and collective sense of identity. Murals become part of the built environment, a discrete visual object in a collection of heterogeneous elements that create place. For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the relation between these heterogeneous elements produces a flow of "desire" that "exists as a process that changes the connections and social relations of a society".[14] Murals inform this change because they are part of a constantly evolving urban

[14] Philip Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire*. Theory, Culture & Society, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1996), 74.

"assemblage" between parts.[15] Contemporary artists impact and affect place by employing strategies of seduction in their work and appealing to a bodily response to sensation. This is seen in Charline von Heyl's mural where she worked to "give immense satisfaction"[16] through translating Ellsworth Kelly's work and adding her own gestural flourishes to produce an image based in desire.

Figure 66 Simon Degroot, *Nundah Train Station Mural Design* (2015), painted paper and collage, 12.5 x 40.5cm.

Figure 67 Simon Degroot, *Nundah Train Station Mural* 2015, exterior acrylic, 900 x 2400cm.

For the Nundah Train Station mural design (2015, figure 66), I abstracted thick line drawings of people and places in Nundah[17]. I selected segments of these drawings and magnified them 'beyond recognition' until they became abstract shapes. The shapes

[15] Ibid., 4.

[16] Charline von Heyl "The Man Podcast: Charline Von Heyl," in *The Modern Art Notes Podcast*, 17 November 2011, https://manpodcast.com/portfolio/no-2-charline-von-heyl-kristen-hileman/, 37:23.

[17] The line drawings of people and places in Nundah were initially created by artist Daniel Brock.

in the final mural (figure 67) establish a degree of ambiguity while simultaneously retaining a specificity, maintaining a local connection with the people and places of Nundah during a process of translation.

This procedural aspect of translation is important. In many ways, what is at work here is something like the photographic and computer filters applied to blur, distort, or pixelate images. There is a "controlled play of difference"[18] in my translation of existing images that is closely related to both the graphical user interface and the technique of caricature. That is, the abstract shapes in this mural are simplifications of existing shapes that still maintain a reference to some lost original. The work embodies a process of copy and collage that is flattened by the finished mural.

3.7 *Hard Graphics*, 2016, Spiro Grace Art Rooms, Brisbane

The collages and paintings in this exhibition suggest a reciprocal process of translation in contemporary visual culture, where samples and shapes move across screens and painting surfaces. I reinserted ephemeral abstracted forms from the Internet into my practice for an online exhibition with Spiro Grace Art Rooms entitled *Hard Graphics* (2016). These included new paintings exploring tensions between drawing, painting, and computer techniques.

This exhibition captures a process of translation as hand-drawn sketchbook shapes are made into vector files before returning to the hand made in contemporary painting. This expands a methodological process of translation that I first employed in *Shallow Space* (2014), exploring collage and paint replicas. These new works incorporate digital processes and allow greater compositional flexibility and control. Using Adobe Illustrator, I can manipulate the size, order, colour, or composition of any painted form until I am completely satisfied with the artwork design.

Comparing each digitally composed artwork-design with its painted replica reveals minor but important differences of translation. Most obviously, each work is

[18] Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Im/Pulse to See," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Washington: Bay Press, 1988), 68.

materially different insofar as the digital composition is immaterial. Firstly, the abstract shapes in the computer-generated work exist as a mathematical ideal; they are weightless vectors, pure, and transcendental. What does it mean to engage and compose these shapes based only on their appearance before painting them?

One possible answer is to consider abstract forms as becoming liberated by a process of translation. That is, by undergoing the kind of translation discussed in this research, abstract forms exist beyond, behind, and in excess of their discreet manifestations—like the translated poems of Hölderlin, where the actual meaning of the text remains hidden, in-between, and behind the translated words. Abstract shapes are mobilised in this process and as Joselit writes, possess "vast power through their capacity for replication, remediation, and dissemination at variable velocities".[19] The digital composition and subsequent painted translation of *Purple Additions* (2016, figures 68 and 69, respectively) encompasses unity and multiplicity into its production.

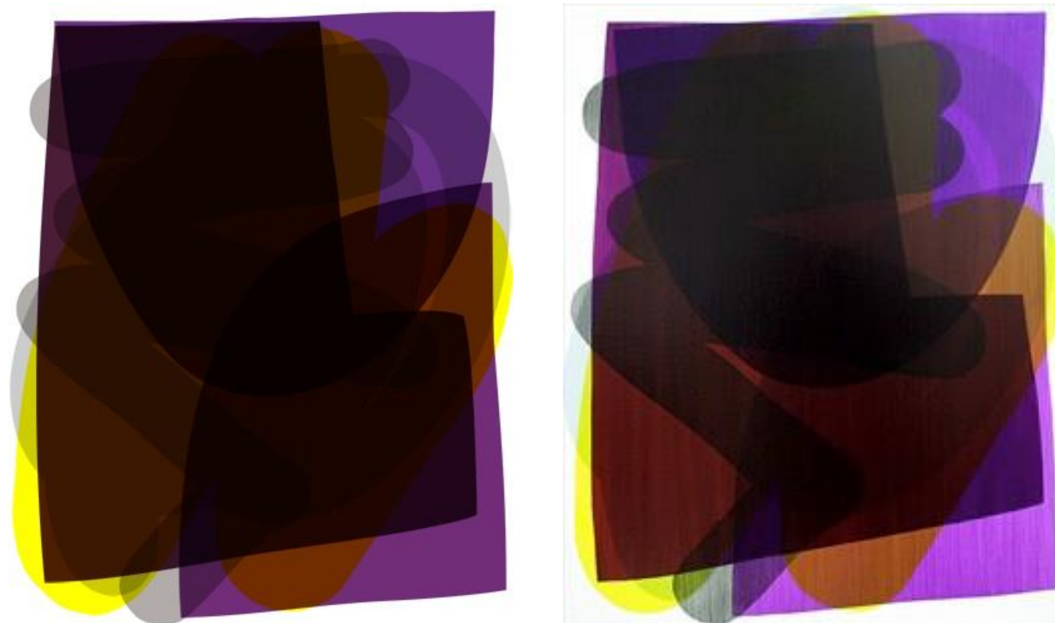


Figure 68 Simon Degroot *Purple Additions* 2016, digital animation, dimensions variable.

Figure 69 Simon Degroot *Purple Additions* 2016, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm.

The works in this exhibition also explore how other artwork-details might be similarly liberated from their original source and inserted into my practice using a process of translation. This is clearly aligned with Pop Art processes where artists reproduced

[19] David Joselit, *After Art*, ed. Sarah Whiting (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), xiv.

images from popular culture, design, and art history. For example, Andy Warhol's *Flower Paintings* (1964) have been liberated from *Modern Photography* (1964),[20] a commercially printed magazine. Importantly, this commercial process of image reproduction is reflected in *Ten Foot Flowers* (1967, figure 70), which uses a similar photomechanical process of image reproduction.

This is fundamentally different from the method of translation I have used in this research. My work departs from a process of mechanical reproduction as the hand-drawn forms become abstract—the flower is liberated from its mechanical verisimilitude because of a process of translation. The flower is familiar when placed next to its source; however, I propose that on its own would be difficult to recognise. This reveals a complicated situation where all visual similarities suggest a possible relation between artworks.

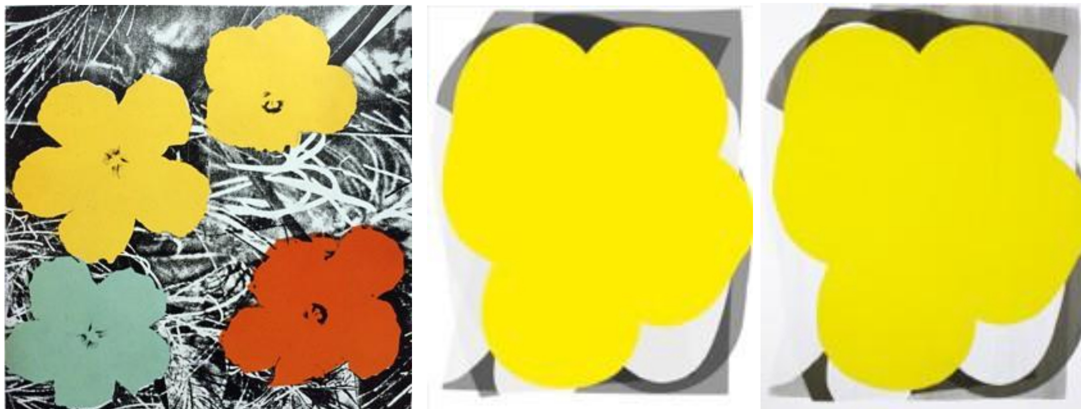


Figure 70 Andy Warhol *Ten Foot Flowers* 1967, synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas, 304.8 x 304.8cm

Figure 71 Simon Degroot *Flower* 2016, digital animation, dimensions variable.

Figure 72 Simon Degroot *Flower* 2016, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm.

The minor differences between the computer-generated image (figure 71) and the painted replica (figure 72) are important for this research. Foster identifies this difference in early Pop Art, which layers "mechanical reproduction, and handwork",[21] confusing an easy categorisation of component parts. Artists such as Roy

[20] In the 1960s, Andy Warhol faced several lawsuits for the unauthorised use of copyright images. The photograph that Warhol used for *Ten Foot Flowers* was taken by photographer Patricia Caulfield.
[21] Hal Foster, "Roy Lichtenstein, or the Cliché Image," chap. 2 in *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 67.

Lichtenstein, Gerhard Richter, and Andy Warhol create a confounding mix of the hand-made, readymade, painterly and photographic—selecting, re-drawing, editing, enlarging, transposing and refining. In art-historical terms, this material confusion was a complex timely response to Greenberg's "medium purity", as artists opposed hermetic formalism in order to "let the world in again", Steinberg observes.[22]

3.8 *Picture Building*, 2016, Kick Arts Contemporary, Cairns

I pursued the monochrome and translucent paint layering in an exhibition titled *Picture Building* at Kick Arts Contemporary, Cairns (2016, figure 73). These works expand a persistent architectural quality that continues to reappear in my practice. I am interested in an expanded practice of 'architectural painting' in these works to suggest what Matisse called "a greater space, a truly plastic space".[23] This exhibition considered a process of painting and drew upon my experience as a commercial printer.

Figure 73 Simon Degroot *Picture Building* installation view 2016, Kick Arts Contemporary Artspace, Cairns.

[22] Steinberg describes for example that Rauschenberg and Johns treat their work as "a flat documentary surface that tabulates information". Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 90.
[23] Matisse cited in Buchberg et al., *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*, 21.

For me, painting is about building and about making your own visual environment. This analogy with building is quite literal in this exhibition because I was literally looking at the built environment and translating elements that I then used to remake or rebuild my own visual environment in painting. I am interested in what these paintings can communicate, in light of the fact that viewers bring their own visual experiences with them to make sense of abstract shapes. For this exhibition, I called upon individual histories of visual experience—a person's "visual literacy"[24]—to create works that feel vaguely familiar but are beyond easy recognition. It is important that these works are not didactic references to another source because there is a poetic element in not knowing that source but sensing it.

Figure 74 Simon Degroot *Picture Building* 2016, oil on canvas, 244 x 183cm.

In these works, I also replay some of my experiences as a commercial printer. This is most evident in *Picture Building* (2016, figure 74), where I have used oil paint in the studio as a type of ink. Applying this paint in a sequence of layers, I have glazed each shape over the other to create a rich and deep surface. As the translucent layers of paint in these works multiply, they ironically become more opaque; like layers of

[24] Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

tinted glass, they deny easy visibility. However, it is precisely because these shapes are applied as individual layers that they allow the "viewer to visually pass in and out (and eventually through) the static…"[25] The layered shapes in the work allow multiple entry points into the painting because each layer is confused as to which came first, or last for that matter, and what first and last mean in this context. This creates a temporal compression, a flattening of time in the work, creating a painting that is all at once forever in the present.

[25] Cameron Hope, "Simon Degroot: Indirect Response, a Synthesis of Abstract Concepts", *Panoptic Press*, http://panopticpress.org.au/?page_id=3095.

Conclusion

This research offers the model of translation as a useful way to think about artists who use existing shapes in their work in such a way that they are familiar but not easily recognised. Turning to the history of Modern abstraction as well as commercial printing techniques, I have outlined an art-historical preference for visual translations that are expedient, direct, and easily disseminated. I have discussed how the most effective contemporary abstract art is post-medium and particularly anti-hermetic. Many artists today use similar abstract shapes to those that can be found in and around advertising, packaging, architecture, product design, and the computer desktop.

Contemporary abstract artists engage with the world around them using shapes that echo their history of use. As both a process and a concept, a methodology of translation can also assist contemporary abstraction to build visual environments outside the studio. Artwork shapes and other details that appear in advertising campaigns, television commercials, and social media are outside art history and so contribute in a new way to visual culture and to developing an identity of place.

In this exegesis, I have detailed some of the specific methodological processes in my practice and contextualised these in relation to art-historical and philosophical discussions. I have focused on the way that artists identify, select, and translate visual elements, translating them into painted motifs. My research thus contributes to and complements existing art-historical and theoretical discourse surrounding abstraction. It is encouraging to see the ideas in this research explored in real time as the artists discussed in this exegesis continue to employ techniques of translation in the creation of new work.

Historically, painting has been considered slow in comparison to new media and images on the screen. Contemporary abstract painting distinguishes itself from these other time periods by the speedy way that artists use translation to process visual information. Artists paint with speed in order to communicate with the world. Indeed, this kind of speed has been accelerating for more than 150 years since Baudelaire wrote, “in the daily metamorphosis of external things, there is a rapidity of movement

which calls for an equal speed in the execution from the artist".[1] This is especially so for contemporary visual culture and a context of image sharing and exchange.

In this research, I have focused on ways that contemporary abstraction can match this speed. In the studio, rapid sketching becomes a driving momentum for thinking about how the translation of image details can contribute to contemporary visual culture. I quickly sketch abstract notations of shapes as I watch television or browse the Internet. On 18 September 2014, I tested this approach, filling a sketchbook with abstract flat shapes to use in future artworks (figure 75). This has now come full circle as the shapes in this sketchbook have been translated into laser-cut interactive acrylic shapes for *Shape Poems* (2017, figure 76).

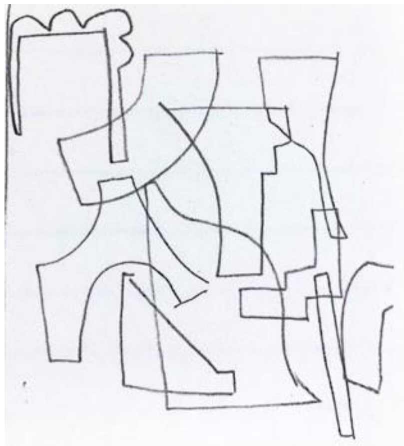


Figure 75 Simon Degroot *Sketchbook Page* 2014, graphite on paper, 22 x 20cm.

Figure 76 Simon Degroot *Shape Poems* 2017, laser cut acrylic shapes, 50 x 35cm.

I have approached the artwork for this research in two interconnected ways. Firstly, I painted in the studio. Looking at the visual world around me—including online and in books—I identified, selected, and translated individual shapes from visual culture into my painting practice. This is a self-evident studio-based research strategy; however, the benefits of this approach are revealed when reflecting on particular image details. I observed that I was selecting shapes with specific qualities—their being, seductive, playful, iconic, and designed.

Secondly, I painted large-scale murals away from the studio. I created abstract shapes by looking at the historical architecture of the local area and translated these three-

[1] Jonathan Mayne, ed. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays by Charles Baudelaire* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 4.

dimensional shapes into the flat shapes of my practice. I looked specifically to a long architectural and building design history of incorporating organic shapes and curves, including the stylised details of plants, such as the arabesque and the quatrefoil.

There continues to be a great synergy between the shapes used in architecture, design, advertising, commercial printing, and abstract painting. It is particularly important to continue to observe how abstract shapes can form a dialogue with other forms of visual culture and to examine the capacity for painting to interact with a contemporary environment in order to further develop our “visual literacy”.[2] Reflecting both on studio-based artwork and large-scale mural projects, I am certain that they are connected on a level of expedited communication and recognisability. Large murals in a collage style are linked to playfulness because they are not overly predetermined, and a lack of systematic figuration opens these murals to audiences in public spaces.

The contemporary artists working in abstraction considered in this exegesis have learnt expediency from art-historical abstraction. For example, Matisse initially used his cut-outs “as an expedient”, and predicted that, “it will only be much later that people will realise to what extent, the work I am doing today is in step with the future”.[3] Indeed, contemporary artists have fallen in step with the paper cut-outs.[4] They enjoy a renewed popularity in contemporary abstract painting, perhaps because of their speedy construction, directness, and easy dissemination.

Focusing my research on methods of translation has allowed me to investigate an aspect of the manipulation of images and shapes in abstraction. To translate is to exercise power and control over images. Translation of image forms into abstraction grants utilitarian control over images and the tools to enter them into the remarkably productive circulation in heterogeneous networks.[5] Translation opens the possibility for contemporary art as post-historical, to be made “without the benefit of a reassuring sort of narrative in which it is seen as the appropriate next stage of the

---

[2] Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

[3] Karl Buchberg, Nicholas Cullinan, Jodi Hauptman, and Nicolas Serota, *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs* (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), 23.

[4] For example, see Shirley Jaffe’s *The Gray Phantom* (2009), Kirra Jamison’s *Hum* (2012), Chad Kouri’s *A Sophisticated Balancing Act* (2013), or Hayal Pozanti’s *81 (Percentage of CEOs with High Intuition Scores Who Doubled Their Business in Five Years)* (2016).

[5] David Joselit, *After Art*, ed. Sarah Whiting (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), xv.

story".[6] Translation in abstract painting is about exchange and multiplicity and a means towards making another kind of sense of our contemporary image-driven world.

[6] Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

List of References

Adam, Peter. “Building for Others.” In *Eileen Gray: Architect / Designer: A Biography*, 291–314. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000.

Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974. Originally published in 1954.

Atkins, Peter. “Painting and Drawing.” Greenaway Art Gallery, 21 September 2011. http://www.greenaway.com.au/Artists/Peter-Atkins.html#essay2011PAtkins.

Attneave, Fred. "Multistability in Perception." Chap. 9 in *Readings from Scientific American: Image, Object, and Illusion*, 91–99. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1971.

Bann, Stephen. *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in 19th Century France*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001.

Barron, Steve. "Take on Me." Music video, 3:24. Warner Bros., 1985.

Barthes, Roland. “Is Painting a Language?” Translated by Richard Howard. In *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*. Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1985.

———. “The Photographic Message.” Translated by Stephen Heath. In *Image-Music-Text*, 12–22. London: Fontana Press, 1977.

Baudrillard, Jean. “The Ecstasy of Communication.” Translated by John Johnson. In *Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 126–34. London: Pluto Press, 1985.

Baxandall, Michael. “Intentional Visual Interest: Picasso's Portrait of Kahnweiler.” Chap. 2 in *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, 41–73. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985.

Bell, Kirsty. “Its Own Reality.” *Frieze*, 5 May 2009. https://frieze.com/article/its-own-reality.

Benjamin, Walter. “The Task of the Translator.” Translated by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc. In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 253–63. Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002.

———. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Translated by J. A. Underwood. London: Penguin Group, 2008. Originally published in 1936.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Great Britain: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books Ltd, 1972.

Berger, Karol. "Hermeneutics. Interpretation and Its Validity." Chap. 6 in *A Theory of Art*, 213–34. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Bickerstaff, Campbell. *Interface: People, Machines, Design*. NSW: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, 2014.

Bishop, Claire. "Digital Divide: Whatever Happened to Digital Art?" *Artforum International* 51, no. 1 (2012): 435–41, 534.

Blomberg, Katja. *Christine Streuli – Nonstop-Painting*. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013.

Bois, Yve-Alain. "The Availability of Malevich." In *Malevich and the American Legacy*, 21–32. New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2011.

———. *Painting as Model*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: October, 1990.

Bois, Yve-Alain, and Greg Sims. "On Matisse: The Blinding: For Leo Steinberg." *October* 68 (1994): 60–121.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction*. Translated by Jeanine Herman. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002.

———. *The Radicant*. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009.

Bradbury, Dominic. *Mid-Century Modern Complete.* London: Thames and Hudson, 2014.

Brüderlin, Markus, ed. *Ornament and Abstraction*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Bryson, Norman. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. UK & USA: The Macmillan Press Ltd & Yale University Press, 1983.

Buchberg, Karl, Nicholas Cullinan, Jodi Hauptman, and Nicolas Serota. *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*. London: Tate Publishing, 2014.

Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. "Formalism and Historicity." Chap. 1 in *Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth Century Art*, 1–88. Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2015.

Bürger, Peter. "The Negation of the Autonomy of Art by the Avant-Garde." Translated by Michael Shaw. Chap. 3 in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Theory and History of Literature, 47–54. Minneapolis: Manchester University Press, 1984.

Butler, Rex, ed. *What Is Appropriation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s & 1990s*. 2nd ed. Brisbane: IMA Publishing, 2004.

Chlenova, Masha. “0.10.” In *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925*, edited by David Frankel, 206–8. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012.

Clark, T. J. “Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art.” *Critical Enquiry* 9, no. 1, The Politics of Interpretation (1982): 139–56.

Daelli, Valentina, Nicola J. van Rijsbergen, and Alessandro Treves. “How Recent Experience Affects the Perception of Ambiguous Objects.” *Science Direct* 1322 (2010): 81–91.

Damisch, Hubert. *Theory of /Cloud/*. Cultural Memory in the Present. Edited by Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries. California: Stanford University Press, 2002. Originally published in 1972.

Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.

———. “Metaphor and Cognition.” Chap. 6 In *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in a Post-Historical Perspective*, 73–87. Berkley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1992.

———. “The Transfiguration of the Commonplace.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33, no. 2 (1974): 139–48.

Derrida, Jacques. *Jacques Derrida Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass. Great Britain: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982.

———. *The Truth in Painting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Dickerman, Leah. “Inventing Abstraction.” In *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*, edited by David Frankel, 12–37. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012.

Dovey, Kim. *Becoming Places*. London & New York: Routledge, 2010.

———. *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*. London & New York: Routledge, 1999.

Drury, Maurice O’Connor. *The Danger of Words and Writings on Wittgenstein*, ed. D. Berman, M. Fitzgerald, and J. Hayes. Bristol: Thoemmes, 1996.

Dunne, Nathan. “Wow! Lichtenstein: A Retrospective at Tate Modern Il.” *Tate Etc.* no. 27 (Spring 2013).

Edwards, Saskia. “Natalya Hughes at Milani Gallery: Warping the Woodblock.”, 10 June 2014. http://www.aestheticfixation.com/2014/06/natalya-hughes-at-milani-gallery.html.

Eshelman, Raoul. *Performatism, or, the End of Postmodernism*. The Davies Group, 2008.

Elkins, James. “What Are We Seeing, Exactly?” *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 2 (1997): 191–98.

Fauchereau, Serge. “Papiers Collés.” In *Braque*, 19–21. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1987.

FitzGerald, Michael C. *Picasso and American Art*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2007.

Foster, Hal. “Roy Lichtenstein, or the Cliché Image.” Chap. 2 in *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha*, 62–108. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Frampton, Kenneth. “Le Poème De L'angle Droit.” Chap. 12 in *Le Corbusier*, 200–213. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001.

Friedberg, Anne. *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

Friedman, Samantha. “Avant La Lettre.” In *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*, edited by Nicholas Cullinan Karl Buchberg, Jodi Hauptman and Nicholas Serota, 85–91. London: Tate Publishing, 2014.

Fry, Edward F. “Georges Braque: Thoughts on Painting 1917.” In *Cubism*, 147–48. London: Thames & Hudson, 1978. Originally published 1966.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Aesthetic and Hermeneutic Consequences.” Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. Chap. 2 in *Truth and Method*, 135–67. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

Gagosian, Larry. *Malevich and the American Legacy*. New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2011.

Galloway, Alexander R. *The Interface Effect*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012.

Godfrey, Mark. “Close Up: Stain Resistance.” *Artforum* 49, no. 10 (2011). wool735.com/cw/essays_and_press/Godfrey%20Artforum_Summer_20110.pdf.

———. “Julie Mehretu: Black City.” In *The Painting Factory: Abstraction after Warhol*, edited by Jeffrey Deitch, 110–121. New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2012.

Gombrich, Ernst. “The Image in the Clouds.” Chap. 6 in *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 181–203. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961.

Goodchild, Philip. *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire*. Theory, Culture & Society. edited by Mike Featherstone London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1996.

Graham-Dixon, Andrew. “Like Memories That Haven't Quite Gelled.” *The Telegraph*, 2006.

Grow, Robin. *Brisbane Art Deco: Stories of Our Built Heritage*. Edited by Kimberley Wilson. Brisbane: Jubilee Studio, 2015.

Hall, Stuart. “Encoding, Decoding.” Chap. 36 in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During, 507– 517. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

Hackett Films. “Silverchair: Young Modern.” CD album artwork. Surry Hills: Eleven: A Music Company, 2007.

Harris, Jonathan. “Cubism's Complexities.” Chap. 4 in *Writing Back to Modern Art: After Greenberg, Fried and Clark*, 117–35. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Hay, Sophie. “The History of Knolling.” *The Long Lyst*, last updated 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20160304064743/http://www.lyst.com/longlyst/art-knolling/.

Hayes, Nicky, and Sue Orrell. “Perception.” Chap. 2 in *Psychology: An Introduction*. New York: Longman Inc., 1987.

Hope, Cameron. “Simon Degroot: Indirect Response, a Synthesis of Abstract Concepts.” *Panoptic Press*, 30 August 2015. http://panopticpress.org.au/?page_id=3095.

Hoptman, Laura. *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014.

Hudson, Susan. *Painting Now*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2015.

“Jacques Lacan.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online), 2 April 2013. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/#MirStaEgoSub

Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” In *Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 111–25. London: Pluto Press, 1985.

Jaspers, Anneke. “Art of the Second Degree: Post Pop and Popism.” In *Pop to Popism*, 234–37. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2014.

Jencks, Charles. “Post-Modern Architecture.” Chap. 3 in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, 64–196. Great Britain: Academy Editions, 1991.

Jenkins, H. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2008.

Jones, Owen. *The Grammar of Ornament*. New York: DK Publishing, 2001. 1856.

Joselit, David. *After Art*. Edited by Sarah Whiting. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St Martin's Press, 1965.

Keene, Steve. “The Apples in Stereo: Tone Soul Evolution.” CD album artwork. Burbank: Warner Bros. Records, 1997.

Krauss, Rosalind E. “Grids.” In *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1985.

———. “The Im/Pulse to See.” In *Vision and Visuality*, edited by Hal Foster, 51–83. Washington: Bay Press, 1988.

———. *The Picasso Papers*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999. 1998.

Krell, Alan. *Manet and the Painters of Contemporary Life*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1996.

Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Kushner, Rachel. “Laura Owens.” *The Believer* 1, no. 2 (2003). http://www.believermag.com/issues/200305/?read=interview_owens.

“Lady Cilento Children’s Hospital.” Lyons Architecture (website). http://www.lyonsarch.com.au/lady-cilento-children-s-hospital/.

Laurel, Brenda. “Interface Evolution.” In *Computers as Theatre*, 2–33. Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc, 1991.

“Le Charivari, December 1, 1832–May 31, 1835.” Metropolitan Museum of Art (online). http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/347359.

Lee, Nathaniel. “Picks: Trudy Benson.” *Artforum*, 3 June 2016, http://artforum.com/picks/id=60414.

Lefevere, André. *Translation/History/Culture*. Edited by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

———. *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Translation Studies. Edited by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere. USA and Canada: Routledge, 1992.

Lipman, Jean, and Richard Marshall. *Art about Art*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978.

Lowenstein, Richard. "What You Need." Music video, 3:35. Atlantic, 1985.

Ludovico, Alessandro. *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Onomatopee, 2012.

Lyotard, Jean-Frâncois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10. Edited by Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse. United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1989.

MacArthur John, Deborah Van Der Plaat, and Janina Gosseye. *Hot Modernism: Queensland Architecture 1945-1975*. Queensland: Artifice Books on Architecture, 2015.

Maharaj, Sarat. “Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other.” In *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, edited by Jean Fisher, 28–35. London: Kala Press in association with the Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994.

Malevich, Kazimir, “From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting.” In *Essays on Art 1915*, 19. New York: George Wittenborn, 1971.

Marx, Karl. “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction.” In *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, edited by T. B. Bottomore, 47. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Mayne, Jonathan, ed. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays by Charles Baudelaire*. London: Phaidon Press, 1995.

McEvilley, Thomas. “On ‘Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief: “Primitivism” in 20th Century Art’ at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984’.” *Artforum* 23 (1984): 54-60.

McLuhan, Marshall. “Media as Translators.” Chap. 6 In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 62–67. New York: Routledge, 2001.

———. *The Medium Is the Massage*. Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1967.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas. “About Nothing.” Chap. 2 In *Seinfeld*. Bfi Tv Classics, 19-49.

London: British Film Institute, 2007.
Mitchell, W. J. T. "Ut Pictura Theoria: Abstract Painting and Language." Chap. 7 In *Picture Theory*, 213–39. Chicago: London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
———. *What Do Pictures Want?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
Monk, Ray. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, 536–37. New York: Free Press, 1990.
Morris, Robert. "Toward an Ophthalmology of the Aesthetic and an Orthopedics of Seeing." Chap. 15 in *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice*, edited by Francis Hasall, Julia Jansen and Tony O'Connor, 225–37. California: Stanford University Press, 2009.
Nicolai, Hermann. "Viewpoint: Vanishing Infinity." *Physics* 2, no. 70, 17 August 2009. http://physics.aps.org/articles/v2/70.
Nikas, Bob. *Painting Abstraction: New Elements in Abstract Painting*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2009.
Nochlin, Linda. "Gustave Courbet's Meeting: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew." *The Art Bulletin* 49, no. 3 (1967): 209−22.
Ohlin, Alix. "Andreas Gursky and the Contemporary Sublime." *Art Journal* 61, no. 4 (2002): 22−35.
Owens, Craig. *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1992.
———. "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism." *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67–86.
"Painter, Poet, Lighthouse Keeper." Lisson Gallery, 23 June 2010. http://www.lissongallery.com/exhibitions/rodney-graham-painter-poet-lighthouse-keeper.
Panofsky, Erwin, *Tomb Sculpture.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1964.
Po, Roman. "A Look at Microsoft, Google and Apple's Approach to Flat Design." Hongkiat (blog), no date. http://www.hongkiat.com/blog/google-apple-microsoft-flat-design/.
Poore, Emily. "New to the Collection: John Young." UQ Art Museum, 25 February 2016. https://uqartmuseum.wordpress.com/2016/02/25/new-to-the-collection-john-young/.
Rancière, Jacques. "The Surface of Design." In *The Future of the Image*, 91–107.

London: Verso, 2009.

Rembrandt Research Project (website). http://www.rembrandtresearchproject.org/.

Rose, Barbara. "Abstract Illusionism." *Artforum* October (1967): 33–37.

Saltz, Jerry. "Sincerity and Irony Hug It Out: At P.S 1's "Greater New York," and New Union of Opposing Attitudes." *New York Magazine*, 27 May 2010.

Seinfeld. "The Red Dot." Season 3, Episode 12. Directed by Tom Cherones, written by Larry David, 1991.

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

Sooke, Alastair. "Modern Masters: Why Modern Art Is Everywhere." *The Telegraph*, 27 April 2010. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/alastair-sooke/7640258/Modern-Masters-why-modern-art-is-everywhere.html.

Stechow, Wolfgang. *Northern Renaissance Art 1400-1600: Sources and Documents*, 114. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999. 1966.

Steinberg, Leo. "Other Criteria." In *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, 55–91. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

———. "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large." In *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, 125–234. Chicago London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

———. "The Glorious Company." In *Art about Art*, 8–31. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978.

Stella, Frank. *Working Space*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Stephenson, Neal. *In the Beginning ... Was the Command Line*. New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1999.

Stokes, Emily. "Ryan Gander." In *Illuminations*, 192–93. Venice, Italy: La Biennale di Venezia, 2011.

Summers, David. "The Conditions of Western Modernism." Chap. 7 in *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, 592–601. New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 2003.

Taylor, Paul, ed. *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970-1980*. Melbourne: Art & Text, 1984.

"Tea Infuser and Strainer." Metropolitan Museum of Art (online), 2017. http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/491299.

Tunnicliffe, Wayne. "'The Easel Did Not Go Pop: It Went Bang!' Australian Pop Art." In *Pop to Popism*, edited by Wayne Tunnicliffe and Anneke Jaspers, 138–47. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2014.

Tupitsyn, Margarita. "Being-in-Production: The Constructivist Code." In *Rodchenko & Popova: Defining Constructivism*, edited by Margarita Tupitsyn, 13–30. London: Tate Publishing, 2009.

von Heyl, Charline. "The Man Podcast: Charline Von Heyl." *The Modern Art Notes Podcast*, March 2011. https://manpodcast.com/portfolio/no-2-charline-von-heyl-kristen-hileman/.

Warde, Fredric. "Printers Ornaments on the 'Monotype'." In *Typographers on Type: An Illustrated Anthology from William Morris to the Present Day*, edited by Ruari McLean, 55−56. London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995. Originally published in 1928.

White, Anthony. "Frank Stella: Discussion of the Work." National Gallery of Australia (website), 2002. http://nga.gov.au/International/Catalogue/Detail.cfm?IRN=37841&BioArtistIRN=15599&MnuID=SRCH&GalID=1.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations.* Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997. Originally published in 1953.

Illustrations

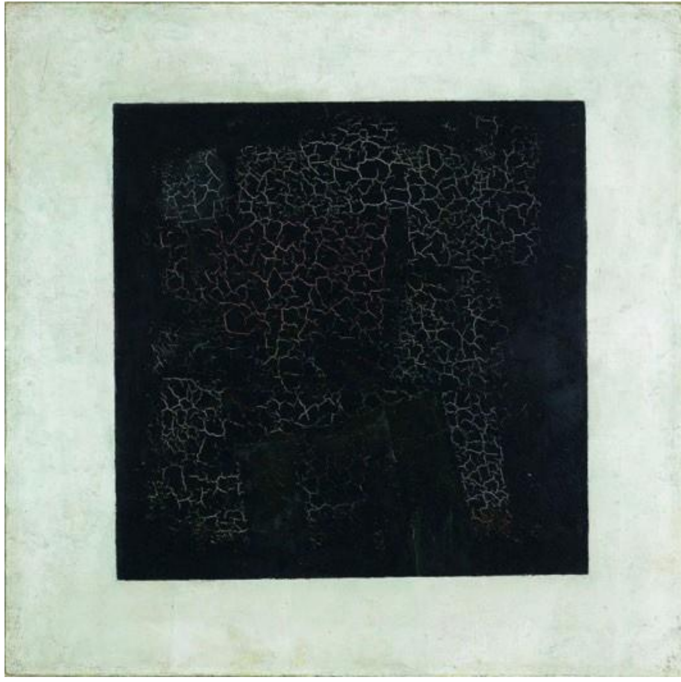


Figure 1 Kazimir Malevich *Black Square* 1915, oil on canvas, 53 x 53cm.

Figure 2 Ellsworth Kelly *Black Square* 1953, oil on wood, 110 x 110cm.

Figure 3 Pablo Picasso, *Guitar and sheet music on a pedestal* 1920, gouache on paper, 22.8 x 29.1cm.

Figure 4 Stuart Davis, *Egg Beater No. 1* 1927, oil on canvas, 73.9 x 91.4cm.

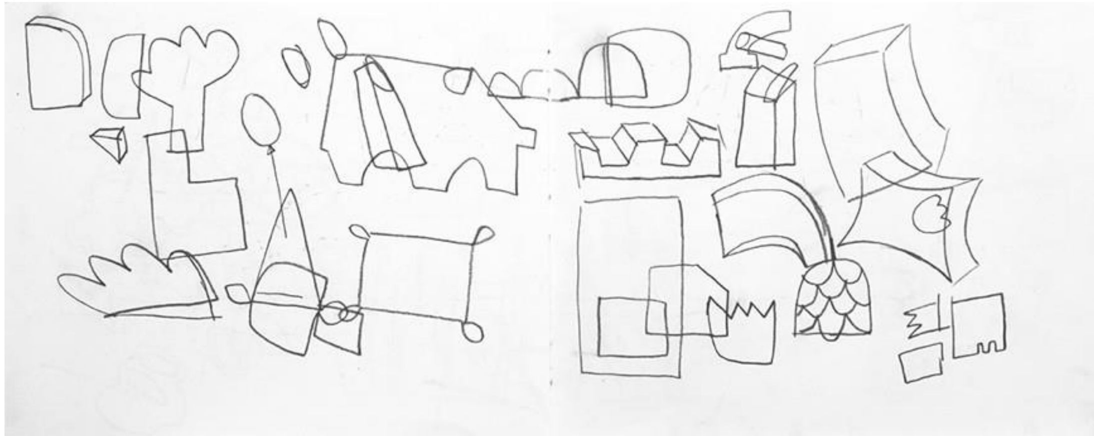


Figure 5 Simon Degroot, sketch book page, 2014, graphite on paper, 21 x 42cm.

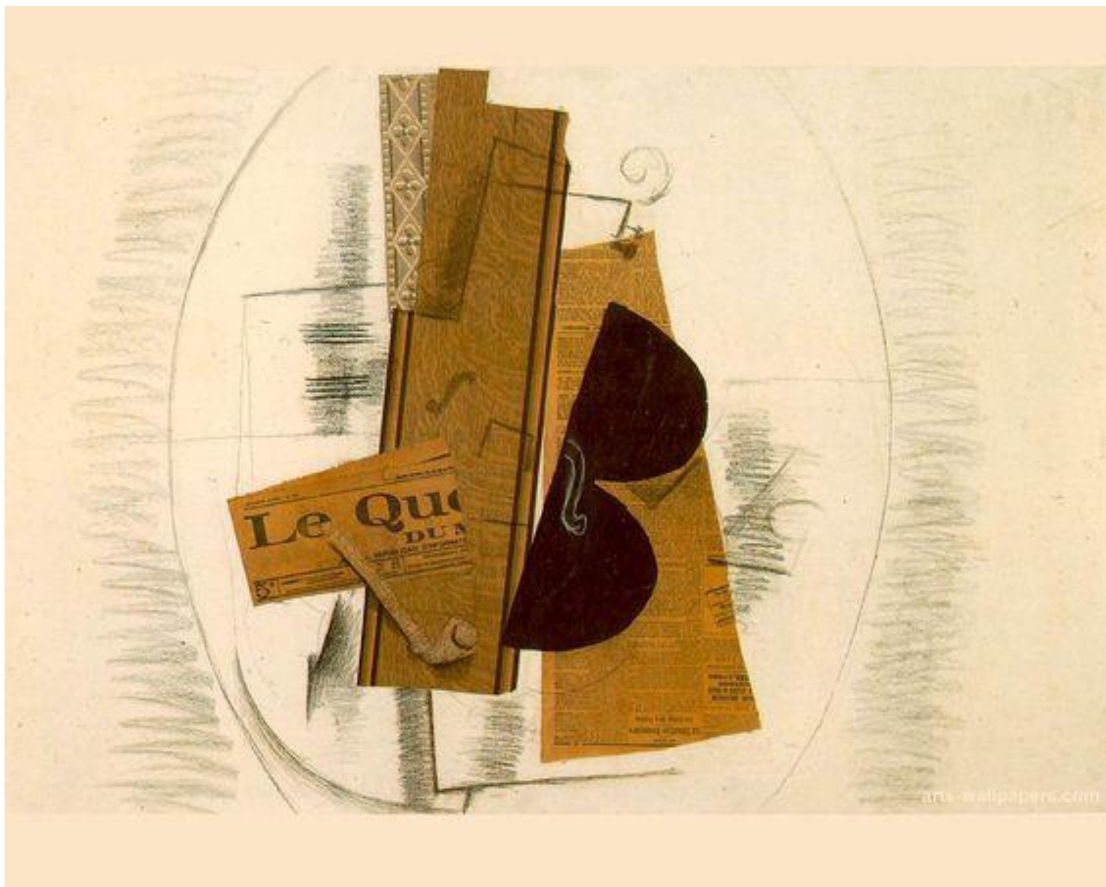


Figure 6 Georges Braque, *Violon et Pipe (Le Quotidien)* (*Violin and Pipe [The Everyday]*) 1913, chalk, charcoal, imitation wood, and pasted paper, 74 x 196cm.

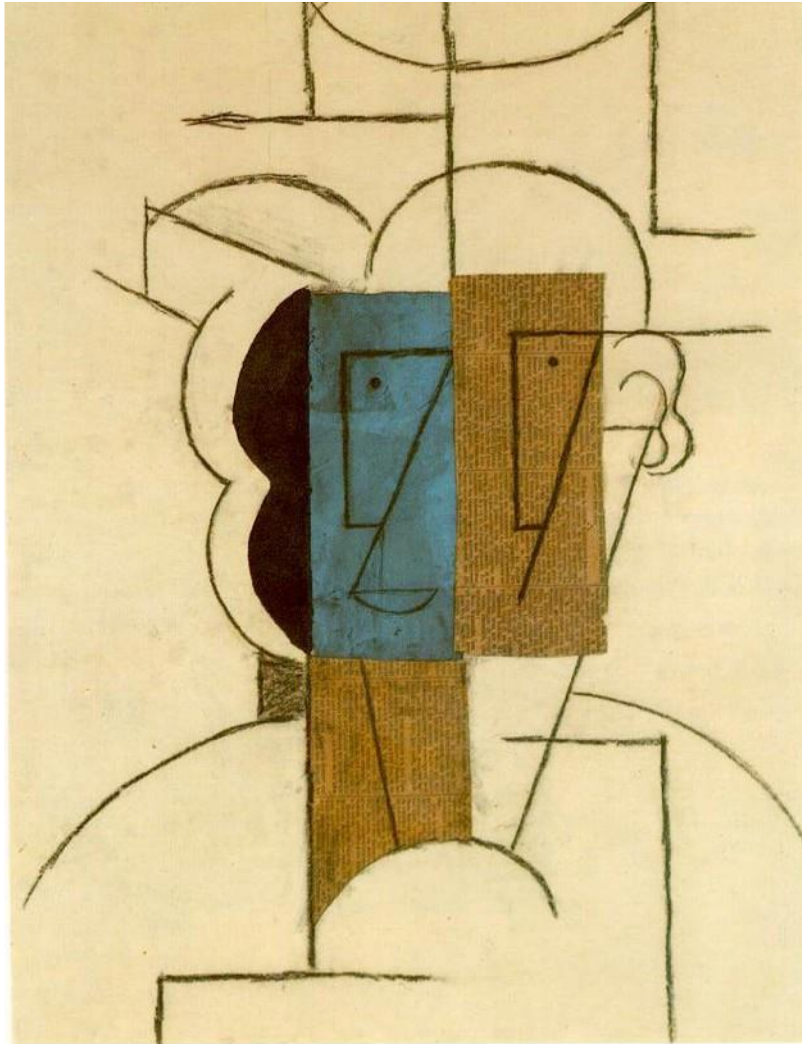


Figure 7 Pablo Picasso, *Head of a Man with a Hat* 1912, cut-and-pasted newspaper and coloured paper, ink, and charcoal on paper, 62.2 x 47.3cm.

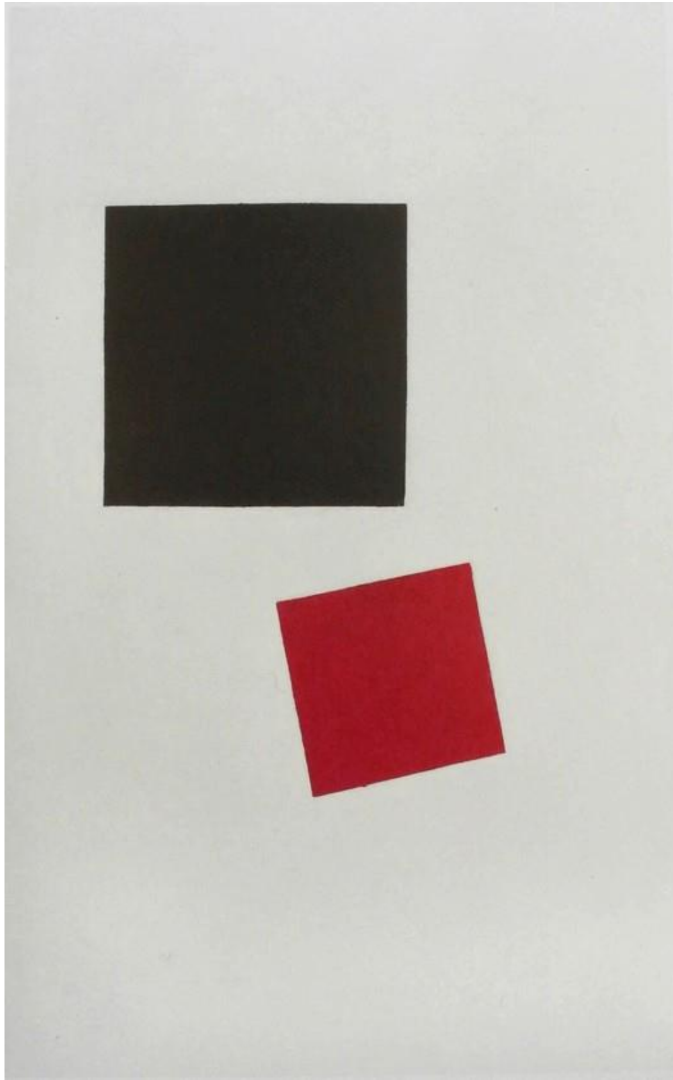


Figure 8 Kazimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension* 1915, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 44.5cm.

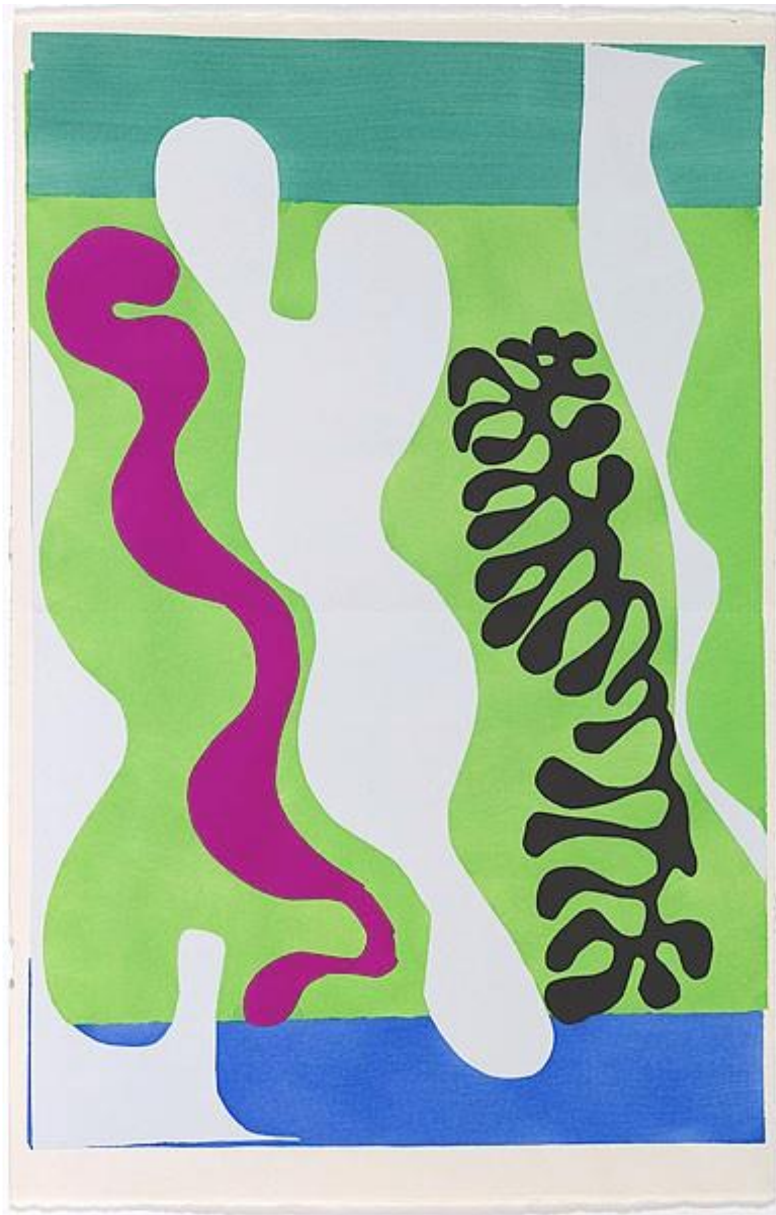


Figure 9 Henri Matisse, *Le Lagon (The Lagoon)* 1947, screenprint for *Jazz*, plate XVIII, 41.6 x 64.8cm.

LES POIRES,

Faites à la cour d'assises de Paris par le directeur de la CARICATURE.

Vendues pour payer les 6,000 fr. d'amende du journal le *Charivari*.

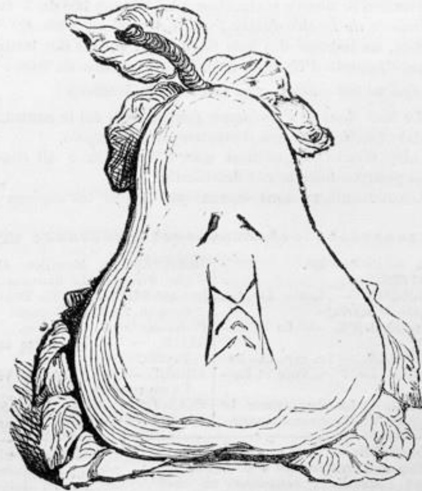
(CHEZ AUBERT, GALERIE VÉRO-DODAT.)

Si, pour reconnaître le monarque dans une caricature, vous n'attendez pas qu'il soit désigné autrement que par la ressemblance, vous tomberez dans l'absurde. Voyez ces croquis informes, auxquels j'aurais peut-être dû borner ma défense :

Ce croquis ressemble à Louis-Philippe, vous condamnerez donc?

Alors il faudra condamner celui-ci, qui ressemble au premier.

Puis condamner cet autre, qui ressemble au second.



Et enfin, si vous êtes conséquens, vous ne sauriez absoudre cette poire, qui ressemble aux croquis précédens.

Ainsi, pour une poire, pour une brioche, et pour toutes les têtes grotesques dans lesquelles le hasard ou la malice aura placé cette triste ressemblance, vous pourrez infliger à l'auteur cinq ans de prison et cinq mille francs d'amende!!

Avouez, Messieurs, que c'est là une singulière liberté de la presse!!

Figure 10 Honoré Daumier after Charles Philipon, 'Les Poires' *Le Charivari,* 16 April 1835, lithograph, 33.3 x 25.4cm.

Figure 11 Marianne Brandt, *Tea Infuser and Strainer* 1924, silver and ebony, 7.3cm(h).

Figure 12 Liubov Popova, *Embroidery Design for the Artisan Co-Operative Verbovka* 1917, cut-and-pasted papers on paper, 12 x 17.5cm.

Figure 13 Dick Watkins, *The Fall No. 2* 1968, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 183 x 152cm.

Figure 14 Laura Owens, *Untitled* 2012, oil, acrylic, flashe, resin, collage, and pumice on canvas, 275 x 213cm.

Figure 15 Charline von Heyl, *Untitled (Wall at WAM)* 2010, acrylic and latex paint, 518 x 2042cm.

Figure 16 Christine Streuli, *Ableger (Offshoot)* 2013, installation view, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland.

Figure 17 Ellsworth Kelly, *Black (Noir)* from *Suite of Twenty-Seven Color Lithographs* 1964–65, 89.5 x 61.1cm.

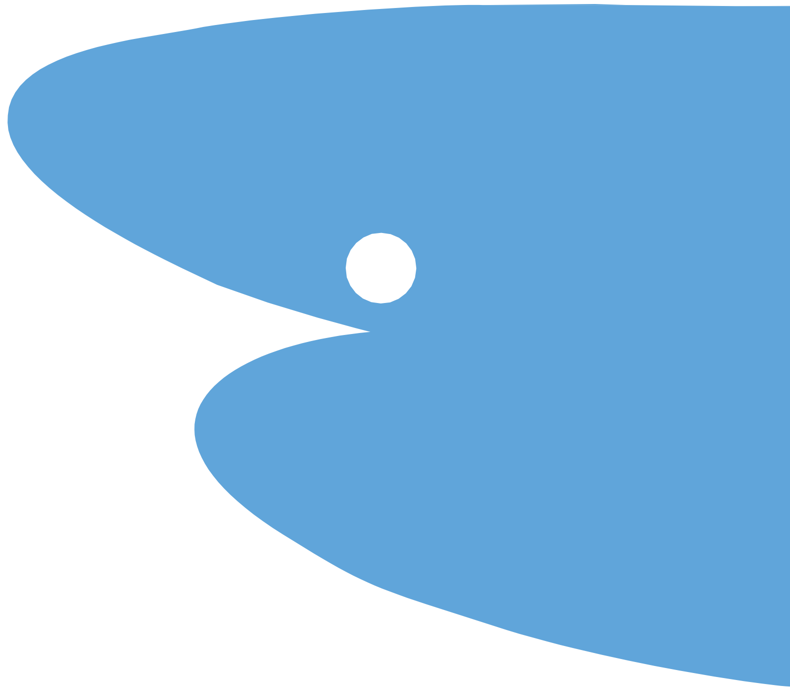


Figure 18 Simon Degroot, *Shape Poems* (detail) 2017, laser-cut acrylic, 29 x 34cm.

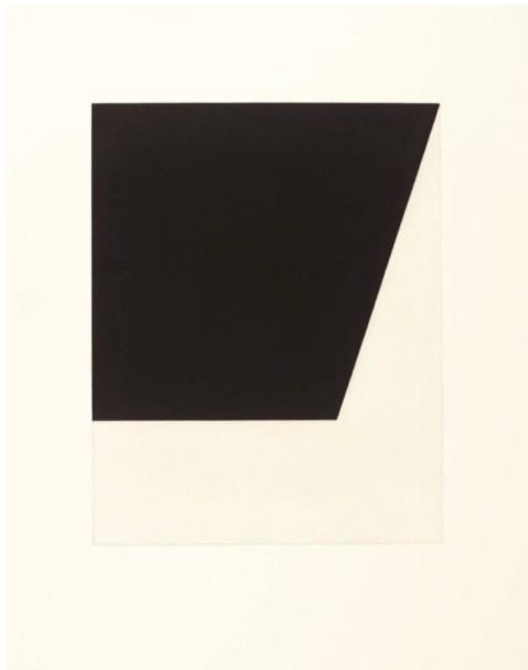


Figure 19 Ellsworth Kelly, *Concorde IV (State)* 1981, etching and aquatint on paper, 40.5 x 32cm.

Figure 20 Iran do Espírito Santo, *Twist 7A* 2011, pencil on photogram, 29.2 x 21cm.

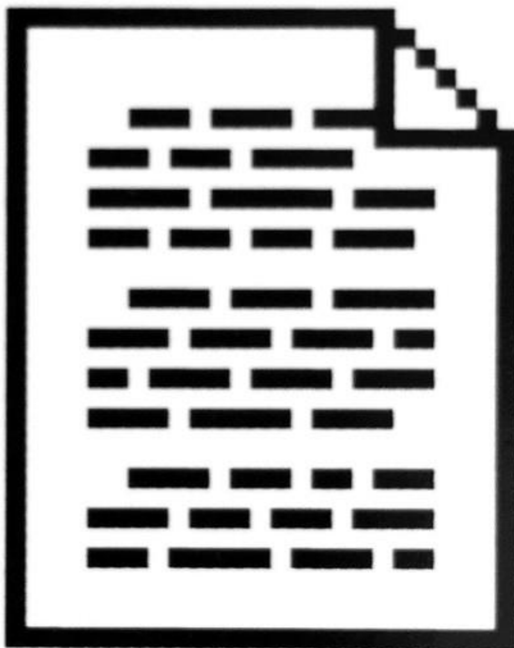


Figure 21 Susan Kare, *New Blank Document* 1984, Apple Computer Inc, 32 x 32 pixels.

Figure 22 Natalya Hughes, *Looking Cute* 2013, acrylic on plywood, 240 x 240cm.

Figure 23 Peter Atkins, *Talk + Text* 2012, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 61cm.

Figure 24 Wendy White, *No Pressure* 2016, edition of 2 + AP, dibond, rainbow webbing, nylon rope, ball chain, 127 x 152cm.

Figure 25 Wendy White, *Pleasure I* 2016, digital billboard, Override: A Billboard Project, Expo Chicago, USA.

Figure 26 Ryan Gander, *Your Present Time Orientation (Second Act)—Random Abstraction* 2011, custom-painted glass, Perspex clip frames, 600 x 110 x 20cm (installation dimensions).

Figure 27 Vincent Hawkins, *Untitled* 2015, monotype print on Fabriano paper, 42 x 29.7cm.

Figure 28 Christopher Wool, *Untitled* 2011, silkscreen on linen, 304.8 x 243.8cm (each).

Figure 29 John Young, *Moment III* 2015, oil on Belgian linen, 76.2 x 103.4cm.

Figure 30 Simon Degroot, *Cloud #1* 2015, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm.

Figure 31 Simon Degroot, *Cloud #2* 2015, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm.

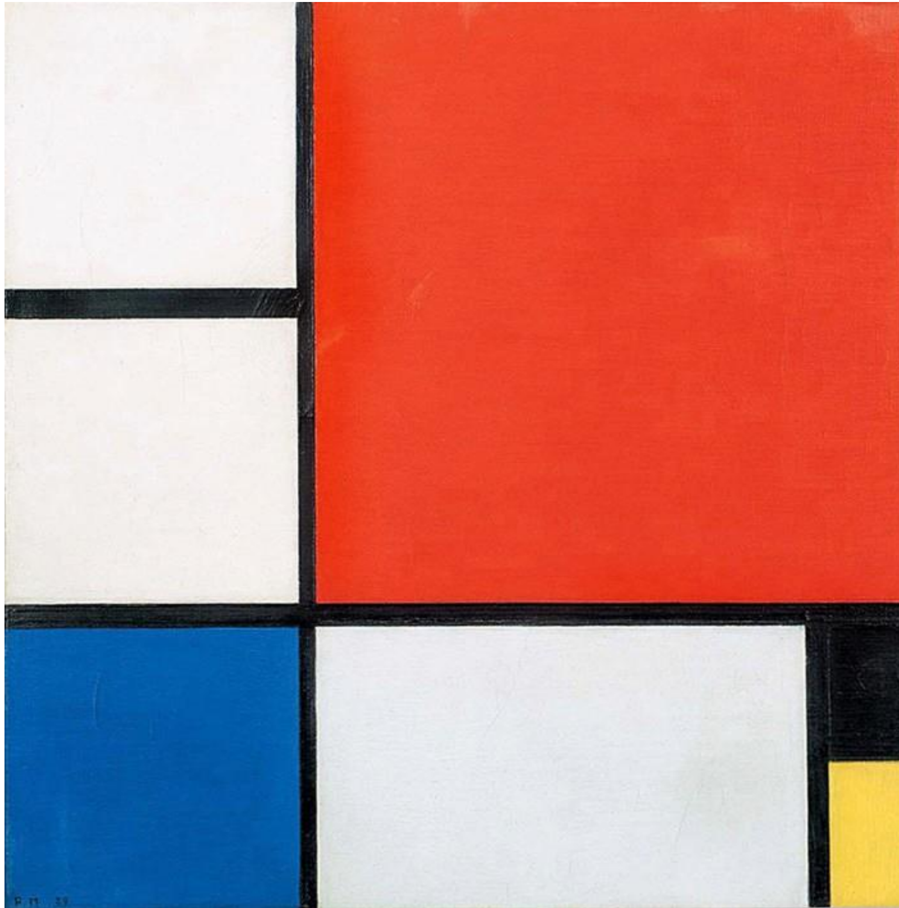


Figure 32 Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow* 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46cm.

Figure 33 iPhone *iOS 7 User Interface* 2013, Apple Computer Inc.

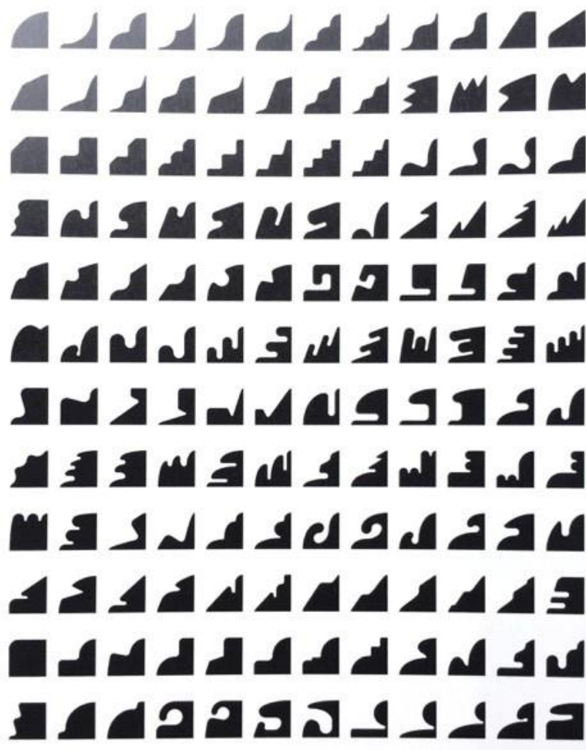


Figure 34 Allan McCollum *The Shapes Project: 144 Top Parts* 2005–ongoing, dimensions variable.

Figure 35 Simon Degroot *White and Blue Flat Lay* 2017, oil on canvas, 198 x 137cm.

Figure 36 Jason Fulford, *This Equals That* 2014.

Figure 37 Internet Meme, *Raw Chicken or Donald Trump?* 2016.

Figure 38 Pablo Picasso, Weeping Woman 1937, oil on canvas, 60 x 49cm.

Figure 39 Apple ‘iPod Silhouettes’ 2000–2011, advertising campaign.

Figure 40 Henri Matisse *Icarus* 1943–44, screenprint for *Jazz*, 42.2 x 65.7cm.

Figure 41 Ian Fairweather, *Pelléas et Mélisande* no date, synthetic polymer on board, 71.5 x 96cm.

Figure 42 Simon Degroot, *Floating in a New Sky Design* (detail) 2014, pencil and acrylic on paper, 10 x 200cm.

Figure 43 Simon Degroot, *Floating in a New Sky* 2014, synthetic polymer, 150 x 3000cm.

Figure 44 Simon Degroot, *Floating in a New Sky* 2014, designs layered in Photoshop.

Figure 45 Simon Degroot, *Cove Dupont* 2014, oil on canvas, 260 x 198cm.

Figure 46 Simon Degroot, *Shallow Space*, installation view, 2014, Australian National Capital Artists Gallery.

Figure 47 Simon Degroot, *Shallow Space #03* 2014, collage on paper, 25 x 35cm.

Figure 48 Simon Degroot, *Shallow Space #04* 2014, oil on board, 25 x 35cm.

Figure 49 Simon Degroot, *Vintaged Bar Mural* 2014, Brisbane Hilton.

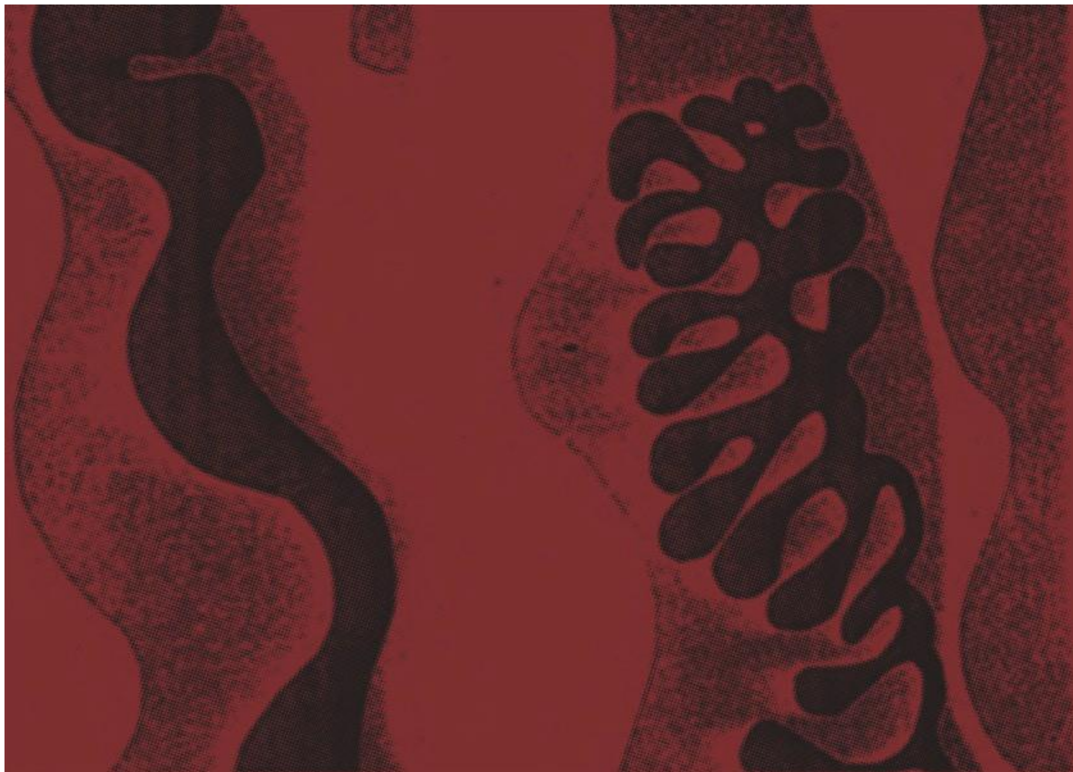


Figure 50 Landini Associates, *Vintaged Bar Mural Design* 2014.

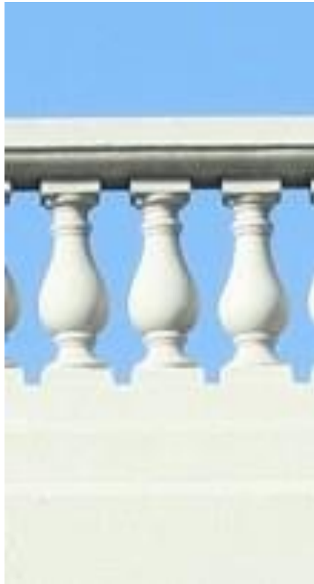


Figure 51 William Jolly Bridge (detail) 2014, artist photograph, Brisbane.

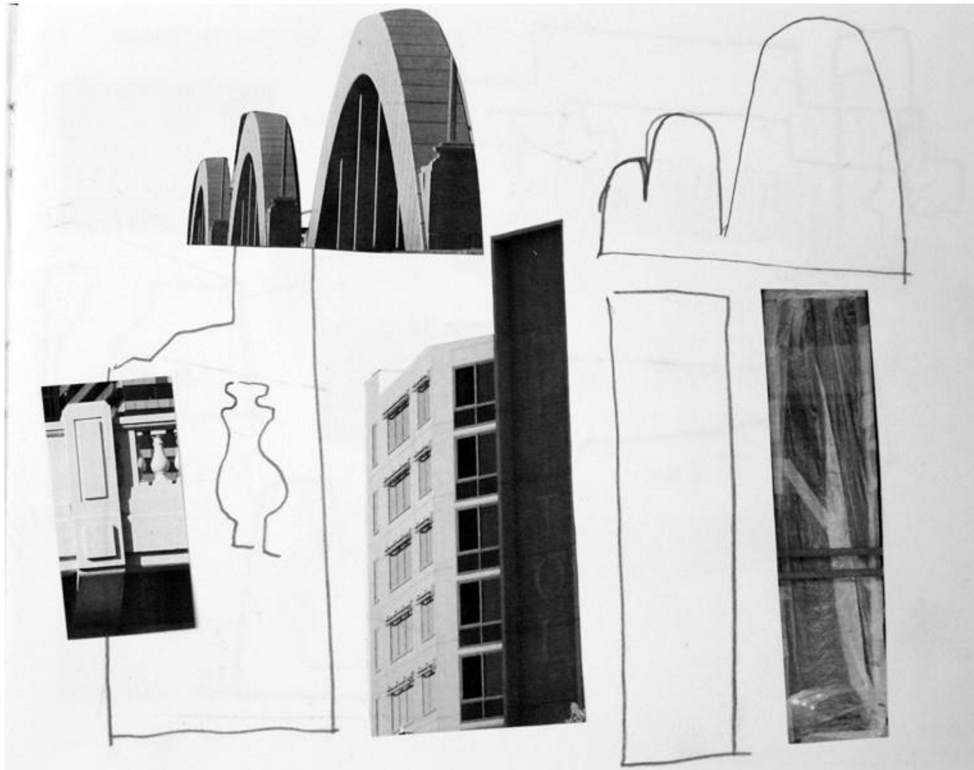


Figure 52 Simon Degroot 2014, graphite and collage on paper, 21 x 26cm.

Figure 53 Simon Degroot, *Pillars Project Mural Design* 2014, painted paper and collage on board, 19.5 x 15cm.

Figure 54 Simon Degroot, *Pillars Project Mural* 2014, exterior acrylic, 900 x 600cm.

Figure 55 Lorna Jane, *Active Warehouse* 2016, printed flyer, 21 x 14.5cm.

Figure 56 Lorna Jane, Instagram image to promote *Active Warehouse* 2016.

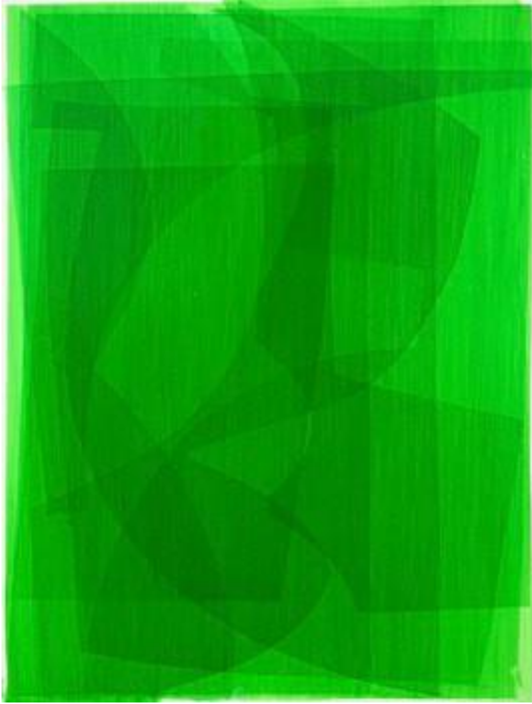


Figure 57 Simon Degroot, *Composite Orders Green* 2015, oil on board, 15.5 x 20.5cm.

Figure 58 Simon Degroot, *Composite Orders Magenta* 2015, oil on board, 15.5 x 20.5cm.

Figure 59 Simon Degroot, *Indirect Response* 2015, installation view including, *Composite Orders Green Screen 1, 2,* and *3*, POP Gallery, Griffith University. Photograph courtesy Louis Lim.

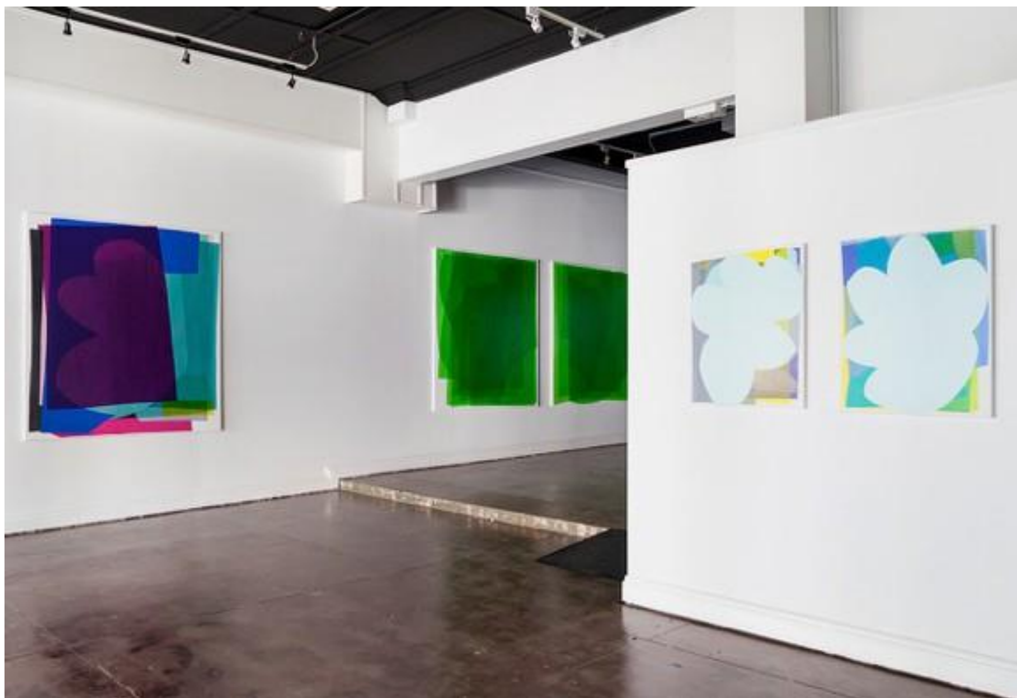


Figure 60 Simon Degroot, *Indirect Response* 2015, installation view, POP Gallery, Griffith University. Photograph courtesy Louis Lim.

Figure 61 Lady Cilento Exterior Façade 2014, Lyons Architecture, Brisbane.

Figure 62 Simon Degroot, *Cilento* 2015, oil on canvas, 122 x 122cm.

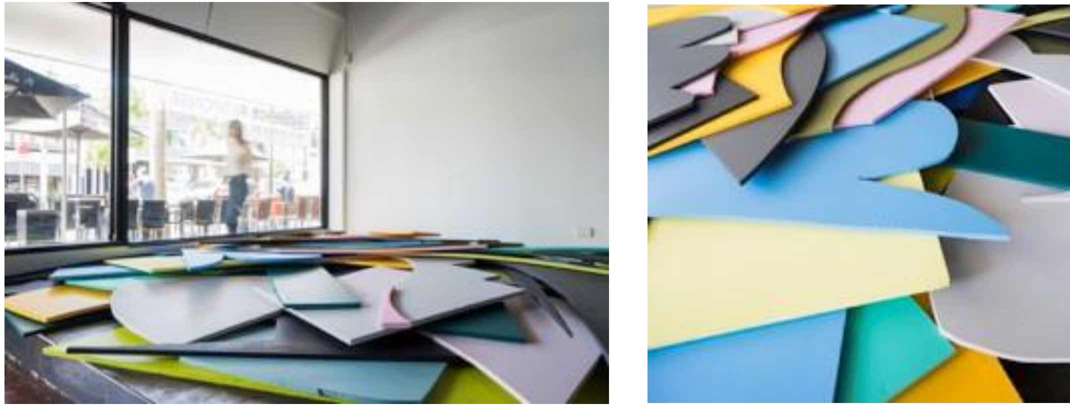


Figure 63 Simon Degroot, *Indirect Response* 2015, installation and detail view of *Off Cuts* 2015, POP Gallery, Griffith University. Photograph courtesy Louis Lim.

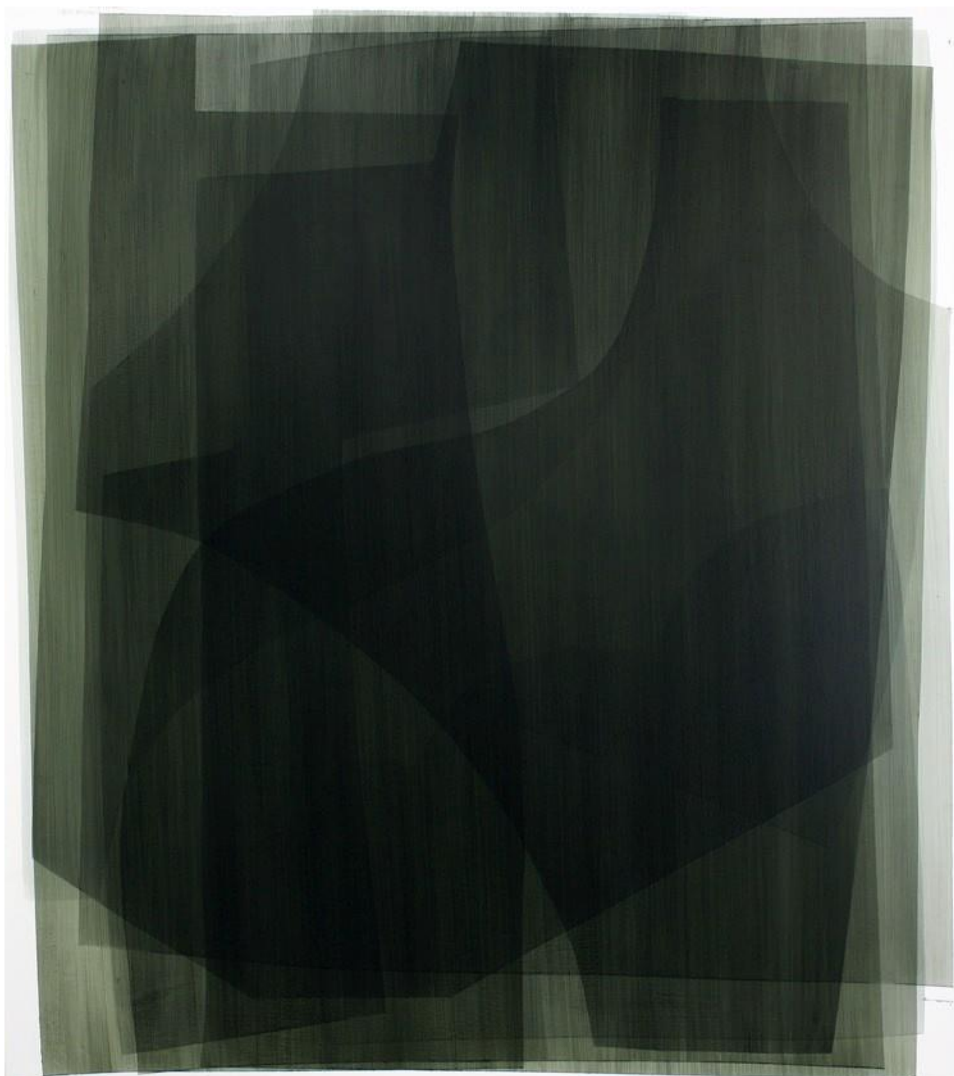


Figure 64 Simon Degroot, *Indirect Response* 2015, oil on canvas, 140 x 125cm.

Figure 65 Simon Degroot, *Tint* 2016, oil on canvas, 183 x 167cm.

Figure 66 Simon Degroot, *Nundah Train Station Mural Design* 2015, painted paper and collage, 12.5 x 40.5cm.

Figure 67 Simon Degroot, *Nundah Train Station Mural* 2015, exterior acrylic, 900 x 2400cm.

Figure 68 Simon Degroot, *Purple Additions* 2016, digital animation, dimensions variable.

Figure 69 Simon Degroot, *Purple Additions* 2016, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm.

Figure 70 Andy Warhol, *Ten Foot Flowers* 1967, synthetic polymer and silkscreen ink on canvas, 304.8 x 304.8cm.

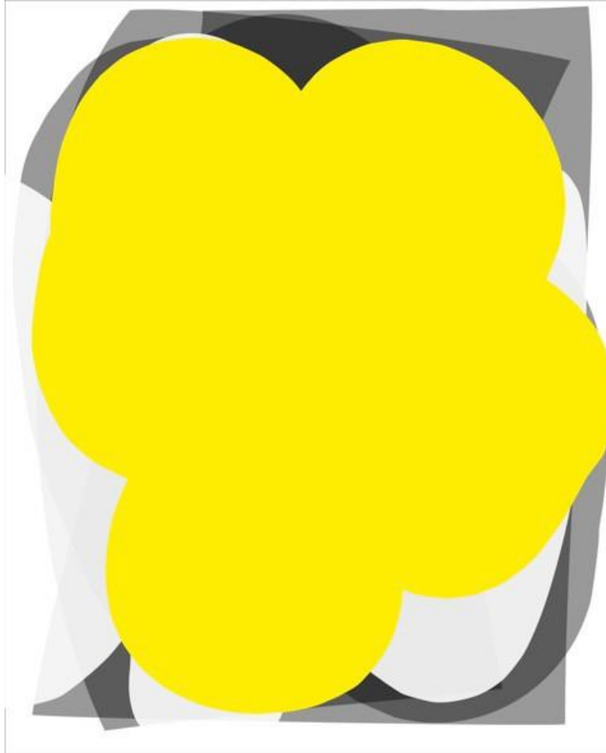


Figure 71 Simon Degroot, *Flower* 2016, digital animation, dimensions variable.

Figure 72 Simon Degroot, *Flower* 2016, oil on canvas, 76 x 61cm.

Figure 73 Simon Degroot, *Picture Building* 2016, installation view, Kick Arts Contemporary Artspace, Cairns.

Figure 74 Simon Degroot, *Picture Building* 2016, oil on canvas, 244 x 183cm.

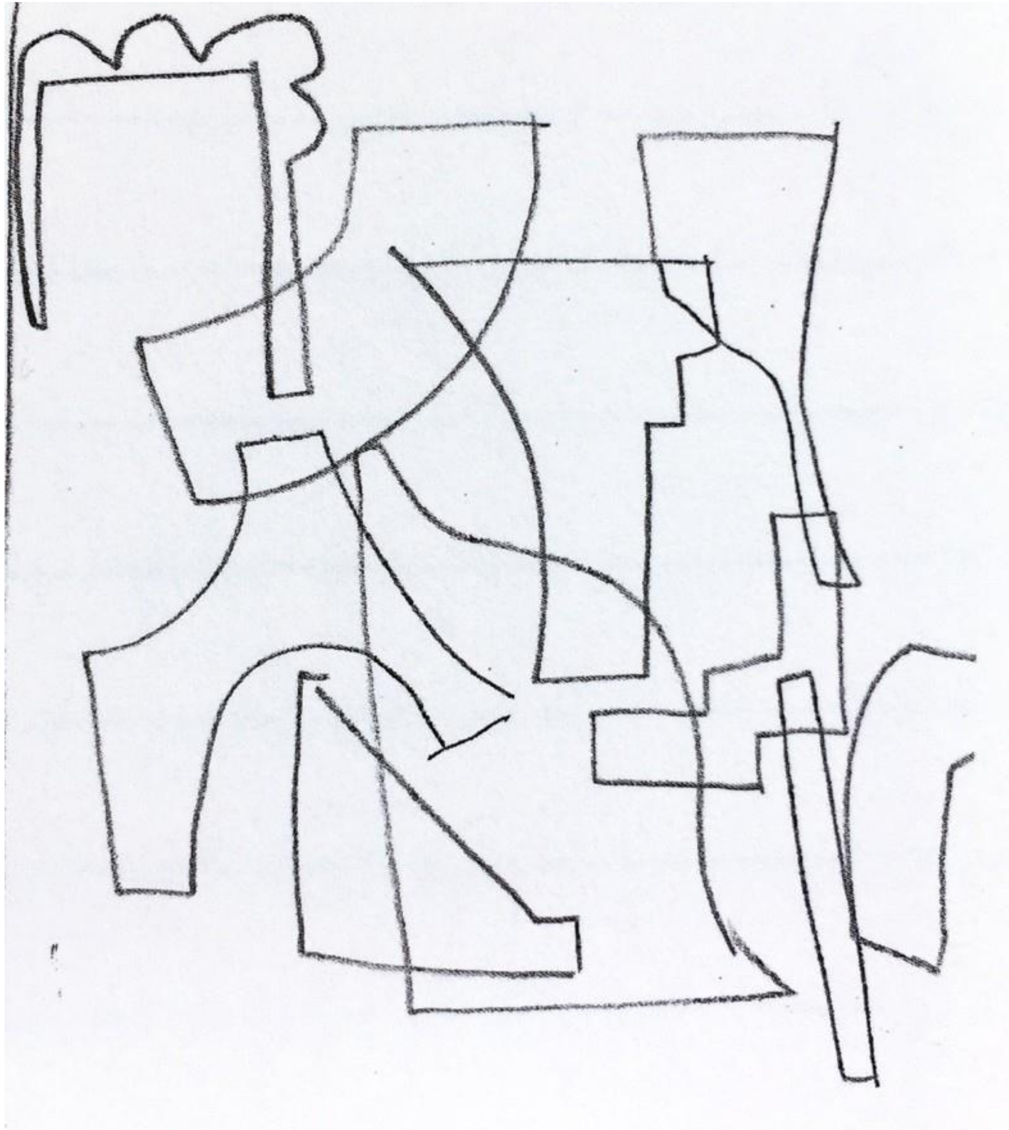


Figure 75 Simon Degroot *Sketchbook Page* 2014, graphite on paper, 22 x 20cm.

Figure 76 Simon Degroot *Shape Poems* 2017, laser-cut acrylic shapes, 50 x 35cm.