

**Privileged, unique and temporary: interpreting aesthetic experiences of the  
painter-painting relationship through an address to and from practice**

By  
Alison Goodyear

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

University of the Arts London  
Chelsea College of Arts  
August 2017

DOS: Professor. Malcolm Quinn (CCW)  
Dr. Daniel Sturgis (CCW)



## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	VI
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	VII
<b>List of Illustrations</b> .....	VIII
<b>List of Acronyms</b> .....	XI
<b>Introduction and Overview of the Research Concepts and Issues</b> .....	1
Research Aims and Objectives .....	14
The Methodology .....	14
Collaborative Approach .....	15
Research Ethics .....	15
Dialogue .....	16
The Lexicon and History of Engagement with Aesthetic Absorption documents ...	16
Wiki Site .....	17
Interviews .....	17
Round Table Discussions .....	18
An Address to and From Painting Practice .....	18
Final Presentation and Thesis .....	19
Problems Encountered .....	19
Structure of the Thesis .....	20
Conclusion .....	21
<b>Chapter 1: The Theory/Practice Relationship</b> .....	23
1.0 Summary .....	23
1.1 The Genealogy of Absorption From Greenberg to Fried .....	25
1.12 Specificity .....	25
1.13 Frank Stella .....	26
1.14 Art and Objecthood .....	27
1.15 Conditions .....	28
1.2 The Genealogy of Absorption: From Fried to Diderot .....	30
1.21 The Ancients .....	32
1.22 Salons .....	33
1.23 Morality .....	35
1.24 Mimesis .....	39
1.25 Tableaux .....	39
1.3 The Fried, Diderot, Chardin, and Greuze Axis .....	40
1.4 Beholdership in Diderot, Fried, and Wollheim .....	46
1.5 Courbet and the Studio .....	51

1.6 Caravaggio's Distinctions .....	54
1.7 Conclusion .....	59
<b>Chapter 2: A Dialogue on Absorption .....</b>	<b>61</b>
2.0 Summary .....	61
2.1 Introducing the Collaborators .....	63
2.2 Qualitative Results .....	71
2.3 Dialogical Results .....	71
2.4 The Dynamics of Absorption .....	72
2.5 The Problematics of Theory and Practice .....	79
2.6 The Uncertainty of Agency .....	82
2.7 Staking Claims .....	93
2.8 Conclusion.....	99
<b>Chapter 3: An Address to and From Practice .....</b>	<b>103</b>
3.0 Summary .....	103
3.1 From Diderot to Fried to Contemporary Practice .....	104
3.2 Address to And From My Practice .....	108
3.3 My Painting Practice .....	109
3.4 Qualitative Findings From My Practice .....	113
3.5 The Limits of Fried's Theory of Prolepsis .....	114
3.6 Negotiating the Limits Through Practice .....	117
3.7 An Alternative Theory/Practice Relationship .....	128
3.8 Conclusion .....	151
<b>4.0 Final Conclusion .....</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>167</b>

#### **Digital images of collaborators works on CD**

Figure 11. Andrea Medjesi-Jones, *Paintings as tools* (2016) [Installed in studio]

Figure 12. Andrea Medjesi-Jones, *Pink Flag (small)* (2017)

Figure 13. Stuart Elliot, *Untitled [41]* (2010)

Figure 14. Stuart Elliot, *Untitled [42]* (2010)

Figure 15. Katie Pratt, *Bluixcity* (2015)

Figure 16. Katie Pratt, *Siscicily* (2017)

Figure 17. Andrew Bick, *OGVDS-GW #2 v3* (2015)

Figure 18. Andrew Bick, *OGVDS-GW #7* (2016)

- Figure 19. Simon Callery, *Horizontal Black Pit Painting* (2014) [Installation view]  
 Figure 20. Simon Callery, *Flat Painting Bodfari 14/15 Cadmium Red Deep* (2015)  
 [Installation view]  
 Figure 21. Gary Wragg, *Eddie's Café* (2005)  
 Figure 22. Gary Wragg, *Orange, Red Staggered Circuit* (2012-13)  
 Figure 26. Alison Goodyear, *Paper Palettes* (2013) [On studio wall]  
 Figure 27. Alison Goodyear, *Palettes Printed on Silk* (2014) [Installation view]  
 Figure 28. Alison Goodyear, *Blue Depths* in development (2015)  
 Figure 29. Alison Goodyear, *Blue Depths* (2015)  
 Figure 30. Alison Goodyear, *Tiger Tiger* in development (2016)  
 Figure 31. Alison Goodyear, *Tiger Tiger* (2016)  
 Figure 33. Alison Goodyear, *Move Me 1* (2013)  
 Figure 34. Alison Goodyear, *Move Me 2* (2013)

<b>Appendices</b> .....	185
The History of Engagement of Aesthetic Absorption Document .....	187
The Lexicon of Aesthetic Absorption .....	197
Questionnaire .....	201
Transcriptions .....	203
Interview Andrew Bick .....	203
Interview Simon Callery .....	219
Interview Stuart Elliot .....	235
Interview Andrea Medjesi-Jones .....	269
Interview Katie Pratt .....	286
Interview Gary Wragg .....	306
Interview Summaries .....	327
Round Table 1 .....	360
Round Table 2 .....	425

## **Abstract**

### ***Privileged, unique and temporary: interpreting aesthetic experiences of the painter-painting relationship through an address to and from practice.***

This practice led research examines the art historical hypotheses of Denis Diderot and Michael Fried on the role of aesthetic absorption in painting practice. It engages with these hypotheses through collaboration with six contemporary abstract painters in an address to and from painting practice. The collaboration was conducted in order to examine aesthetic absorption from the perspective of studio practice in order to develop greater understanding of its relevance to contemporary abstract painting. This was achieved by completing six objectives. First, a lexicon of the terms surrounding aesthetic absorption was developed along with a brief account of the history of engagement with the concept of aesthetic absorption. This was followed by individually interviewing each collaborator, then gathering them together for two round table discussions. All dialogue produced was transcribed, and along with the research material was made available to the collaborators through a wiki site. This material was then reflected upon through painting practice and thesis writing, to be presented finally as a written thesis and viva presentation.

By opening up this in-depth dialogue on the practicalities behind Diderot and Fried's art historical theories, this research has highlighted the concerns and hesitations of a specific group of artists in their engagement with absorption. It bridges the gap between theory and practice by examining how painters have negotiated aesthetic absorption and the associated positions of painter-beholder and painting-beholder. This research has redefined those positions and relationships by mapping and analyzing the experiences described in the dialogues. As such, the contribution to knowledge of this research lies in its finding a new understanding of how painters can negotiate those positions. This is relevant to painting practice for two important reasons. First, it allows us, in a more structured way, to better understand the differences in the register of experience from banal or pathological types of absorption to aesthetic absorption in painting practice. Secondly, this understanding provides a framework to enable more coherent and focused programmatic modes of address from the studio in negotiating painter-beholder and painting-beholder relationships, thus providing greater conviction from the position of practice.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my UAL supervisory team Professor Malcolm Quinn, Director of Studies, and Dr Daniel Sturgis, second supervisor. I would also like to thank Mick Finch, Reader in Visual Art Practice at Central Saint Martins for his guidance in the early stages of this research.

I would like to thank my research collaborators: Andrew Bick, Simon Callery, Stuart Elliot, Andrea Medjesi-Jones, Katie Pratt, and Gary Wragg, for their generous and rich contributions to this research.

Thank you to my friends: Ruth Solomons for invaluable assistance with the round table events, and Sarah Buckingham for patience and help with the final copy checking of this thesis. I would also like to thank the PhD cohort at UAL, too numerous to list, for their guidance and camaraderie along the way.

I am grateful to Tan Hinc, my Godmother, who was a force to be reckoned with, and continues to be a great inspiration. And above all I would like to thank my wonderful parents Patricia and Leonard Goodyear for their immense love and support prior to, throughout, and beyond this research.

## List of Illustrations

Figure 1. ....	7
Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, <i>Soap Bubbles</i> (c.1733-34)	
Figure 2. ....	11
Joseph Marioni, <i>Red painting</i> (2012)	
Figure 3. ....	11
Joseph Marioni, <i>Green painting</i> [detail] (2004)	
Figure 4. ....	31
Jean-Baptiste Greuze, <i>La Piété Filiale</i> (c.1763)	
Figure 5. ....	37
François Boucher, <i>Dreaming Shepherdess</i> (c.1763)	
Figure 6. ....	38
Jean Baptiste Greuze, <i>A Girl with a Dead Canary</i> (c.1765)	
Figure 7. ....	48
Caspar David Friedrich, <i>The Large Enclosure, near Dresden</i> (1832)	
Figure 8. ....	49
Johann Philipp Veith, <i>The Large Enclosure, near Dresden after Friedrich</i> (1832)	
Figure 9. ....	52
Gustave Courbet, <i>The Painter's Studio: A real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic and moral life</i> (1854-55)	
Figure 10. ....	58
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, <i>Boy bitten by a Lizard</i> (c.1594-5)	
Figure 11. ....	65
Andrea Medjesi-Jones, <i>Paintings as tools</i> (2016) [Installed in studio]	
Figure 12. ....	65
Andrea Medjesi-Jones, <i>Pink Flag (small)</i> (2017)	
Figure 13. ....	66
Stuart Elliot, <i>Untitled [41]</i> (2010)	

Figure 14. ....	66
Stuart Elliot, <i>Untitled [42]</i> (2010)	
Figure 15. ....	67
Katie Pratt, <i>Bluixcity</i> (2015)	
Figure 16. ....	67
Katie Pratt, <i>Siscicily</i> (2017)	
Figure 17. ....	68
Andrew Bick, <i>OGVDS-GW #2 v3</i> (2015)	
Figure 18. ....	68
Andrew Bick, <i>OGVDS-GW #7</i> (2016)	
Figure 19. ....	69
Simon Callery, <i>Horizontal Black Pit Painting</i> (2014) [Installation view]	
Figure 20. ....	69
Simon Callery, <i>Flat Painting Bodfari 14/15 Cadmium Red Deep</i> (2015) [Installation view]	
Figure 21. ....	70
Gary Wragg, <i>Eddie's Café</i> (2005)	
Figure 22. ....	70
Gary Wragg, <i>Orange, Red Staggered Circuit</i> (2012-13)	
Figure 23. ....	89
<i>Two by Two</i> (2015) [Installation view] David Reed and Mary Heilmann	
Figure 24. ....	107
Andrew Grassie, <i>The Hanging of New Hang</i> (2005)	
Figure 25. ....	107
Andrew Grassie, <i>Tate New Hang 8</i> (2005)	
Figure 26. ....	110
Alison Goodyear, <i>Paper Palettes</i> (2013) [On studio wall]	
Figure 27. ....	110
Alison Goodyear, <i>Palettes Printed on Silk</i> (2014) [Installation view]	

Figure 28. ....	118
Alison Goodyear, <i>Blue Depths</i> in development (2015)	
Figure 29. ....	121
Alison Goodyear, <i>Blue Depths</i> (2015)	
Figure 30. ....	123
Alison Goodyear, <i>Tiger Tiger</i> in development (2016)	
Figure 31. ....	124
Alison Goodyear, <i>Tiger Tiger</i> (2016)	
Figure 32. ....	132
Roy Ascott, <i>Change Painting</i> (1960)	
Figure 33. ....	134
Alison Goodyear, <i>Move Me 1</i> (2013)	
Figure 34. ....	134
Alison Goodyear, <i>Move Me 2</i> (2013)	
Figure 35. ....	136
Alison Goodyear, Photographs of interaction with <i>Move Me 1</i> (2013)	
[Installation view]	
Figure 36. ....	136
Alison Goodyear, Photographs of interaction with <i>Move Me 2</i> (2013)	
[Installation view]	
Figure 37. ....	150
The artist James Petrucci viewing 'Blue Depths' (2015) [Installation view]	

## **List of Acronyms**

AB: Andrew Bick  
SC: Simon Callery  
SE: Stuart Elliot  
AMJ: Andrea Medjesi-Jones  
KP: Katie Pratt  
GW: Gary Wragg  
AG: Alison Goodyear

INT: Interview (individual)  
RT1: Round Table 1  
RT2: Round Table 2



## **Introduction and Overview of the Research Concepts and Issues**

Research Aims and Objectives

The Methodology

Collaborative Approach

Research Ethics

Dialogue

The Lexicon and History of Engagement with Aesthetic Absorption documents

Wiki Site

Interviews

Round Table Discussions

An Address to and From Painting Practice

Final Presentation and Thesis

Problems Encountered

Structure of the Thesis

Conclusion

***Privileged, unique and temporary: interpreting aesthetic experiences of the painter-painting relationship through an address to and from practice.***

## **Introduction and Overview of the Research Concepts and Issues**

This practice led research engages with the legacy of debates on the theory of aesthetic absorption and the painter-painting relationship. It has been developed out of a particular concern of painting: of the artist as a specific kind of beholder, and from an aesthetics of the studio. It focuses on a specific art historical axis of thought and practice on absorption that has engaged critics/art historians and artists.

One of the issues that arise when researching the concept of absorption is that the term 'absorption' touches on the aesthetic and pathological while skirting the banal. At the extreme end of the spectrum, absorption could be said to connect with the Stendhal syndrome, a psychosomatic illness causing physical reactions when an individual is exposed to art.<sup>1</sup> This experience is represented in the first scenes of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Stendhal was the pseudonym of the writer Marie-Henri Beyle, who described his experience of the frescoes of Volterrano in the Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence, which also houses (among others) the tombs of Michelangelo, Machiavelli, Galileo, Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch. He writes: 'There, seated upon the step of a faldstool, with my head thrown back to rest upon the desk, so that I might let my gaze dwell on the ceiling, I underwent, through the medium of Volterrano's *Sybiis*, the profoundest experience of ecstasy that, as far as I am aware, I ever encountered through the painter's art. My soul, affected by the very notion of being in Florence, and by the proximity of those great men whose tombs I had just beheld. Absorbed in the contemplation of *sublime beauty*, I could perceive its

film *The Great Beauty* (2013) co-written and directed by Paolo Sorrentino, where a tourist collapses under the spell of the beauty of Rome. At the other end of the spectrum, absorption is a term that is used to describe immersion in banal everyday tasks. In contrast to both these extremes, this research is concerned with aesthetic absorption and how the understanding of aesthetic absorption has become intertwined with painting practice.

In 1975, Michael Fried drew attention to the concept of absorption in his art historical paper 'Absorption: A Master Theme in Eighteenth-Century French Painting and Criticism', drawing on the writings of one of the first major art critics, Denis Diderot. The central thesis Fried advanced, a concern particular to painting in eighteenth century France, considered how the internal absorption of the subjects within a painting encourages external absorption of the beholder. As Christopher Braider succinctly puts it: 'Absorption is both the psychological state to which beholders are reduced and the means by which the painting so reduces them' (2013: 107). Fried combines this with Diderot's paradoxical notion that a painting should be constructed to ignore what Fried calls the 'primordial convention' (1980: 93) that all paintings are made to be beheld. Otherwise this would risk a mannered or theatrical approach, where a painting addresses or faces the beholder, and as a result impedes their absorption by reminding the beholder of their position – that is, standing in front of a painting. In these paintings, the subjects are depicted as undergoing the experience of absorption, and this experience is represented aesthetically. In turn, it is hoped that these aesthetic strategies encourage absorption in the beholder, resulting in what I will now describe as the aestheticization of absorption, or aesthetic absorption.

Michael Fried pursues the notion of absorption in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980). Within this text, and treated almost as an aside, Fried speculates that the artist Chardin possibly found the 'absorption of his figures both a natural correlative for his own engrossment in the act of painting and a proleptic mirroring of what he trusted would be the absorption of the beholder before the finished work' (1980: 51). I suggest that Fried uses the

---

very essence close at hand ... I reached the point where one encounters celestial sensations ... Everything spoke so vividly to my soul. Ah, if I could only forget. I had palpitations of the heart, what in Berlin they call 'nerves.' Life was drained from me. I walked with the fear of falling' (Stendhal 2010 [1817]: 302). Eventually extreme experiences such as this, which were reported as occurring elsewhere, came to be known as Stendhal Syndrome, after Stendhal's description. It should be noted that there is some dispute as to whether this experience actually took place, due to inconsistencies with Stendhal's private diaries kept throughout his travels of this time (Stendhal 1955).

word 'trusted' here to suggest that Chardin was drawing on his own absorption (engrossment), which in turn gave him belief in what he could hope for in terms of the experience of the beholder in front of the work. As such, the finished painting would become a document of process and the artist's own absorption. Similarly, echoing this notion, Diderot had written on the artist Greuze: 'When he works, he is completely absorbed by his picture; it affects him profoundly, he carries around with him the personality of the figure he is portraying in his studio, sad or gay, foolish or serious, flamboyant or reserved, according to whatever has occupied his brush and his imagination that morning' (Diderot cited in Thompson 1989: 5). These examples have led me to investigate a new direction for research concerning the relationship of aesthetic absorption and painting process. Absorption is an experience that in Fried and Diderot is aestheticized, and this aestheticization is achieved through painterly practice. I suggest that, because Fried's 'proleptic mirroring' occurs through the act of painting, and the process of painting habitually occurs in the studio, the only place where it can be adequately investigated (and the new direction and primary focus of this practice led research) is in and from the studio. Therefore this research is fundamentally concerned with how these art historical theories are negotiated within the studio as a site of production and analysis, and specifically about how aesthetic absorption is established through a relationship between the painter-beholder and the painting-beholder.

The studio as a site for the production and analysis of art has supported diverse approaches from what might be considered a traditional romantic notion of the lone genius artist to a more current understanding of it as a place of expanded productive methods of working. For example Svetlana Alpers reminds us how the work of the artist Rembrandt is now considered as the efforts of a 'substantial group of artists (students, assistants and imitators)' (2012 [1988]: 20), with Alpers describing Rembrandt's approach as the 'director of his own theatre company' (ibid: 24), whose late works present 'the equivalent of closet drama rendered in the medium of paint' (ibid: 24).

It could be argued that this approach of working with a 'company' was to some extent duplicated by Andy Warhol's studio – The Factory, which incorporated a great many collaborations and diverse approaches to making his art. In this regard, Lane Relyea has noted that:

No longer does the studio appear as an ideological frame that mystifies production, a space where the realities of social or mass production are supposedly held at bay in favour of an antiquated craft model that showcases the individual artist's creative genius. And no longer is the studio seen as belonging to a 'system' such as Buren described, as a space characterized by box-like enclosures, of 'frames and limits', each assigned a discreet place in some rigid stable and all-determining structure of order. What system or structure does exist today is more properly described as a *network*.  
(2012 [2010]: 219)

And it is this sense of a network and how it connects with both painting practice and collaboration expanding out of the studio, that I discuss later in relation to the work of David Joselit.

Using the studio as analytic site is also demonstrated in the PhD thesis of Rob Ward *The Hunting of the Duckrabbit: In Pursuit of an Aesthetics of Knowledge* (2010). It explores the studio as a thought experiment in order to 'offer up a repertoire of possible consequences' (2010: 160). The PhD thesis of Ian Kiaer *Endless House: 'Models of Thought for Dwelling* (2008) also uses the studio, in this case to find a theoretical underpinning for the making of the work and the act of writing (2008: 6). Alternatively, the PhD thesis of Paul Ryan Peirce's *Semeiotic and the Implications for Esthetics in the Visual Arts: a study of the sketchbook and its positions in the hierarchies of making, collecting and exhibiting* (2009) considers the sketchbook as a model for extending our understanding of the studio, and thus substitutes the sketchbook for the studio as site of enquiry. This is because, as he puts it: 'such studios 'go with you' there are new conceptions of what studio space can be; compared with conventional studios 'you go to'' (2009: 256).

To gain greater understanding through the studio as site for analysis it was decided to pursue this research through a collaborative address to and from practice. This is because it was considered that only by interviewing other painters and opening a dialogue to look at what is at stake with absorption could one come to understand how artists negotiate it. On Fried's approach, Alison Green suggests that 'it is far from every day that one sees such crossings between historical and contemporary frames in art historical or art critical writing' (2017: 90). I would add that the activity of reading art historical theories back through painting practice in collaboration with practicing artists as demonstrated through this research is also far from everyday,

and perhaps even unique. It is because of the collaborators' generous contributions that this research is able to highlight the concerns and hesitations of a specific group of artists, and what their experience and reflections might mean for aesthetic absorption in painting practice today. Fried himself states: 'A great deal more remains to be discovered about the vicissitudes of the relationship between painting and beholder' (1998: 53). This notion can be extended to the relationship of the painter to painting by using the concept of the painter-beholder, a crucial component fundamental to greater understanding of the concept of aesthetic absorption.

The particular kind of beholder brought about through painting practice is given prominence in the title of this research: 'privileged, unique and temporary', which refers to a paper by Stephen Mulhall (2001) in response to Fried's theories and book *Manet's Modernism* (1996). Mulhall describes Fried's painter-beholder as 'merely the first beholder, privileged only temporally ... however, the painter-beholder necessarily beholds the process of producing the painting, and that privilege belongs to no other beholder' (2001: 13). Here Mulhall highlights that there are several temporal states at work for the painter-painting relationship. In describing the painter as 'merely the first beholder, privileged only temporally' he is stressing that this is a minor and momentary privilege due to the painter being the beholder who is 'first in line', but also perhaps that being first in line holds no particular weight or power. However, he is also stressing that the major or more potent moment of privilege lies with the durational episode of 'beholding the painting of a painting' as 'that privilege belongs to no other beholder' (ibid.). I would add that perhaps this position of first beholder could also be concomitant with, and taken up by, the imagined or anticipated beholder to be, that is the painting-beholder. I suggest that more often than not this process results in a painter-painting relationship that is unique, in that it is an original occurrence for each painted work.

There are caveats to Mulhall's idea that it is only the painter who beholds the process of *making* a painting; there are artists who work in groups or partnerships, such as Biggs and Collings,<sup>2</sup> or Art and Language.<sup>3</sup> Working in groups has a long history, at its peak in the ateliers of the Renaissance, where a studio of artists

---

<sup>2</sup> Vigo Gallery, 'Biggs and Collings'. Available at: <<http://www.vigogallery.com/?artists,biggsandcollings,works>> [Accessed 5/10/15], (non-paginated).

<sup>3</sup> Lisson Gallery, 'Art & Language'. Available at: <<http://www.lissongallery.com/artists/art-language>> [Accessed 5/10/15], (non-paginated).

overseen by a master could work on the same artwork.<sup>4</sup> Another caveat is introduced when we consider paintings that are created using devices, as seen in the work of artists like Natasha Kidd,<sup>5</sup> who use machines to remove the artist from directly making the work. I will discuss further approaches to collaborative painting process in Chapter 3.

In looking for a base definition of absorption we could turn to James A.W. Heffernan's critique (2008), where he describes absorption as a closed space defined by an inaccessible mind,<sup>6</sup> that is, the beholder is introduced to a space through various signs that signal a condition of inaccessibility. With this understanding in mind, the paradox Diderot sets up is how to read that un-readability. Thus Chardin's *Soap Bubbles* (c. 1733-4) (Fig.1) is a readable sign (of someone blowing bubbles), but of something one cannot read, that is the mind of the boy who is engaged in this activity. The beholder is being addressed or communicated to, and what is being communicated is that the beholder does not have access. If this is the case, here we could define absorption as apprehending a sense of a mind that is fundamentally closed to us. Where art historically this might have been seen in the work of artists like Chardin with paintings like *Soap Bubbles*, in non-representational or abstract painting less immediately apparent approaches are taken.

---

<sup>4</sup> The history of the Atelier goes back to the Middle Ages when artists would work within monasteries, painting religious works for the Church. During the time of the Renaissance, the advent of private patrons allowed a change in focus, and artists would be commissioned to paint a wider variety of work including portraiture for their patrons. These ateliers would consist of an artist (the master), and a group of students who would work up from the position of apprentice to journeyman and eventually to master. The place of the Atelier remained much unchanged till the emergence of the French Academy and salons, where a new model of critique and development of art emerged.

<sup>5</sup> Kidd, N. 'Natasha Kidd'. Available at: <<http://www.natashakidd.com/work>> [Accessed 5/10/15], (non-paginated).

<sup>6</sup> T.J. Clark describes absorption as self-containment, as seen in the occupied figures in Nicolas Poussin's painting *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (1648) (2006: 232).

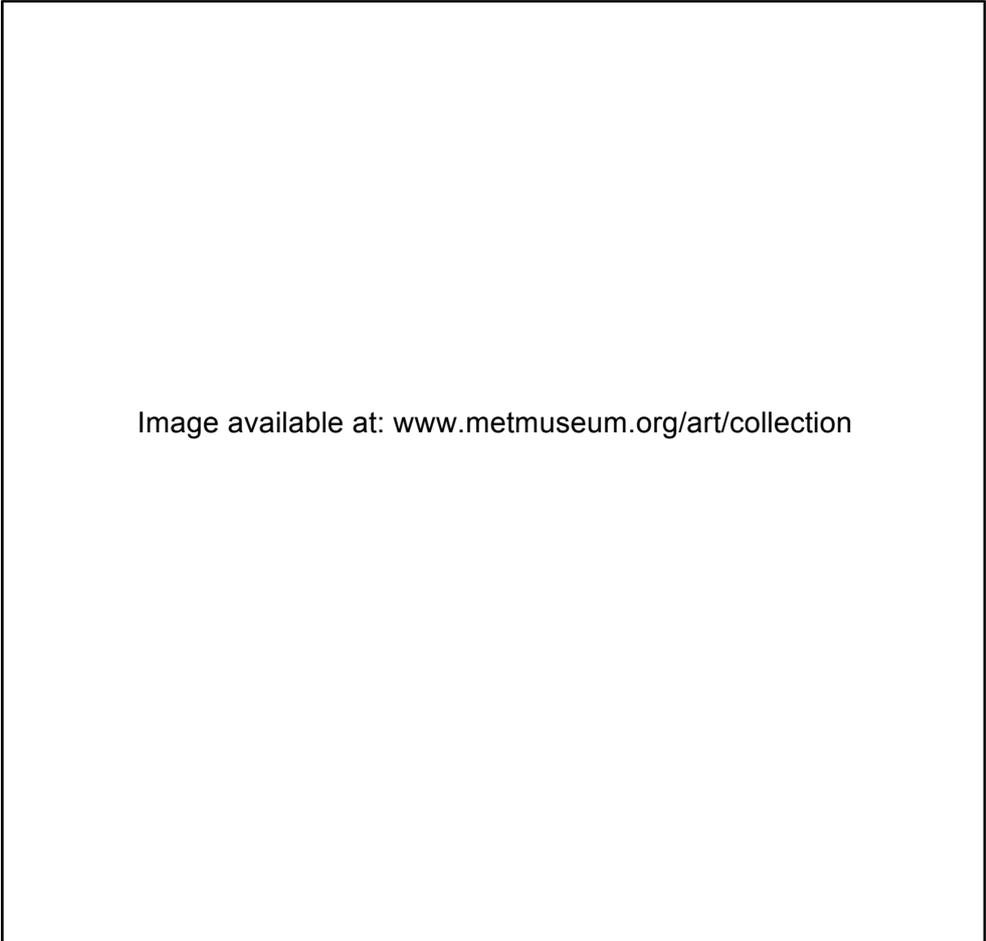


Image available at: [www.metmuseum.org/art/collection](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection)

Figure 1. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles* (c.1733–34)

Oil on canvas, 61 x 63.2cm

(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Heffernan writes: 'once we abandon the ontological fiction that the painter or photographer does not exist, making her activity an integral part of our experience of the picture ... we prise open the Orgone box of absorption'.<sup>7</sup> Heffernan is suggesting that in dropping the fiction that the painter does not exist, and acceding to making their activity an intrinsic part of our experience of the painting, we accommodate or become more open to an absorptive encounter.

This connects with literary theory and the intention of the author as highlighted by Walter Benn Michaels (2011):

The aesthetic problem was how to create anti-theatrical works of art at the moment when the very effort to do so (indeed, any effort at all) had begun to register as theatrical. The theoretical solution was to deny not that those efforts took place but that they were in any way constitutive of the meaning of the work of art. It was the syntactic and semantic rules of the language, not the author's consciousness that determined the meaning of the work. (2011: non-paginated)

But as Michaels points out, whilst this solution may solve the aesthetic problem, it produces an additional concern:

If the artist's intentions never matter, how can any work of art be more absorptive (or less) than any other? Which is to say, this theoretical argument counts as part of the crisis in absorption, a solution that threatens to destroy rather than preserve the absorptive project. (2011: non-paginated)

This 'internal crisis of absorption' is where the refusal of theatricality transforms into the refusal of intentionality, of the artist's agency. The refusal here is the refusal of the artist's effort to produce any effect on the beholder, and as Michaels points out, was already indicated by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* and attributed to natural beauty, because the 'appeal to nature is both the refusal of the artist's intentions and the embrace of the beholder's response' (2011: non-paginated). Many art historians, as well as Fried, address how the issues of the painter-beholder, the artist's

---

<sup>7</sup> The Orgone Box was a cabinet that was said to accumulate 'orgones' which were particles from a massless omnipresent energy. This was in order that an individual could sit within it and absorb its health benefits. This pseudoscientific concept, originally proposed by Wilhelm Reich in the 1930's and continued by his student Charles Kelley, was eventually debunked in the 1950's.

agency and this 'appeal to nature' arise art historically. This includes Richard Wollheim, who I discuss further in Chapter 1. Primarily, Fried discusses absorption and theatricality from the position of standing in front of a finished painting,<sup>8</sup> from the perspective of the painting-beholder. However, he does consider alternative positions of beholding in what he describes as the 'shifting interpretations of the issues of theatricality' (1998: 49). This is seen in his considerations of Édouard Manet's painting process, and the relationship between painter, painting and model (1996), and with Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio becoming 'continuous' with his paintings through 'immersive' and 'specular' moments (2010). Fried also discusses Gustave Courbet's process (1990) - not only for his technique, but the radical stance he takes and the position he claims for the painter. These accounts of art historical painter and process help to build an understanding of the position my collaborators find themselves in, for the way it has helped define painting practice today, which I discuss further in Chapter 1.

Owing to his extensive writing and hypotheses on absorption and related issues, Fried is key to this dialogue, providing a model of the subjective shifts that implicitly raise issues of studio aesthetics. He engages with the legacies of both Diderot and Greenberg, looking at the differences between a specialist aesthetic vision and the mundane everyday through the lens of the past. However, throughout Fried's texts, this research finds that what comes to the fore are certain limits. Fried's main sources of information are the compositions or techniques of paintings, through which he examines and interprets the painter-beholder relationship. Fried does not primarily approach painting from the perspective of the painter. Consequently he has no access to what in fact is happening from that position,<sup>9</sup> despite the considerable amount of art historical reflection he brings into play. Art historical case studies from this position reveal these limits.

What this research investigates is the very thing Fried can only suppose.

This research, in which my own painting practice and that of other artists is the central focus, considers that in order to examine these art historical theories, address these limits, and more fully appreciate the concerns and intricacies surrounding absorption, we need to approach them from both the real and imagined position of the painter-beholder, and the site of practice where these positions are

---

<sup>8</sup> For an extensive argument against Fried's theory of theatricality see: Daniel Rubinstein (2017) 'Failure to Engage: Art Criticism in the Age of Simulacrum', *Journal of Visual Culture*, Volume 16, Issue 1, April 2017.

<sup>9</sup> There is little documentation revealing the actual concerns of the (often long dead) painters in question.

negotiated - the studio. This is because the painter-beholder is a particular kind of specialised beholder, developed out of painting practice and the studio, traditionally taking up a very different position to that of the painting-beholder. This is not to say that what Fried sets out to do does not have merit, but that rather through a combination of understandings gathered from both approaches, that is of theory and practice together, a greater and stronger understanding of what is happening in painting practice can be gained.

To address these issues I decided to examine them in dialogue with a group of abstract painters, who like myself, find themselves to be in some fashion engaged with a historical and contemporary dialogue on absorption. The aim of bringing these painters together was to talk from the position of painter-beholder in a studio situation, a position they rarely speak from, in a collaborative address to and from practice. By choosing abstract painters as collaborators for this research, I refocused the discussion from representational painting of 'inner' absorption (that of a subject represented within a painting) to demonstrating how the theory of absorption that has emerged out of representational practice is continued through abstraction. Fried sets a precedent for this in his book *Four Honest Outlaws* (2011)<sup>10</sup> where he discusses the work of Joseph Marioni, whose paintings employ painterly absorptive strategies (Fig. 2 & 3).<sup>11</sup> Marioni's painting practice is fitting in that it helps us to understand how (through Fried's eyes) an abstract painting practice of today, dealing with the tensions of colour and light, engages with the concerns relating to high modernism and its prehistory that initially arose in eighteenth century France.

---

<sup>10</sup> As Fried says, throughout the 25 plus years that he researched and wrote his art historical trilogy (which has now gone beyond three books), he never imagined that it would 'bear any direct relevance to contemporary artistic practices' as during the 1970's, 80's and 90's he had 'lost faith in the dialectic' which he came to realise was a mistake (2011: 23). In writing *Why Photography Matters* (2008) he had cause to re-evaluate that assumption through his encounter with many artists like Jeff Wall, Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, who were working in relation to his theories. Consequently he was motivated to write *Four Honest Outlaws* (2011) in which Joseph Marioni is included.

<sup>11</sup> His works, often large canvases, initially seem to be monochrome, but upon closer inspection reveal many coats of subtly different hues of acrylic paint, of various levels of translucency. This paint drips off its bespoke rounded bottom stretchers, allowing it to flow freely over the edge. These canvases are also tapered and hang separately from the wall, and because of the optical effect of the tapering, seem to loom into our view.



Figure 2. Joseph Marioni, *Red painting* (2012)  
Acrylic and linen on stretcher, 61 x 50.8cm  
(Private Collection)

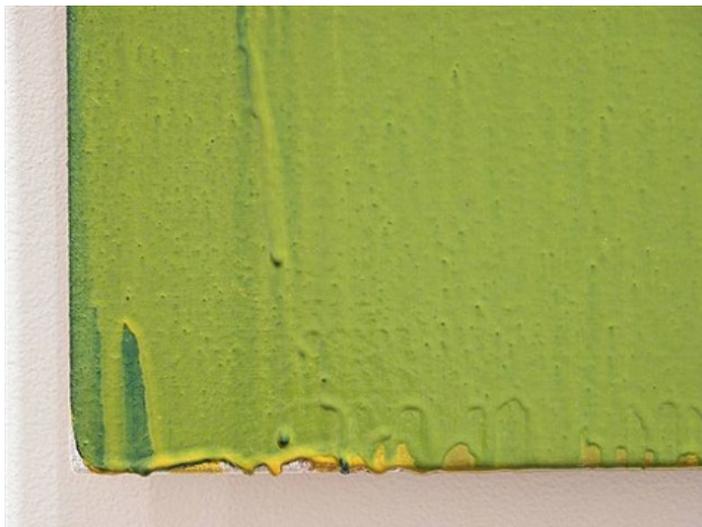


Figure 3. Joseph Marioni, *Green painting* [detail] (2004)  
Acrylic and linen on stretcher, 132.1 x 106.7cm  
(Private Collection)

As this research has worked through the collaborators' dialogues, it has become clear that there are overriding concerns associated with the Friedian position and painting practice. I found that the collaborators 'opened up' and talked about things that they struggled with and were hesitant about.

Part of this struggle was over how, on the one hand, collaborators wanted to say that art can change you, but on the other hand how vulnerable artists feel in making such claims. There is little at stake by saying 'my work absorbs me', and the evidence suggests they all want to believe they can also be an absorbed painting-beholder of another's work. But in claiming it of their own practice, in saying 'I believe art can change or bring about change', they are diffident. This is a different story with much higher stakes. As collaborator Andrew Bick suggests, there is a 'sense of caution as to how and what exactly we can claim about what we are doing' (AB RT2: 14.43).

Subsequently, a question of the 'higher stakes' of aesthetic absorption arises for the artist: through my work, am I the person that can change me? Collaborator Stuart Elliot, on describing his painting process, said: 'if I'm doing it right it should be just like buttering toast, very quotidian' (SE INT: 29.53), but later added: 'I feel very much rewritten by the work as often I do that I am making it' (SE INT: 41.00). Here we have absorption described as an everyday process, yet producing a response that isn't. It seems that artists don't want to lose the possibility of a subjective shift, that making art might change something. At once this leaves us both rejecting absorption as pathology or narcissism, but also rejecting the possibility that there is no change, whilst finding that painting a picture can be just like buttering toast.

Examining the dialogues through the lens of my own practice has revealed the confusion the collaborators have experienced and provided me with insights into their struggles and what they might mean. Specifically, that Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring suggests that the experience of the painter-beholder is mirrored in the painting-beholder, which leads the painter-beholder to believe in what I describe as the romance of making, or even the myth of making. What my dialogues with the collaborators, further reflected in my own painting practice, have exposed is that proleptic mirroring cannot in fact be trusted. Hence the conclusion I have come to is that artists can sometimes confuse the experience gained in making with aesthetic practice. This is the myth, that an enjoyable/absorptive experience of painting practice produces a good painting.

Thus, my research has found Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring to be problematic, when analysed from the position of studio practice. However, I suggest a solution is found by taking David Joselit's threshold concept into consideration (Joselit 2016). Here clarity is achieved by separating Fried's ideas into two parts, by placing Fried against Fried, that is, setting Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring in relation to the work of Chardin, against Fried's theory of immersive and specular moments in relation to the work of Caravaggio. This is because these immersive and specular moments (Fried on Caravaggio) help to explain what is happening in painting process in a way that proleptic mirroring (Fried on Chardin) fails to.

Joselit suggests that the paintings of Jackson Pollock 'opened an aesthetic threshold between disorganized sensation and organized form' (2016: 15).<sup>12</sup> My claim is that this threshold can be expanded upon by describing it as the confluence of banal absorption with aesthetic absorption. This allows us to reconsider this threshold between disorganized sensation and organized form as the fulcrum where the banal/disorganized is fed through to an aesthetic/organized programmed approach. And it is this key understanding which makes it possible for us to reassess the function of Fried's immersive and specular moments. That is once they are added to this understanding where immersive is aligned with the banal/disorganized as immersive/banal/disorganized, and specular is aligned with the aesthetic/organized as the specular/aesthetic/organized, it provides us with a new expanded thresholds model. It is through such distinctions that I suggest a better understanding of the operation and capacity of aesthetic absorption in painting practice is possible.

As such, this research has become more about focusing on how artists can negotiate these thresholds, which is about what the transformational potential of painting has been, or could be, when compared to absorption in everyday studio tasks. It also offers a way to understand why banal absorption and aesthetic absorption can become confused. Negotiating these thresholds is part of the tradition that artists find themselves engaged with, where artist, art and beholder come together. It shows the conflicts of that position that artists and specifically painters have found themselves in since Greenberg, because they have to take a stance on that legacy, where the difference of an aesthetic vision to the mundane everyday is brought to bear.

---

<sup>12</sup> Joselit highlights that Pollock was 'probably the last artist for whom the modern gestural mark retained its purchase in interiority—in terms of either the optical mechanics of vision or the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious' (2016: 17).

Thus far, I have marked out a terrain of aesthetic absorption in post-Greenbergian aesthetics. It is concerned with how absorption is an experience that in Fried and Diderot is aestheticized, and this aestheticization is achieved through the painter and realized in the studio. As such, this practice-led research re-stages the aesthetic and art historical frames within the space of studio as scenario, as the place where the painting-beholder is imagined and where these art historic theories are negotiated.<sup>13</sup> I will now go on to discuss how this was achieved.

### **Research aims and objectives**

One issue for this research has been how to situate art historical theory in relation to painting practice today, because the focus of this thesis is not the relationship of the beholder to eighteenth century French paintings, rather, it is concerned with the painter-beholder of contemporary painting practice. The aim of this research has been to uncover the actuality behind a hypothesis on what happens in that practice. It considers that new understanding can be established regarding theories of aesthetic absorption and how they are negotiated by going directly to the artist. This has been accomplished by collaborating with six practicing painters: combining theory, practice and dialogue to establish a more accurate representation of what is taking place in the painter-painting relationship.

### **Methodology**

The research aims were achieved through six objectives:

- 1) Create a lexicon of aesthetic absorption and the history of its engagement,
- 2) Create a Wiki site for group access to research documents,
- 3) Interview the six collaborators in their respective studios using UAL guidelines on research ethics,

---

<sup>13</sup> This thesis began with seeing Michael Fried present at the 'Tableau: Painting Photo Object' symposia held at the Tate Modern (2011). Over the course of this PhD I have presented at 'The International Conference on the Image, Chicago' (2013), 'Developing the Substrate' Symposium, Chelsea College of Arts (2014), Co-chaired 'Painting as a Document' with Clare Woods and Barry Schwabsky, Tate Britain (2014), presented at 'The International Conference on Visual & Performing Arts', Athens (2015), presented at 'Visual Artists Today' Symposium, Birkbeck University (2015), Chaired 'Painting in Time' with Kate Hawkins, The Tetley (2015), and presented at 'The International Conference on the Image', Liverpool (2016). I have also attended a number of conferences, most recently 'Painting, Drawing and the Digital' at University of Northampton (2017), and 'Colour, Emotion, Non-Figuration: John Hoyland Revisited' at Chelsea College of Arts UAL (2016). I found that the debate surrounding these issues in painting practice is still current and in the main the presentations given were compelling. However I feel that what has consistently not been addressed is this issue of live studio practice, as the majority of the discussion focuses on non-living artists. Accordingly, with this research I have referred art historical theories on absorption in painting practice to live studio practice.

- 4) Facilitate a dialogue on absorption through two round table discussions, taking ethical considerations into account,
- 5) Reflect on the dialogue through painting practice and thesis writing,
- 6) Summarize the research in the written thesis and viva presentation.

### **Collaborative approach**

As discussed, it was decided to take a collaborative dialogue-based approach in this research. This helped achieve rigorous results through multiple inputs, thus allowing a balanced scope with the potential for rich dialogical data (Morgan 1993). It was limited to six painters alongside the researcher, achieving a necessary balance for objective data, whilst maintaining a manageable project.

The collaborators were selected from across generations and gender, and included three females between the ages of 45-55, and four males between the ages of 40-71. The decision was made to choose collaborators with a practice based specifically in the field of abstract painting, thus allowing for a shared visual approach (i.e. non-representational) which was engaged with a history of abstract painting, which on a practical level connects with my practice as researcher/painter/collaborator. My collaborators are part of a thriving and vital painting milieu, enabling the discussion to follow from common points of reference, which allowed concerns to arise that were not initially anticipated by the research and that would not have been revealed if it were not for this critical decision. The artists who took part in my research are Andrew Bick, Stuart Elliot, Simon Callery, Andrea Medjesi-Jones, Katie Pratt, and Gary Wragg.

### **Research Ethics**

Throughout this research I have followed the UAL Code of Practice of Research Ethics. I considered ethical concerns in relation to sharing and protecting private information of my collaborators. I acquired signed participant consent and information forms from all of the concerned parties, and my research was given ethical approval by UAL. As a result of a written risk assessment for health and safety, procedures were put in place to guarantee individual safety during the process of the research.

## **Dialogue**

One methodological issue that arises around absorption is the immersive qualities of absorption and the reflexive distance required to study it. Kant states: 'When our incentives are active, we are not observing ourselves; and when we are observing ourselves, our incentives are at rest' (1974 [1798]: 4). Likewise, Rosalind Krauss writes: 'We cannot analyse the production of illusion at the same time as we are having it' (1990: 93). This was addressed by establishing a reflective and discursive framework, opening up a dialogue between absorption and reflection on absorption with the collaborators, through an address to and from the painter's experience. I went directly to the voice of the artist, first by interviewing each collaborator individually. This was followed by two round table discussions, where the collaborators gathered together to debate what is at stake with absorption in painting practice.

Using dialogues as a research method to bring different opinions to the same forum is advocated by Biggs and Karlsson (2010: xvi), and as Arlander advocates:

In contemporary visual art we could learn to respect the skills of collaboration, dialogue, sharing ideas and working as a team, and to respect the tacit knowledge embodied in practices – since these are related to traditional academic ideals in other forms of research (like a self-correcting discourse, research groups of scientists, situated knowledge, etc.). (2010: 331)

## **The Lexicon and History of Engagement with Aesthetic Absorption documents**

To maintain clarity and enable sharing of experiences and understandings by defining a common language, a Lexicon on the Engagement with Aesthetic Absorption was created. This Lexicon is a collection of terms that connect with this subject, and includes descriptions of: absorptive states and similar conditions, art historical references, and philosophical understanding. It is a tool of rhetoric, which as Mullin states serves 'as a method of discovery and analysis of communicative processes and production' where 'artist practitioners can employ rhetorical tools to examine not only their practices (a useful and common default when one thinks of art scholarship), but also to inquire about the relationship between viewer and artist, artist and self, artist and medium' (2010: 153).

The Lexicon was accompanied by a document on the History of Engagement with Aesthetic Absorption. This provides concise descriptions of key moments where

the concept of aesthetic absorption has been engaged with, functioning as a device to disseminate information, aid quick recall, and to ensure that the background to this research is available to the collaborators. These documents are designed to be edited by any of the collaborators if required, thus enabling new understandings to develop.

### **Wiki site**

Both the Lexicon and the History of Engagement documents were made accessible on a Wiki site called 'Painter-painting relationship'. This Wiki site is a Web 2.0 tool that particularly lends itself to collaborative work (Ferris & Wilder 2006) (Corfield 2013). As well as the Lexicon and the History of Engagement documents, individual transcriptions, summaries of the individual interviews, and the round table transcriptions were all available here.

### **Interviews**

The first stage of the reflective and discursive framework was the process of interviewing the collaborators. Using interviews in this way is a key method with which to gain critical insight into practice, by producing both qualitative and quantitative data to establish a position (Gray & Malins 2004) (Dimitriadi 2009).

Prior to the interview, each collaborator received the Lexicon of Aesthetic Absorption and the History of Engagement with Aesthetic Absorption documents. They were interviewed in their respective studios in order to enable a frame of reference by being close to works that prompted responses. Each collaborator was asked the same 25 questions by the researcher (see appendix), to set a common point of reference from which their responses could be analysed. The questions covered the role, position and understanding of aesthetic absorption in painting practice from the position of painter-beholder and painting-beholder. Each session was audio recorded, and transcribed by the researcher, and then shared with the group via the Wiki page. This material produced over 56,000 words. To allow for a quicker reading, a summary document was created of the key points. If collaborators required further reading the exact point in the interview was found through page and time markers. Once the interviews were completed the round table discussions were held.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> One initial method considered took the form of writing letters, as seen in the book *I Send You This Cadmium Red* (1999), an epistolary exchange between artists John Berger and John Christie writing on their personal experience

## **Round Table Discussions**

The round table dialogues were held over two sessions, drawing on the Lexicon and History documents and the summary of individual interviews to initiate the debate. There was an exchange of experiences and ideas from a position of reflection on the practice of painting, on what is occurring during practice.

These events were audio recorded and then transcribed by the researcher, which produced over 104,000 words (see appendix).

Analysis of this dialogue allowed the mapping of commonalities, differences, and problematics to emerge, and was also applied to the interview transcriptions. These results are discussed in Chapter 2.

## **An Address to and From Painting Practice**

The reflective and discursive framework of this research continued through reflection on the dialogical material in an address to and from my painting practice. This was achieved by my first taking the same questionnaire put to the collaborators. This was in order to identify where my experiences lay in relation to theirs, not only as researcher, but also as co-collaborator. This was followed by a focus on the issues the collaborators identified during the dialogues. These issues were then examined and reflected upon from the position of the painter during painting process, and much in the same way Fried carries out close readings of paintings. However, my version of case studies of specific paintings differs because it is read through a reflection of my experience of painting practice.

This used Kolb's four-stage model of learning through experience of: do, reflect, learn, test (1984). This four-stage approach was reformulated for an approach to practice: first I made the paintings, then I reflected on them in writing, then I considered what was learnt from this process through building hypotheses, and concluded by testing my results against the dialogue of the collaborators. For as Kier suggests: 'recalling how the work came into being allows for a different approach to the information it holds' (2008: 13), and as Beech found: 'writing could intensify, accelerate and recast this entwinement of theory and looking' (2016: 7).

---

of colour. Although this method would have created a very rich textual and visual resource, unfortunately the slowness of this process would have proven prohibitive.

I am aware of phenomenological accounts of painting practice such as those discussed by David Maclagan in 'Psychological Aesthetics' (2001) arguing for a phenomenology of aesthetic experience, for the psychological 'lining' of aesthetic qualities. Maclagan states:

In relation to aesthetic properties, inarticulate form is in practice only the most dramatic example of a wide range of features that are not just hard to put into words, but hard to become conscious of in the first place. We encounter comparable difficulties in relation to qualities that are 'psychological' ... [amounting] to an indeterminate area in between the aesthetic and psychological. (2001: 111)

However, in order to avoid reproducing these difficulties in a way that could become unmanageable, for this research it was decided not to use phenomenological modes of address with which to analyze an extensive body of already complex dialogical data.

### **Final Presentation and Thesis**

This research culminates in this written thesis, and a final presentation at the time of examination, containing within it photographs of the collaborators' and the researcher's practice, and the dialogical material produced.

### **Problems Encountered**

During this research complications were encountered. One collaborator had to drop out of the research due to an accident and being hospitalised. Another collaborator missed an interview due to a family birth. Trying to fit into six individual diaries meant the research schedules had to be shifted to meet these requirements. Arranging a date for the round table discussion also proved difficult. It involved finding a date that all six collaborators could attend, including the PhD supervisors and the researcher, whilst coordinating available dates for a venue to hold the discussion. Initially it was hoped to be one event, but unfortunately due to individual demands this was not possible. Consequently two events were held. The first (01/07/2015) with Simon Callery, Stuart Elliot, Gary Wragg and Professor Malcolm Quinn, and the second (16/07/2015) with Andrew Bick, Katie Pratt and Dr. Daniel Sturgis. Andrea Medjesi-Jones wasn't able to attend either event. All collaborators were invited to add comments if unable to attend, but this offer was not taken up. All edits on the

Wiki site were documented and shared so the changes become a continuation of the research's dialogue. At this moment in time only the researcher performed edits. It was only recently discovered that this researcher is dyslexic and affected by Irlen Syndrome. The way this dyslexia takes form involves some memory recall issues, leaving the task of transcribing i.e. listening to a passage and typing it down, a seemingly impenetrable task. The individual interviews were time consuming, but the group dialogues proved incredibly difficult, taking a very long time to transcribe because of the layering of voices through people talking over each other.<sup>15</sup> Irlen Syndrome also affects sight, and can disrupt reading and writing. To help address this, prescription glasses with green lenses are worn to mitigate some negative effects such as sensitivity to light and visual distortion, which can cause physical symptoms and discomfort.<sup>16</sup>

It was the original intention to produce a group exhibition of work from all the collaborators alongside the dialogical material, whilst engaging UAL's painting, research and curatorial communities, but this proved impossible within the resources available at UAL. As a result, the final output of this research was adapted: the exhibition was dropped, and the final presentation included the dialogical materials and the thesis produced by the researcher. The group exhibition is now planned as a post-doctoral research project. As such, this research has become the foundation of a larger ongoing project for this subject and this artist/researcher/curator.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

The order of this written thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1 examines the art historical concepts in greater depth, looking at the genealogy of aesthetic absorption, and the relationship and tensions between these concepts and painting practice.

Chapter 2 discusses the interview methodology and the findings of the quantitative results collected from the individual interviews. This is followed by an analysis of the dialogical material.

---

<sup>15</sup> There wasn't an alternative way of transcribing as software could not contend with the complexities of speech, and using a professional transcriber (even if large amounts of funds were available) would have been prohibitive due to the requirement of specific subject knowledge.

<sup>16</sup> Further information available at: <<http://irlen.com/reading-problems-dyslexia-learning-difficulties-the-irlen-method>> [Accessed 29/12/16].

Chapter 3 discusses the development of absorptive concerns or strategies in art from Diderot and Fried, to contemporary practice. This is followed by examination and reflection of the issues raised by the collaborators in the dialogues, in an address to and from my painting practice.

The conclusion recaps this research, explaining its reasoning, how it contributes new knowledge in its examination of Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring, and how aesthetic absorption might be understood or addressed differently. It draws to a close by describing future avenues for this research.

The thesis is completed by the appendices that include: the questionnaire, the Lexicon of Aesthetic Absorption, the History of the Engagement with Aesthetic Absorption document, and transcriptions of the interviews and round table discussions.

### **Conclusion**

This research, which could be described as functioning broadly in a Modernist tradition working out of the studio, examines the studio setting as the site where the activity of the artist is made manifest, not in person, but through a programme of absorptive strategies which intervene within normative ways of seeing.

Collaborating with a group of abstract painters, and opening up an in-depth dialogue on the practicalities behind Diderot and Fried's art historical theories, has allowed this research to map experiences encountered through painting practice. This includes my own position as artist-researcher and co-collaborator through close readings of my own paintings. As such, the contribution to knowledge of this research lies in its finding new understandings of these theories, in examining how these art historical propositions connect back through to the studio and contemporary painting practice. It highlights the concerns and hesitations of a specific group of artists, how they as painters negotiate the painter-beholder and painting-beholder positions, and suggests what their experiences and reflections might mean for aesthetic absorption in painting practice for artists today.



## **Chapter 1: The Theory/Practice Relationship**

### 1.0 Summary

#### 1.1 The Genealogy of Absorption: From Greenberg to Fried

##### 1.12 Specificity

##### 1.13 Frank Stella

##### 1.14 Art and Objecthood

##### 1.15 Conditions

#### 1.2 The Genealogy of Absorption: From Fried to Diderot

##### 1.21 The Ancients

##### 1.22 Salons

##### 1.23 Morality

##### 1.24 Mimesis

##### 1.25 Tableaux

#### 1.3 The Fried, Diderot, Chardin, and Greuze Axis

#### 1.4 Beholdership in Diderot, Fried, and Wollheim

#### 1.5 Courbet and the Studio

#### 1.6 Caravaggio's Distinction

#### 1.7 Conclusion

### **1.0 Summary**

This chapter charts the development of the concept of aesthetic absorption, the theories surrounding it, how understanding of it has changed over time, and how these art historical concepts relate to painting practice today.

I begin by examining the genealogy of aesthetic absorption through art history, mapping the emergence of Michael Fried's theories and his early contact with Clement Greenberg. This includes Greenberg's theory of specificity and how this thinking went on to inform Fried's own. I go on to examine Fried's relationship with the painter Frank Stella, and how it helped develop his understanding of painting. I then discuss Fried's pivotal paper 'Art and Objecthood' (1998 [1967]), and how it addressed the relationship between artwork and beholder. Here Fried criticized minimalist art for its innate theatricality, a quality he believed prevented a genuine aesthetic experience, and as such for him it became the antithesis of art.

I then focus on Fried's eventual move away from Greenberg's theories regarding the norms and the minimal conditions that constitute painting, and how such ideas are

still debated in painting practice today. I trace Fried's move from art critic to art historian, and the beginning of Fried's project of tracing his theories back through art history, beginning with his focus on Denis Diderot and the concepts of absorption and theatricality.

I continue by mapping the journey of the concept of aesthetic absorption from Fried to Diderot, tracing the roots of these ideas in the Ancient World, of Pliny the Elder, of Parrhasius and Zuexis, and where notions of the beholder were first considered. I examine how Diderot was influenced by his reading on the Ancients, how their theories found their way into his Salon writings, and how they helped to define the role of one of the first art critics.

I explore the great impact Diderot's Salons had on how art was considered by his readers, and how, through his contact and deep consideration of art and painting in particular, this helped him formulate theories of the beholder and the painting as tableaux. I discuss the connections Diderot built with specific painters whose work he found to be the most absorptive. Of these, Chardin and Greuze were foremost. I discuss how, through their work, Diderot theorized on the absorptive experiences of the painting-beholder and the painter-beholder.

I discuss the position of painting-beholder and painter-beholder, and how both Diderot and Fried hypothesized on what might be occurring from each of these positions. Specifically I focus on Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring and what this might mean for the painter-beholder from the position of painting practice.

I explore the debate further by examining the theories of the art historian Richard Wollheim alongside Fried, their consideration of the 'internal spectator', and how this allows the spectator of the picture a 'distinctive access to the content' (1987: 129) using the work of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings to support these theories.

I conclude by discussing Fried's art historical writing, looking at both Courbet and Caravaggio. I use Courbet's painting *The Painter's Studio: A real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic and moral life* (1854-55) in conjunction with Herding's reading to examine the studio as site where the painting-beholder is imagined, and a programme of work emerges. Finally I discuss Fried's theory of the immersive and specular 'moments' in the painting process of Caravaggio, and how they might provide us with particular insights relative to painting practice today.

## 1.1 The Genealogy of Absorption From Greenberg to Fried

Michael Fried's entire work as art historian and critic has followed the trajectory of modernism in art. This includes his investigation on the anti-theatrical tradition that emerged in French painting during the eighteenth century, in what he considers to be pre-modernist ideals brought to the fore through the Diderotian concern with beholding. To understand the genealogy of Fried's thesis I will briefly trace Fried's background and how his understanding developed.

Fried first came into contact with the critically engaged discussion surrounding modernist painting through the writings of the art critic Clement Greenberg. This early connection grew into a mentor-like relationship that Fried describes as one that has inspired and defined his own lifetime of writing.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.12 Specificity

Greenberg developed his theories on modernist art in influential texts, namely: 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' (1988 [1939]), 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1988 [1940]), 'American Type Painting' (1995 [1955]), and later 'Modernist Painting' (1995 [1960]), 'After Abstract Expressionism' (1995 [1962]), and 'Avant-garde Attitudes' (1968). It was in 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1988 [1940]) that Greenberg put forward one of his most significant theories concerning medium specificity,<sup>18</sup> drawing on Gotthold Lessing's paper 'Laocoon' (1766), which disputed Horace's dictum 'ut pictura poesis' (as is painting, so is poetry). In 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1940) Greenberg advanced Lessing's theory on the difference between literary and visual art, stating that for an art form to be successful it must remain distinct and separate from others, stressing its own methodology. He put forward the notion that through the process of self-criticism (akin to Kantian self-criticism), a central concern for modern art was to cast off the norms and conventions that were found to be unnecessary as an exemplar of a particular art form.<sup>19</sup> Each art should cast off that which it shared with any other in an attempt to distinguish its intrinsic properties specific to its medium,

---

<sup>17</sup> Fried actively sought Greenberg out in 1958 by writing to him expressing his admiration of his work as an art critic, and asking for his advice. At this point in time he had already 'formed the plan' (Fried 1998: 3) for his own future of writing as an art critic. Greenberg answered Fried's letter and the two eventually met, resulting in Greenberg giving Fried a written introduction to Hilton Kramer, (the editor of *Arts Magazine*), who later offered Fried the post of London correspondent for *Arts* whilst he was a student at University College, London. This step had a profound and lasting effect on Fried's future; by the age of 22 he was a recognised art critic, publishing on a regular basis in New York.

<sup>18</sup> Greenberg's ideas on medium specificity were initially laid out in 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' (1988 [1939]), and 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1988 [1940]).

<sup>19</sup> See Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting' (1995 [1960]), and 'After Abstract Expressionism' (1995 [1962]).

and thus guarantee its future by showing the individual value of its aesthetic experience. Within the medium of painting, these innate and irreducible properties were identified as the flatness of the support, and delimiting that flatness through the support's framing edge.<sup>20</sup> These concepts would prove to be foundational in Fried's understanding of modernist art, and in how they informed his own theories.

### 1.13 Frank Stella

Whilst studying at Princeton University in 1959, Fried struck up a friendship with the artist Frank Stella. This friendship flourished, eventually leading to Fried curating *Three American Painters* (1965), an exhibition of works of Stella, Jules Olitski and Kenneth Noland. Inspired by Stella's shaped canvas paintings, Fried brought them into play as the focus for debate on the distinctions between minimalism and modernist art. In 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons' (1998 [1966]) Fried described the developments that led to Stella's new paintings,<sup>21</sup> championing Stella's new works for their continuity between the shape of the support and the elements within the paintings, and how they avoided illusionism or response to literal shape.

For minimalists like Donald Judd, Frank Stella's paintings were an embodied exploration into three-dimensional work that exploited shape as medium in a way similar to minimalism. For Fried, this same aspect of shape established continuity between the literal *and* the depicted (1998 [1966]: 89), and was separate from minimalism. Dominic Rahtz points out that for Fried 'the 'real'-ness (the "thinglike" quality) of Stella's painting resulted from the painted image. In contrast, for Carl Andre it was the other way round, the 'image' ("design") resulted from the 'real'-ness of paint, as material to be applied with a brush over and over again over a given area' (Rahtz 2001: 62). The outcome, depending on which position is taken, was that Stella's work could be placed within either the modernist<sup>22</sup> or minimalist domain.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Greenberg writes in 'After Abstract Expressionism' (1995 [1962]): 'Under the testing of modernism more and more of the conventions of the art of painting have shown themselves to be dispensable, unessential. By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a picture: thus a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture—though not necessarily as a *successful* one.' (1995 [1962]: 131).

<sup>21</sup> Fried writes 'There is no distinction one can make between attending to the surface of the painting and to the illusion it generates; to be gripped by one is to be held by the other' (1989 [1966]: 79).

<sup>22</sup> Dominic Rahtz writes of Frank Stella's early work: 'that although Stella was an exemplary modernist painter, his paintings also had the effect of making what would be referred to as the literalist position "arguable"' (2001: 43).

### 1.14 Art and Objecthood

Fried confronted these differing positions in his seminal paper 'Art and Objecthood' (1998 [1967]).<sup>24</sup> This paper was to prove critical in the discussion on modernist and minimalist art. It was here that Fried initially engaged with absorption and theatricality in the context of modernism, for as he put it, at this point 'I was a Diderotian critic without knowing it' (1998: 2). Fried criticised minimalist art, or literalist art as he then called it, for its innate theatricality, because he believed that 'theatre is *now* the negation of art' (1998 [1967]: 153), a quality he believed prevented a genuine aesthetic experience. He differentiated art objects from other objects through their internal coherence, where objects can either be art *or* objecthood, and as minimalist art recognised its position as object, consequently for him it became the antithesis of art. He stated that the survival of art lies in 'its ability to defeat theatre' for 'art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre' (ibid.: 163). For Fried, minimalist art has presence, which he connected with theatricality, as the work only exists through the viewer's experience, corrupting our sensibilities, whereas modernist work has presentness, because it is instantaneously present, thus allowing a genuine aesthetic experience.<sup>25</sup> Fried concluded his paper with the phrase 'presentness is grace' (ibid.: 168), a statement which appears as redemptive, with moralising and divine overtones. But here 'grace' also refers to conviction in the quality of the work (1998: 47), ultimately suggesting all that doesn't have presentness is the reverse of grace, and as such lacks our conviction of its quality.<sup>26</sup>

Fried's theory in 'Art and Objecthood' (1998 [1967]) is clearly influenced by Greenberg's 'After Abstract Expressionism' (1998 [1962]). Later, in 'Recentness of Sculpture' (1998 [1967]), Greenberg wrote: 'Minimal works are readable as

---

<sup>23</sup> These opposing positions were represented by Fried and Carl Andre, in a debate over the direction Stella's work would take. As Fried put it 'Carl Andre and I were fighting for his soul' (1998: 71). Being the point of convergence for these different positions was an issue for Stella, but as Andre later put it 'Frank has always been too much his own man to let his soul be swayed so easily' (ibid.).

<sup>24</sup> Some of those that responded were: Robert Smithson's 'Letter to the Editor' *Artforum* (October 1967), Allan Kaprow's 'Letters' *Artforum* (September 1967), Anette Michleson's *Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression* (1970), Rosalind Krauss' *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977), and in 'The Writing of "Art and Objecthood"' by James Mayer (2012).

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Rubenstein argues that 'Paradoxically, Fried's attempt to grasp what 'works' in a work of art by opposing authentic art to objecthood, not only distorts and sterilizes the affective power of art, but also makes it into something stale and confined, in other words, it makes art into an object' (2017: 45).

<sup>26</sup> In his book *Art and Objecthood* (1998) Fried writes: 'the viewer's conviction in a work's seriousness, its "quality," is never for a moment, or is only for a moment, safe from the possibility of doubt (a modernist state of affairs with a vengeance); conviction–grace–must be secured again and again, as though continuously, by the work itself but also, in the act of experiencing, by the viewer, by us.' (1998: 47).

art, as almost anything is today — including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper ... Yet it would seem that a kind of art nearer the condition of non-art could not be envisaged or ideated at this moment' (Greenberg 1998 [1967]: 253). This is reflected in Judd's statement, 'A work needs only to be interesting' (2005 [1965]: 181), challenging the idea of art as a transcendent experience. If all that was required was for work to be 'interesting', minimalism was fundamentally redefining what was needed for something to be called art. For Judd, Fried's position was conservative, and wasn't a true reading of minimalism; he believed his vision of minimalism was far broader than Fried recognised. Fried thought his standpoint on modernist art was a way of deepening Greenberg's position, by opening it to dialogue. Ironically, so did Judd, who saw minimalism as a way of questioning and reacting to modernist painting in order to progress its purpose.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.15 Conditions

Eventually Fried's theories on modernism began to differ<sup>28</sup> from those of Greenberg.<sup>29</sup> Fried disputed Greenberg's theory that the arts have *timeless* essences, although he did not oppose the idea that through a self-critical approach, modernism was an attempt to find the distinct essence of each art. Instead, Fried's modernist credo was inspired by his friend, the philosopher Stanley Cavell, and his reading of Wittgenstein's later theories (Cavell 1979). Fried believed the essence of an artistic medium is itself a result of convention, that one of the material norms that constitute painting is the history of painting at any one time; a fluid understanding

---

<sup>27</sup> As seen where Judd compared Di Suvero's work to Kline's: 'he uses beams as if they were brush strokes, imitating movement, as Kline did.' (1965 [2005]: 183), and stating 'The new work obviously resembles sculpture more than it does painting, but it is nearer to painting' (ibid.).

<sup>28</sup> Rosalind Krauss, Fried's classmate at Harvard University in the Department of Fine Arts, also shared an initial affinity for the writings and theories of Clement Greenberg. Krauss followed a similar path to Fried, later splitting from Greenberg's formalist views on modernism. In her paper 'A View of Modernism' (1972) Krauss criticised Greenberg's theory for its lack of consideration towards content and feeling, instead going on to favour the principles of minimalism. In her book *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (1999) Krauss considers this condition and calls for a 'differential specificity' (1999: 56). For her, Greenberg's notion of medium specificity is no longer relevant; instead she advances that there is the need for a new specificity that resides in the 'essence of Art itself' (1999: 10), that reflects on its own past medium specific practice that it 'will now have to reinvent or rearticulate' (ibid.: 56).

<sup>29</sup> Greenberg's ideas also shifted over time; what may be referred to as 'early Greenberg' defines an era that describes his focus on the social and psychological culture of the artist, and theories on medium specificity, whereas 'later Greenberg' could be described as a time of re-evaluating and refining his earlier held views. He rejected much of 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' (1988 [1939]), describing his explanation of kitsch as ill thought out, and later redressed his understanding in 'Avant-garde Attitudes' (1968), reinforcing the importance of avant-gardism as an attitude, and dynamic driver of modernism. Through this process of reflection Greenberg's focus moved to aesthetic judgments, and the art historical influence over the new generation of artists.

in that it changes as time passes, and as a consequence has the potential for reinterpretation as the norms move with time. This position enabled Fried to question Greenberg's earlier comment: 'thus a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture – though not necessarily as a *successful* one' (1995 [1962]), which was a dilemma because of its proximity to non-art. Fried suggested that a more accurate description would be to say 'that it is not *conceivably* one' (1998 [1967]: 169).<sup>30</sup>

This idea of 'minimal conditions' provided Fried both with a way of countering Greenberg's non-art problematic, and a way of searching through the history of art for validation, a developing Friedian trait. This led Fried to reason that one of the material norms that constitutes painting is the history of painting at any one time. This was to be a crucial shift in Fried's thinking, as if he had found his true direction, which can be seen to follow throughout his art historical work.

This concern of the minimal conditions and what counts as painting would also eventually be taken up by Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon and Stephen Melville for the pivotal *As Painting* (2001)<sup>31</sup> exhibition held at the Wexner Centre, Ohio. It was an investigation of limits, of where painting is and what painting should do, as I will discuss further in Chapter 3. Interestingly and importantly, one of the 26 artists whose work was included was Donald Judd. That is because Judd's work clearly tests those parameters, with Armstrong and Lisbon arguing that Judd 'continues to make "paintings"' (2001: 40), and as they point out Judd has acknowledged that: 'my thought comes from painting even if I don't paint' (ibid.).

---

<sup>30</sup> Fried explains 'seeing something as a painting in the sense that one sees the tacked-up canvas as a painting, and being convinced that a particular work can stand comparison with the painting of the past whose quality is not in doubt, are altogether different experiences: it is, I want to say, as though unless something compels conviction as to its quality it is no more than trivially or nominally a painting. This suggests that flatness and the delimitation of flatness ought not to be thought of as the "irreducible essence of pictorial art," but rather as something like the minimal conditions for something's being seen as a painting; and that the crucial question is not what those minimal and, so to speak, timeless conditions are, but rather what, at a given moment, is capable of compelling conviction, of succeeding as painting. This is not to say that painting *has no* essence; it *is* to claim that that essence—i.e., that which compels conviction—is largely determined by, and therefore changes continually in response to, the vital work of the recent past. The essence of painting is not something irreducible. Rather, the task of the modernist painter is to discover those conventions that, at a given moment, *alone* are capable of establishing his work's identity as painting.' (1998 [1967]: 169).

<sup>31</sup> *As Painting* (2001) [Exhibition]. The Wexner Centre for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, USA. 12 May -12 August 2001.

## 1.2 The Genealogy of Absorption: From Fried to Diderot

Fried eventually withdrew from his writing as an art critic around 1970, to focus his attention on writing as an art historian. For as he put it: 'I had pretty much said what I had to say' and 'nothing I could have said would have improved upon the position laid out in *Art and Objecthood* (1998: 14). His move towards art historical concerns, although it looked like a complete change of direction, was another example of this Friedian trait of searching through the history of art for validation whilst still maintaining his trajectory of examining the evolution of modernism.

Fried's attention had been caught by the salons of eighteenth century France, and in particular by the writings of Diderot. As outlined in my introduction, drawing from the writings of Diderot, Fried put forward the idea that a central concern within French painting of the eighteenth century was how depiction of 'internal' absorption within a painting encourages the 'external' absorption of the beholder. One example of this 'internal' absorption can be seen in the painting *La Piété Filiale* (c.1763) by Jean-Baptiste Greuze (Fig. 4), where the subjects of the painting, in this case a family gathered around their dying father, are totally engaged and focused on him, all the figures look inward, not one of them looks directly out at the beholder. This is even demonstrated by the dogs, who are inwardly focused on their own pursuits. The desired outcome of such a painting was the 'external' absorption of the beholder, who was thoroughly transfixed, held in place and totally unconscious of this fact, which Fried describes as 'self-abandonment nearly to the point of extinction of consciousness' (1975: 172).

Image available at: [www.hermitagemuseum.org](http://www.hermitagemuseum.org)

Figure 4. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La Piété Filiale* (c.1763)

Oil on canvas, 115 x 146cm

(The Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg)

Fried highlighted how the theory of aesthetic absorption combined with Diderot's paradoxical notion that all paintings must be painted as if there was no beholder before them, even though they are created solely for this purpose to be beheld: 'whether you compose or act, think no more of the beholder than if he did not exist' (1980: 95). Paintings that addressed or faced the beholder were deemed as *le théâtral* or theatrical, and it was this theatricality that resulted in impeding absorption by reminding the beholder of their position, that of standing in front of a painting. Overcoming this condition of theatre became a prime concern (1998: 49). Fried sees this particular response in art of this time as a reaction to art of the Rococo, but acknowledges work prior to this period evidently portrays similar states<sup>32</sup> in what he describes as the 'absorptive tradition' (1980: 45). This is exemplified in the work of artists such as Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and Vermeer, but the issue of aesthetic absorption came to the fore as a 'peculiarly French concern' of this time (ibid: 46).

### 1.21 The Ancients

As a writer, philosopher, encyclopedist,<sup>33</sup> art critic, dramatist, scientist, and philosopher, Denis Diderot accomplished a great deal in the many roles he undertook throughout his lifetime (1713-1784). Not least of his accomplishments was the impact he made on the thought and culture of The Enlightenment,<sup>34</sup> and his essential contribution in the development of the concept of absorption and theatricality, and their role in relation to painting. As Russell Goulbourne writes, Diderot was greatly inspired by the Ancients (2011)<sup>35</sup> as illustrated in his letters to Falconet, where he wrote about reading Pliny (the Elder), and the resulting influence

---

<sup>32</sup> For further details of seventeenth century examples see: Svetlana Alper's 'Describe or narrate? A Problem in Realistic Representation' *New Literary History*, 8 (1976-77), 15-41.

<sup>33</sup> Diderot was as co-founder, editor and writer of the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Encyclopaedia or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts), from 1751 to 1772 alongside Jean le Rond D'Alembert. It was a colossal literary work, spanning 28 volumes, with 71,818 articles and 3,129 illustrations. D'Alembert left in 1759, along with the majority of the writers, after the French authorities formally suppressed the encyclopedia, leaving Diderot and only a few others to finish the project.

<sup>34</sup> The Enlightenment took place initially in Europe during the seventeenth century and later expanded to America. It embraced a spirit of enquiry deemed for the good of all men, where knowledge attained through scientific method was championed above prior understanding, especially that which didn't stand up to interrogation. Key figures in these debates included Addison, Alison, Bayle, Hume, Hutcheson, Locke, Kant, Rousseau, Shaftesbury, Spinoza, Voltaire, and Diderot.

<sup>35</sup> Diderot worked on translating Temple Stanyan's *History of Greece* (1743), and later Plato's *Apology* (399 BC) whilst imprisoned at Vincennes for publishing his 'Letter on the Blind' (1749), a controversial paper that was deemed to be against religion by the authorities. Goulbourne states: 'it is no exaggeration to say that it is impossible to understand Diderot the *philosophe* without understanding his debt to antiquity' (2011: 13).

on Diderot's idea of painting as perfect imitation, or illusion. In book 35 of his *Naturalis Historia* (77-79 AD)<sup>36</sup> Pliny wrote on the story of the painting competition that took place in Greece in early fifth century BC to decide who was the better artist, Zeuxis or Parrhasius.<sup>37</sup> As the story goes, both participants presented their paintings and Zeuxis was the first to unveil his painting of grapes. It is said that on seeing the grapes, birds flew down to peck at them because they were so realistic. When it came to the turn of Parrhasius, Zeuxis asked him to remove the curtain from his painting, only to find that the curtain was the painting. The success of fooling the birds seemed a triumph, but the stroke of genius was in fooling a fellow artist. Zeuxis admitted, 'I have deceived the birds, but Parrhasius has deceived Zeuxis' (Whitley 2001: 286).

On the significance of this painting, Emmanuelle Hénin suggests (2011) the curtain of Parrhasius could be interpreted as a stage curtain, and could be seen as an early demonstration of how painting and theatre are intimately linked. Kate Tunstall (2006) suggests that such examples of Plinian-inspired anecdotes, which resonate throughout Diderot's Salon writing, reveal Pliny's overlooked influence on Diderot. This is also demonstrated by Diderot's support for the Plinian-inspired concept of verisimilitude, of painting as a true and perfect imitation of nature.

## 1.22 Salons

It is because of his groundbreaking and colourful writing on the salons of eighteenth century France that Diderot is seen as one of the first major art critics. Salon writing was new to Diderot, so he took time to educate himself in artistic matters through the help of the artist Chardin, amongst other mentors (Wrigley 1993: 235). This level of commitment demonstrated how seriously he took art, and gave a level of profundity previously lacking amongst the customary satire and polemic, helping to establish a legitimate and critical vocabulary new to art criticism. Before Diderot, there were other forerunners writing on the salons, with La Font de Saint-Yenne being one of the principal reviewers, but none played such a major part in the development of the status of the art critic as Diderot, who Fried describes as 'the greatest critic of the age' (1980: 55).

---

<sup>36</sup> Understood to be the earliest surviving writing on art.

<sup>37</sup> See: Pliny (the Elder) (77-79 AD) *Naturalis Historia*, book 35. Available at: <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:phi,0978,001:35:36>> [Accessed 14/07/2017], (non-paginated).

The salons<sup>38</sup> were state run art exhibitions initiated by Jean Baptiste Colbert and were open to the public. The first was held in 1667 under the reign of Louis XIV, and from 1699 they were held at the Salon Carré in the Louvre. Thomas Crow describes how the salons ‘brought together a broad mix of classes and social types, many of whom were unused to sharing the same leisure-time diversions. Their awkward, jostling encounters provided constant material for satirical commentary’ (1985: 1). This was all part of the backdrop of what Crow describes as a ‘public space in the making’ (ibid.: 23). They exhibited works of the classically trained artist members of the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture until 1791, when, by decree of the revolutionary government, they were opened to all artists.<sup>39</sup>

It was Friedrich Melchior Grimm, a German philologist and friend of Diderot, who originally commissioned the Salon writings to appear in his bi-monthly *La Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*. This was a confidential hand-written letter covering the developments of Parisian society that managed to circumvent the French censors. Initially, these uncensored writings on the salons were freely shared amongst the masses, but once the censors began to realise how these influential writings had the potential to encourage inflammatory discourse with possible negative effects on the artists in question, they began to restrict these freedoms. As a result, Grimm’s correspondence was only available to a select audience of subscribers, the majority of whom were from royal or wealthy backgrounds outside of France.<sup>40</sup> Overall, Diderot reviewed the Paris Salons of 1759 through 1771, 1779 and 1781. As a result of the secrecy the correspondence was only published posthumously in 1798 by Jacques-Andrés Naigeon.

Through his Salon writing, which was full of humour, pertinent personal anecdotes, as well as elaboration and digression,<sup>41</sup> Diderot developed an ability to extract the fundamental qualities of the art he discussed, and a poetic style of writing that transported the reader. This enabled the reader to recreate the art of the salons in their mind’s eye. On Diderot’s writing style, Thomas Crow writes: ‘When he sets

---

<sup>38</sup> The salons were named after the Salon d’Apollon of the Louvre Palace, Paris in which the first exhibition was hung in 1667.

<sup>39</sup> The Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture was originally founded in 1648 by a group of artists including Charles Le Brun.

<sup>40</sup> The list of subscribers included Catherine II of Russia, Frederick II, the king of Prussia, Stanislas Poniatowski, the king of Poland, Gustav III, the king of Sweden, and the Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Gotha.

<sup>41</sup> For further details see: Wrigley, R. (1993) *The Origins of French Art Criticism: From the Ancien Régime to the Restoration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

about writing in a way that cannot be supplemented by illustration, he is writing for himself as much as for his clients and grasps in a profound way – more than any modern illustrated book can do – how it is that one knows art’ (Crow 1995: xvii).

Diderot’s writing on art, as Mark Darlow points out, is a relationship between word and image. An early example of this is seen in his ‘Letter on the Deaf and Dumb’ (1751), where he uses the term ‘hieroglyph’ to suggest representing one type of expression through that of another (Darlow 2011: 206). His use of language and literary style has encouraged considerable debate. Whilst Marie Bukdahl sees Diderot’s writing as a transparent linguistic style that ‘developed an impartial and neutral representation of the artistic work’ (1980: 27), David Scott suggests it is a ‘flexing of linguistic muscles’ (1988: 53), which Tom Baldwin states becomes a textual ‘obliteration’ leaving the ‘painted image for dead’ (2011: 235).

On this relationship, Baldwin suggests we see this ‘ekphrasis in terms of the painting’s ‘haunting’ of the text, of shifting relations of visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, metamorphosis and instability. The painting is neither fully present nor entirely lost: it is a trace, it comes and goes, and changes shape’ (ibid.: 245). Eventually (Salon of 1767), Diderot urged for images to accompany his writings, and as Shane Agin argues, this is when Diderot came to realise the inadequacy of language to communicate the ‘beauties of the visual work of art into words’ (2007: 24), thus marking ‘the end of the *Salon*-writing project’ (ibid.: 28).

### **1.23 Morality**

In his review of Fried’s *Absorption and Theatricality*, John Barrell highlights the importance of ethics and morals to Diderot (Barrell 1981). Indications of this can be seen in his writing on the paintings of Francois Boucher (Fig. 5). Diderot writes: ‘Degradation of taste, colour, composition, character, expression, and drawing have kept pace with moral depravity. What can we expect this artist to throw onto the canvas? What he has in his imagination. And what can be in the imagination of a man who spends his life with prostitutes of the basest kind?’ (1995a [1765]: 22).

For these reasons, when Diderot found in an artist a culmination of all that he held truthful, good and beautiful, he extolled their virtues, singing their praises to his readers. Diderot found this remedy in the work of Jean-Baptiste Greuze (Fig. 6), he writes: ‘This Greuze is really my man. Firstly, the genre pleases me. It is moral painting. What then, has the brush not been consecrated to debauchery and vice

long enough? Should we not be satisfied to see it finally compete with dramatic poetry to touch us, to instruct us and to invite us to virtue?' (Diderot cited in Starobinski et al. 2007: 138).<sup>42</sup> The painting *La Piété Filiale* (c.1763) by Greuze (Fig. 4), in testament to its absorptive qualities, when exhibited at the 1763 Salon, as Fried writes, 'literally moved beholders to tears' (1980: 55). Of the painting's subjects Diderot wrote: 'it happened that, on that particular day, it was his son-in-law who brought the old man some food, and the latter, moved, showed his gratitude in such an animated and earnest way that it interrupted the occupations and attracted the attention of the whole family' (ibid.). Fried argues that here Diderot's statement is the 'most forthright assertion of the primacy of considerations of absorption', describing how Greuze managed to:

orchestrate an entire sequence of ostensibly chance events in order to arrive in the end at the sort of emotionally charged, highly moralized, and dramatically unified situation that alone was capable of embodying with sufficient perspicuousness the absorptive states of suspension of activity and fixing of attention that painter and critic alike regarded as paramount. (1980: 55)

Here Diderot is equating aesthetic absorption with a moral seriousness, becoming an instrument with which we, as painting-beholders, can be 'moved' towards virtue.

---

<sup>42</sup> In attesting to the character of Greuze, James Thompson writes: 'Greuze shared some of Rousseau's optimistic faith in man's natural virtue in simple surroundings, away from the corrupting influence of society' (Thompson 1989: 5).

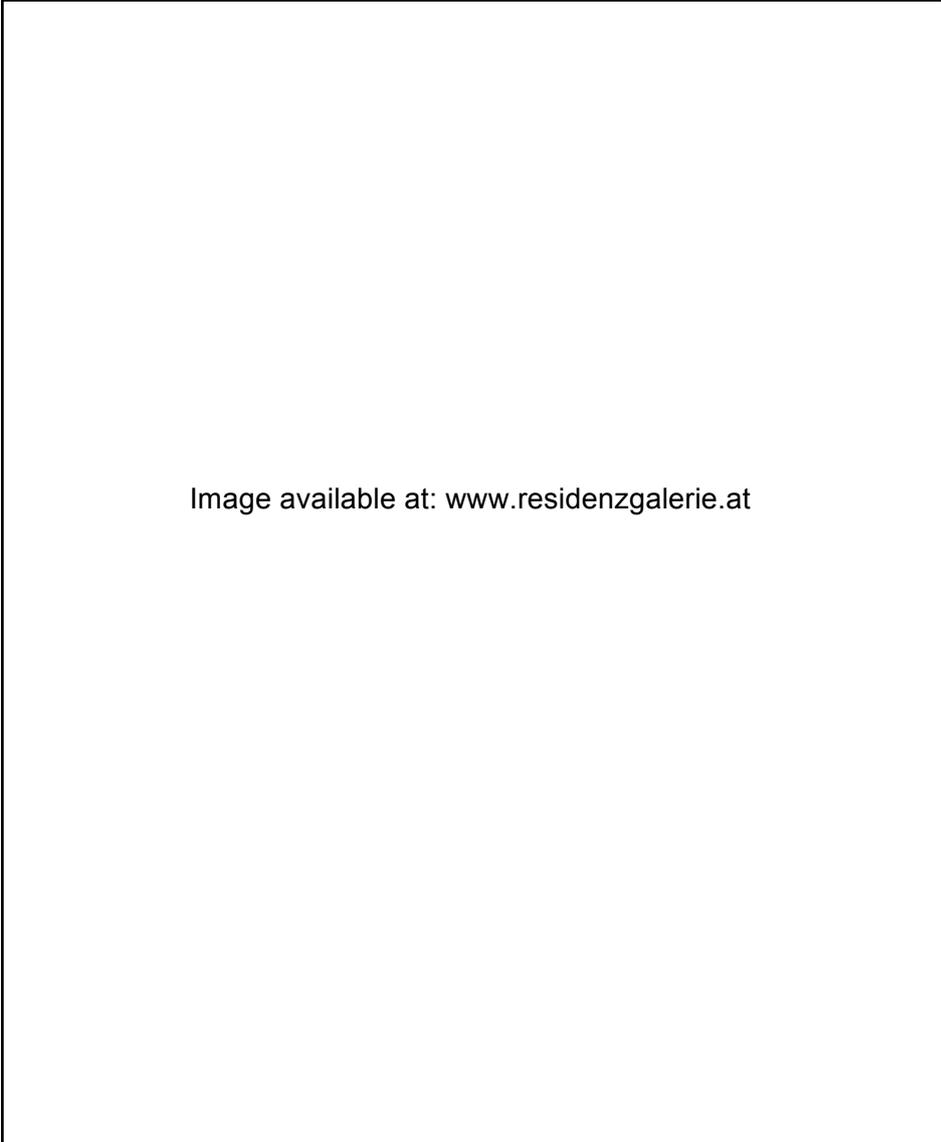


Image available at: [www.residenzgalerie.at](http://www.residenzgalerie.at)

Figure 5. François Boucher, *Dreaming Shepherdess* (c.1763)

Oil on canvas, 60 x 47cm

(Residenzgalerie, Salzburg)



Image available at: [www.nationalgalleries.org](http://www.nationalgalleries.org)

Figure 6. Jean Baptiste Greuze, *A Girl with a Dead Canary* (c.1765)

Oil on canvas, 53.3 x 46cm

(Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh)

### 1.24 Mimesis

Corresponding with Diderot's ideas on aesthetic absorption were questions regarding the concept of theatricality, for which he drew inspiration from the writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713).<sup>43</sup> Shaftesbury initially considered the relationship between author and reader and its theatrical qualities in his 'Soliloquy: or, Advice to an Author' first published in 1710 (1790). It is interesting to note that, like Diderot, Shaftesbury was also strongly influenced by Pliny, referencing him here as his source (ibid.: 124), and as discussed earlier it was Pliny's description of the Parrhasius and curtain anecdote that brought the art of painting and theatre together. In 'Of Hercules' Shaftesbury wrote: 'The good painter must come a little nearer to truth, and take care that this action be not theatrical, or at second hand; but original and drawn from Nature herself' (2014 [1713]: 45). Here we see the term 'theatrical' used as an adverse effect in relation with the unreal and unnatural, the antithesis to nature as truth, and a strong example of the Plinian influence of championing the mimesis of nature.

Diderot drew on these considerations, reworked them, and applied them literally to his writings. In 'Discours de la poésie dramatique' (1758) and later in 'Pensées détachées sur la peinture' (1772) Diderot urged for dismissing awareness of the beholder: 'Whether you compose or act, think no more of the beholder than if he did not exist. Imagine, at the edge of the stage, a high wall that separates you from the orchestra. Act as if the curtain never rose' (Diderot [1758] cited in Fried 1980: 95). He believed that a proscenium theatre should work as if there was an imaginary 'fourth wall' at the front of the stage, before the audience. The purpose of this imaginary wall or boundary was to encourage the actors to act as if there were no audience, and for the audience to observe as if they were watching real events.

### 1.25 Tableaux

Within these critiques, Diderot made explicit theories on painting, the principal concern of the new relationship between painting and drama. As Fried writes: 'he called for the development of a new stage dramaturgy that would find in painting ... the inspiration for a more convincing representation of action than any provided by the theater of his time' (1980: 77), and to 'seek what he called *tableaux* ... which if properly managed he believed were capable of moving an audience to the depths of its collective being' (ibid.: 78). It is not easy to define the characteristics of 'tableaux',

---

<sup>43</sup> Diderot translated and annotated Shaftesbury's 'An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit' (1745).

although Diderot aligns it with composition.<sup>44</sup> He describes it as an ‘unexpected incident that happens in the course of the action and that suddenly changes the situation of the characters in a *coup de théâtre*. An arrangement of those characters on the stage, so natural and so true to life that faithfully rendered by a painter, it would please me on a canvas, is a *tableau*’ (Diderot [1757] cited in Fried 1980: 95). As Fried highlights, Diderot sees a *coup de théâtre* as happening within the action, whereas a *tableau* stands ‘outside the action, with the result that the characters themselves appeared unaware of its existence and hence its effect on the audience’ (1980: 96).

Plainly put, in Diderot’s time the tableau is a point of view, only visible from the position of the beholder, and it is this position that convinces the beholder that the actors are unaware of themselves being seen. So the painting-beholder, who isn’t privy to the activity in the studio, to that particular position, is the only subject who has no other way of perceiving the absorptive process than through fixing attention on the painting. On the other hand, the artist who is absorbed cannot perceive this absorptive process, but can imagine a painting-beholder who does. As Fried writes, Diderot acquaints this relationship with painting ‘a scene represented on canvas or on stage that does not suppose witnesses’ (1980: 97), connecting back with the primary concerns of absorption and theatricality, which I discuss further in Chapter 3.

### 1.3 The Fried, Diderot, Chardin and Greuze Axis

Previously, I have followed the legacy of debates on the theory of aesthetic absorption through Fried’s thesis from Greenberg to Diderot, in an effort to understand how each has had an effect on the development of this concept. Here I discuss the artists that Diderot held in high regard, looking at what part their practices played in the development of absorptive art in the eighteenth century. I will consider how this unlocks the questions that Fried was only able to speculate on concerning aesthetic absorption and the painter-painting relationship, the painter-beholder. A hierarchy of genres existed in eighteenth century painting that

---

<sup>44</sup> Diderot initially defined the term tableau in his Encyclopédie article on ‘Composition’: ‘A well-composed picture (tableau) is a whole contained under a single point of view, in which the parts work together to one end and form by their mutual correspondence a unity as real as that of the members of the body of an animal; so that a piece of painting made up of a large number of figures thrown at random on to the canvas, with neither proportion, intelligence nor unity, no more deserves to be called a true composition than scattered studies of legs, nose and eyes on the same cartoon deserve to be called a portrait or even a human figure.’

Diderot, D. The ARTFL Project, ‘Composition’. Available at: <<http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2:1718:7.encyclopedie0513>> [Accessed 21/03/17], (non-paginated).

had initially emerged during the Italian Renaissance, which was used to establish the status of painting as separate to architecture and sculpture. In France, this hierarchy was enforced by the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture, the principle institution for distinguished artists and scholars. The pinnacle, and most prestigious of this hierarchy of genres was considered history painting; of dramatic and narrative-based scenes derived from historical, religious, mythological or allegorical settings. This was followed by: portrait painting, genre painting of scenes of everyday life, landscape painting, and ended with still life painting as the lowest of genres.

Diderot was select in the artists he championed, as discussed earlier. Two such artists were Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and Jean-Baptiste Greuze, both clearly driven and ambitious painters as demonstrated through their desire to be accepted as history painters.<sup>45</sup> Pierre-Jean Mariette wrote of Chardin how he struggled to produce work of quality: 'His brush has nothing facile about it' (Mariette cited in Rosenberg 2000 [1749]: 32). And Chardin's early and unsuccessful attempts at depicting action and movement required of history painting forced him to re-evaluate his position. Consequently he found a way to embrace his strengths, reject narrative, and transform his practice. His originality lay in his painting mainly the inanimate,<sup>46</sup> of that which he could arrange in front of his easel; thus creating a painting style unique to artists of this century (1980: 32).<sup>47</sup>

Greuze's desire to become a history painter came to a more dramatic peak in 1769 when he was required to submit his reception picture for his continued acceptance to the Académie.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, Greuze chose to submit a history painting as opposed to his usual genre painting. This painting *Septime Sévère et Caracalla* (1769),<sup>49</sup> was declared a failure, not only by the members of the Académie, and the public, but also by Diderot.<sup>50</sup> At this time Greuze was already an established

---

<sup>45</sup> Chardin trained up his son Jean-Pierre to become a history painter. Tragically Jean-Pierre's painting career failed and all ended miserably when he committed suicide in Venice on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1772 (Rosenberg 2000: 15).

<sup>46</sup>Inanimate here is meant to describe scenes without action including still-lives and genre paintings that were uninterrupted by movement.

<sup>47</sup> Diderot writes: 'If the sublime of technique was not there, Chardin's ideal would be a wretched one' (1995b [1767]: 108).

<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that this was 10 years after first exhibiting at the salons, and was a formal requirement to become an accepted member of the Académie, and necessary to continue exhibiting within the salons.

<sup>49</sup> Greuze, J. B. (1769) *Septime Sévère et Caracalla* [Oil on canvas]. Louvre, Paris, France.

<sup>50</sup> Brookner writes: 'Diderot was patronizing "Greuze is out of his class; a scrupulous imitator of nature, he has not been able to rise to the sort of exaggeration demanded of history painting."' (Diderot cited in Brookner 1972: 68).

and successful genre artist, but being defeated in achieving the status of history painter greatly affected him, and as a result he left the Académie, turning his back on it. This affair also ended what Anita Brookner describes as the 'weathercock friendship of Diderot' (1972: 154), as no doubt Diderot's disloyalty left Greuze greatly wounded.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of such disservice, Emma Baker argues that Greuze should be seen as the 'inventor and principal ... exponent of a distinct genre, the painting of sentiment' (2007: 3), and not just a mere precursor to Davidian history painting.

Of these artists, Fried writes that Chardin:

made painting after painting in which engrossment, reflection, reverie, obliviousness, and related states are represented with a persuasiveness equal to that achieved by the greatest masters of the past, and by so doing perpetuated as much of what I shall call the absorptive tradition as it was in one man's power to keep alive. (1980: 44)

This compared to Greuze, who Fried felt was the turning point in French painting:

Greuze was unquestionably the chief continuator in his generation of the absorptive essence of Chardin's art ... the sentimentalism, emotionalism, moralism, exploitation of sexuality, and invention of narrative-dramatic structures characteristic of Greuze's treatment of absorption contrast sharply with the concentration and "purity" of Chardin's rendering of absorptive motifs. (1980: 61)

Fried also puts forward the idea that the work of Chardin is a precursor to that of Manet, whose work he identifies with the birth of pictorial modernism, which he sees here as becoming apparent.

Recently, Manet's work has been examined in relation to the painting-beholder experience in a study carried out by Harland et al. (2014). The study tracked eye movements supported by verbal statements to question how beholders experience Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882-83),<sup>52</sup> a painting that is understood to

---

<sup>51</sup> Greuze must have felt this doubly so, as earlier on Diderot had argued for a revision of the category of history painting to be opened up to include painters of genre subjects such as Greuze and Vernet, because of their 'mastery of the representation of action' (Fried 1980: 75).

<sup>52</sup> Manet, E (1882-83) *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* [Oil on Canvas] The Courtauld Gallery, London, England.

employ ‘both “absorptive” and “acknowledging” modes of address’ (2014: 241) to establish engagement with the painting-beholder. The study used experts (a group of artists and art historians) and novices (who had seen the painting previously, but ‘had no prior training in art spectatorship nor any knowledge of relevant critical theory’ (ibid.: 243). What is interesting to this research is that this study found that only the expert participants were ‘sensitive’ (ibid.: 245) to Manet’s double relations within the painting,<sup>53</sup> whilst the novices, although fixed on other elements within the painting, seemed ‘insensitive to such complexity’ (ibid.: 247). These results suggest that only the expert is fully aware of what the artist Manet was trying to do with his work, what I will go on to describe as his programme. Whilst this is the first study to confirm that a certain level of visual expertise can be required to comprehend such programmes of practice, I would suggest that such understanding could be applied to any field of similar complexity. That it has been applied to painting in this example, suggests that prolonged viewing or contact with paintings and their connecting theories affords greater understanding, which I suggest supports the notion of the painter as expert-beholder.

Fried has examined the painter to painting relationship, that is the painter-beholder, to a much lesser degree compared to that of the painting-beholder, and by this I mean examining what is occurring for the painter-beholder in ways other than examining their paintings. In one of his comments on this issue, as was highlighted in my introduction, Fried suggests that Chardin possibly found the ‘absorption of his figures both a natural correlative for his own engrossment in the act of painting and a proleptic mirroring of what he trusted would be the absorption of the beholder before the finished work’ (1980: 51). This statement poses several problematics, the first regarding Fried’s expression ‘a natural correlative’, which seems to indicate that Fried is proposing that Chardin himself had a corresponding reaction to absorption in the act of representing it. Perhaps Fried means that this absorptive state is something existing in nature, or human nature, as opposed to something created by humankind, and that the painter is merely exploiting that nature, or that one form of aesthetic absorption inevitably produces the other.

The next problematic arises with Fried’s use of the term ‘finished work’. It is a seemingly simple term that upon deeper enquiry remains obscure, raising questions: how does the beholder know a work is finished, or even how does the painter-

---

<sup>53</sup> That is, the reflections that play with our understanding of our position as painting-beholder standing in front of the painting.

beholder know this, and is it irrelevant whether the painting is finished, as long as the intended experience is encountered? The final problematic becomes apparent with Fried describing how Chardin 'trusted' that his experience was a precursor to the same experience happening for the beholder. This use of the word 'trusted' is a strong term for something that is uncertain and possibly unknowable. It reads like 'expected - or does Fried mean Chardin 'put trust in', reading more analogous with a faith in the efficacy of his work because of his own experience of it? It also highlights that this exchange isn't guaranteed, and as such the painting-beholder cannot in fact be trusted to experience aesthetic absorption in the way the painter-beholder intends.

In his speculation on Chardin's process, Fried demonstrates an attempt at understanding the painter to painting relationship. Such speculation in relation to art historical concerns is understandable, little being recorded from the artist at first hand, and especially considering how notoriously guarded Chardin was of his process. Only fragmented reports exist, such as where Diderot wrote: 'It is said of the latter [Chardin] that his technique is totally idiosyncratic and that he uses his thumb as much as his brush. I don't know if this is true, but I am sure of one thing though, namely that I've never known anyone who has seen him work' (Diderot 1995b [1767]: 86).

The underlying concept that the artist should be a genius,<sup>54</sup> to work painlessly from innate talent, could go some way to explaining some of the secrecy built around artists' practice. Describing this genius, Caroline Jones writes: 'the artist observes, but is not of the world' (1996: 15), which is a trope of genius that grew out of Renaissance Italy and stories of Michelangelo (ibid.: 7), and a notion to be further romanticised by Baudelaire in 1863.<sup>55</sup> It may be that Chardin grew secretive about his process as a reaction to the early derogatory comments he received, such as those from Mariette as discussed earlier. Hence it may be that Chardin was trying to protect his laboured approach to painting practice, resulting in the perpetuation of the idea of the effortless artist-genius.

---

<sup>54</sup> Genius is meant here in the Kantian sense of a substitute for nature, although Kant was yet to set down his ideas in *Critique of Judgment* (2008 [1790]).

<sup>55</sup> See: Baudelaire, C. (2010) [1863] *The Painter of Modern Life*, London: Penguin Books.

There is another issue at work here that relates to the underlying reasons why, as critics claim,<sup>56</sup> Diderot struggled to engage critically with the painting style of Chardin. Tunstall (2006) suggests Diderot takes a Plinian view of painting, following the belief that mimesis of nature was its true path, and hence illusion. This view forces Diderot into an unavoidable paradox of the competing claims of illusion and style: 'how is Diderot to account for his admiration for Chardin's paintings of inanimate, everyday objects, objects that are not in themselves admirable, without making reference to the style in which they are painted, which he cannot do without undermining the claim that they are perfect illusions?' (Tunstall 2006: 347) for as Diderot himself wrote: 'Style is to the arts what corruption is to the morals of a people' (Diderot cited in Starobinski et al. 2007: 131).

Here I have highlighted two separate agendas: Chardin and the impression of the artist genius, and Diderot and his Plinian paradox. Diderot, by adhering to the Plinian view of painting, is driven to find alternative ways of encountering Chardin's paintings, and in this endeavour he even suggests that Chardin's objects are not created of paint, but of the very same matter as the objects.<sup>57</sup> Chardin, by concealing his painting process, cultivated an air of the esoteric, remaining rarefied. Although these agendas initially seem isolated, they stem from a position born from defending against perceived threats that undermine these illusions: of mimesis of nature in the paintings, of the substitute for nature in the genius painter. For Diderot nature was truth, truth was natural,<sup>58</sup> therefore the antithesis was the unnatural, which for Diderot was all that was mannered, affected, and theatrical.<sup>59</sup>

What emerges is how, in following their own agendas, both Diderot and Chardin work towards the continuing ambiguity of the artist and the artistic process, and subsequently what we are left with is conjecture when it comes to understanding the process of artists such as Chardin. For this reason, one particular comment by Diderot as discussed in the introduction, regarding Greuze's less secretive process

---

<sup>56</sup> For further details see: Starobinski J, Delon, M, and Cohen, A. (2007) *An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thoughts*, (ed.) by Jean Sez nec, Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York: Springer.

<sup>57</sup> Theological connotations that as Tunstall suggest are 'evoking an image of God breathing life into matter' (2006: 355).

<sup>58</sup> Diderot writes: 'Our steps cease involuntarily, our gaze plays over the magical canvas, and we cry out to one another: What a picture! How beautiful! It seems that we tend to consider nature as the product of art. And reciprocally, if a painter manages to achieve a similar enchantment on canvas, we tend to regard this result of art as natural. It's not in the Salon, it's in the depths of the forest, among the mountains over which the sun casts light and shadow that Loucherbourg and Vernet are great.' (Diderot 1995b: 203).

<sup>59</sup> Hence Diderot urging for a return to truth and nature, after the mannered Rococo (Fried 1980: 102).

holds particular weight and intrigue. It sheds more light in an otherwise shrouded area and specifically connects to aesthetic absorption within painting practice:

When he works, he is completely absorbed by his picture; it affects him profoundly, he carries around with him the personality of the figure he is portraying in his studio, sad or gay, foolish or serious, flamboyant or reserved, according to whatever has occupied his brush and his imagination that morning' (Diderot cited in Thompson 1989: 5).

I suggest this insight into Greuze's process connects with Fried's speculation on Chardin's process, (as was highlighted earlier) and provides a further key to unlocking the questions of practice. This is because it suggests that Greuze was so absorbed through his experience of painting practice that it spilled out of the studio into his everyday life, and as such points to a different state of making apart from the mundane. This is important because it suggests that here Greuze, in imagining and constructing himself as painter-beholder, in some way changed himself, that is he altered how he viewed and acted in relation to the world and in everyday life. His own personal experience could have informed his approaches to the painting-beholder.

#### **1.4 Beholdership in Diderot, Fried, and Wollheim**

Aside from these considerations, the painting-beholder debate does not open a dialogue on painting practice as initially it would seem to do. It is to a greater extent a discussion about 'beholdership'.<sup>60</sup> It is on this relationship of the painting-beholder that the thinking of Diderot and Fried connects with that of Wollheim. I introduce Wollheim's theory here in order to compare how these theories address the painter-beholder, the painter to painting relationship, and the questions of practice it raises. In *Art and its Objects* (1968) and *Painting as an Art* (1987) Wollheim<sup>61</sup> theorises that some paintings contain an 'internal spectator', a position within the painting suggesting a viewpoint that is a central imagining of the protagonist, and this spectator within the picture allows the spectator of the picture a 'distinctive access to the content' (1987: 129). By imagining from inside the painting as the internal spectator, the external spectator responds to the painting from his

---

<sup>60</sup> Throughout this thesis I predominantly use the term beholder in place of spectator (apart from a few select situations such as when discussing Wollheim's theories). This is because it follows the language used by Fried, and as such better describes the relationship of viewer or artist to painting.

<sup>61</sup> In 1961-62 Fried studied philosophy under Richard Wollheim at University College, London.

viewpoint. This imagined position provides the external spectator with all the insight and experience without the physical participation, thus giving the external spectator an 'enriched' understanding of the picture before them.

To illustrate this hypothesis, Wollheim looks to the work of Caspar David Friedrich. In *The Large Enclosure, near Dresden* (1832) (Fig. 7) Friedrich uses a high viewpoint showing the curvature of the earth, which seemingly makes the spectator hover above the immediate foreground that runs underneath. Wollheim believed that Friedrich structured his paintings to convey the viewpoint of the nature-artist and their 'spiritual vision'. This effectively introduced them as the internal spectator,<sup>62</sup> projecting 'what he sees inwardly on to what he sees outwardly ... his perception of nature becomes his subject matter' (1987: 138). Wollheim analyses how he achieves this through an alternative reading of the Börsch-Supan theory,<sup>63</sup> by reconstructing the repertoire of the internal spectator in the painting using represented elements to reproduce emotions and feelings of that spectator.

This knowledge of the outside then equips us and allows us to reconstruct the internal spectator's 'visual experience' (ibid.:139), resulting in the depth of response from spectator *in* to spectator *of* the picture. Wollheim argues that Friedrich paints in such a way 'to do nothing less than convert the spectator' (ibid.: 140), suggesting Friedrich is positioning the spectator in a godly capacity, looking down from the skies above, to arouse the divine experience.

---

<sup>62</sup> Friedrich's paintings sometimes lack the protagonist Wollheim originally stipulates. Where these works were designed to be viewed as part of a series, so paintings with a protagonist work in conjunction with those without.

<sup>63</sup> As Wollheim highlights, Helmut Börsch-Supan suggests a method where distinct senses are attributed to representational elements within a picture and the way these elements are structured (1987: 138).

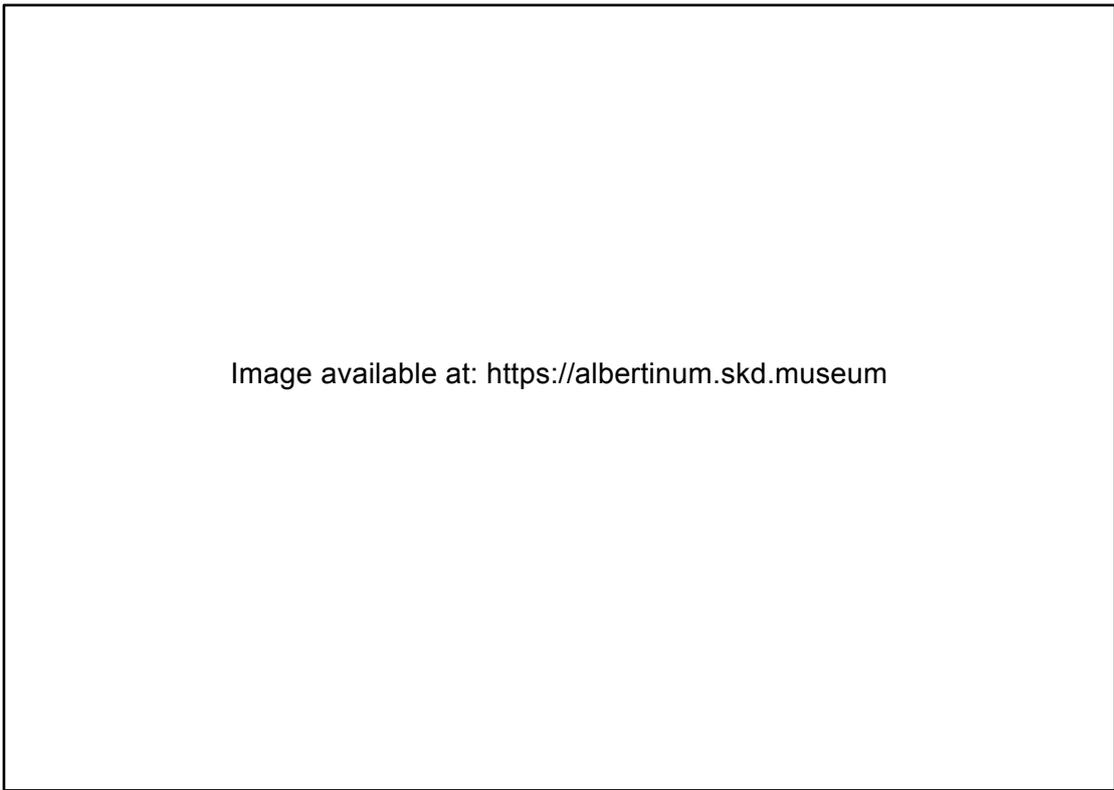


Image available at: <https://albertinum.skd.museum>

Figure 7. Caspar David Friedrich, *The Large Enclosure, near Dresden* (1832)

Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 184cm

(Old Masters Picture Gallery, Dresden)



Figure 8. Johann Philipp Veith,  
*The Large Enclosure, near Dresden after Friedrich* (1832)  
Copper engraving on paper, 22 x 29.5cm  
(Private Collection)

The reverse was seen when *The Large Enclosure, near Dresden* (1832) by Friedrich (Fig. 7) was recreated as an etching. The printer Johann Philipp Veith 'corrected' this point of view, and in Wollheim's words 'made the picture totally banal' (1987: 136) (Fig. 8). Thus we see how Friedrich's painting offers the distinction of being somewhere other than the banal, perhaps of somewhere heavenly. Such a consideration is pertinent to this research, because it sets up through aesthetic positioning something distinct from the banal, a point of transition that Friedrich created in order for us, the spectator, to realize.

Fried found a new sort of beholder could be argued for in Friedrich's works, where the self is '*brought before* itself in the activity of representation (*Vorstellung*)' (1980: 104) and as such the understanding of the beholder is enhanced because of the painting. For Fried, drawing from the theories of Fichte, and other German Idealist philosophers, this explains Friedrich's symmetrical composition, his use of the Rückenfigur (figures depicted from behind, looking into the landscape) and the effects of transparency and minimal surface qualities.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Fried posits, this new sort of beholder could be satisfied by the creation of a new sort of object, the 'fully realised' tableau (ibid.).

Both of these conceptualisations connect with a less discussed aspect of Diderot's notions, namely what Fried describes as Diderot's 'secondary or *pastoral* conception' (1980: 132). This 'offshoot' or 'special case of the dramatic' (ibid.), establishes the fiction of the beholder's physical presence within the painting 'by virtue of an almost magical recreation of the effect of nature itself' (ibid.),<sup>65</sup> as seen in the work of artists like Claude-Joseph Vernet. Initially, this seems contrary to what Fried calls the ultimate aim for Diderot and the art of painting, that of establishing the fiction of the non-existence of the beholder.

However, Fried suggests that this is put right for both conceptions when the 'estrangement of the beholder from the objects they are beholding is overcome; the condition of spectatorship is transformed and thereby redeemed; and the beholder is stopped and held, sometimes for hours at a stretch if contemporary testimony is

---

<sup>64</sup> For further analysis see: BFor further, H. (1974) *Caspar David Friedrich*, (trans.) by Sarah Twohig, New York: George Braziller.

<sup>65</sup> Without using representations of figures in absorptive activities.

to be believed, in front of the painting' (ibid.). In other words, by painting landscapes that capture 'nature itself' and imagining the painting-beholder positioned within them, Vernet creates a successful absorptive strategy, thus vindicating or honouring the beholder position. Fried similarly, in discussing the processes of Courbet (1990) and Caravaggio (2010) posits that it is also the painter-beholder's underlying need to establish the fiction of their own physical presence within the painting, for the painter to become physically and psychically engaged during their painting process, as I will now discuss.<sup>66</sup>

### 1.5 Courbet and the Studio

There have been numerous readings of Courbet's painting *The Painter's Studio: A real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic and moral life* (1854-55) (Fig. 9), partly perhaps because of its curious composition of characters. Of these readings, the one that has come to be the most accepted (also by Fried and Linda Nochlin) is by Klaus Herding (1991). Part of what Herding advances (based on work already achieved including Toussaint's), is through an examination of the people within the painting, the 'dialogue' of their portrayal, and their significance as part of the composition.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> 'I have interpreted as representing, indirectly or metaphorically, the painter-beholder's physical and psychical engagement in the activity of painting and, ultimately, his desire to transport himself as if bodily into the work taking shape before him' (Fried 1990: 152).

<sup>67</sup> I include Herding's complete description here to give a sense of Courbet's designs: 'According to H  l  ne Toussaint, those represented are (starting in the left foreground): Napoleon III (seated), with two of his ministers; Finance Minister Fould; Courbet's "Jew" holding the strongbox on the far left; and seated to the emperor's right, the "purveyor of cheap textiles", Minister of the Interior Persigny. Then come two loyalist newspapermen, next to Fould the ultramontane "priest" Veuillot, and opposite Persigny, a republican, Emile de Girardin, to whom Courbet referred to as "the coroner". Behind the emperor would be Lazare Carnot (d.1823), who voted for the execution of Louis XVI in 1792 and became minister of the interior under Napoleon I; next to him, in the white uniform of the Italian *chasseurs* with the red scarf of the revolutionary armies, Toussaint sees Garibaldi, the first in a series of personifications of foreign countries. Then come Kossuth, with bonnet, representing the Hungarian rebels, and Ko  sciuszko (d.1817), representing the Polish freedom fighters. The latter, in allusion to these fighters' nickname, *faucheurs* (harvesters), is holding a scythe. Between Persigny and Girardin appear a carnival strongman symbolizing Turkey and a jester in Chinese costume symbolizing European ties with the Far East. Behind Girardin, finally we see a young woman who may represent an allusion to Greece, and a laborer with the features of Herzen, the Russian socialist. Beneath a life-size lay figure crouches a woman--to whom Courbet himself referred as an Irish-woman--dressed in rags and suckling her baby, an embodiment of abject poverty.

To the right of the central group appear the friends of art: the musician Promayet with a violin under his arm; Courbet's patron, Bruyas; Proudhon, Cuenot, and Buchon; seated, Champfleury, and at his feet a boy drawing; behind them, a couple representing free love. Then comes another, elegant, couple, the only figures on this side whose identity is still controversial. They probably represent Apollonie Sabatier, and her escort, the Belgian banker Mosselman. Finally seated in the corner, engrossed in a book, is Baudelaire' (Herding 1991: 46).

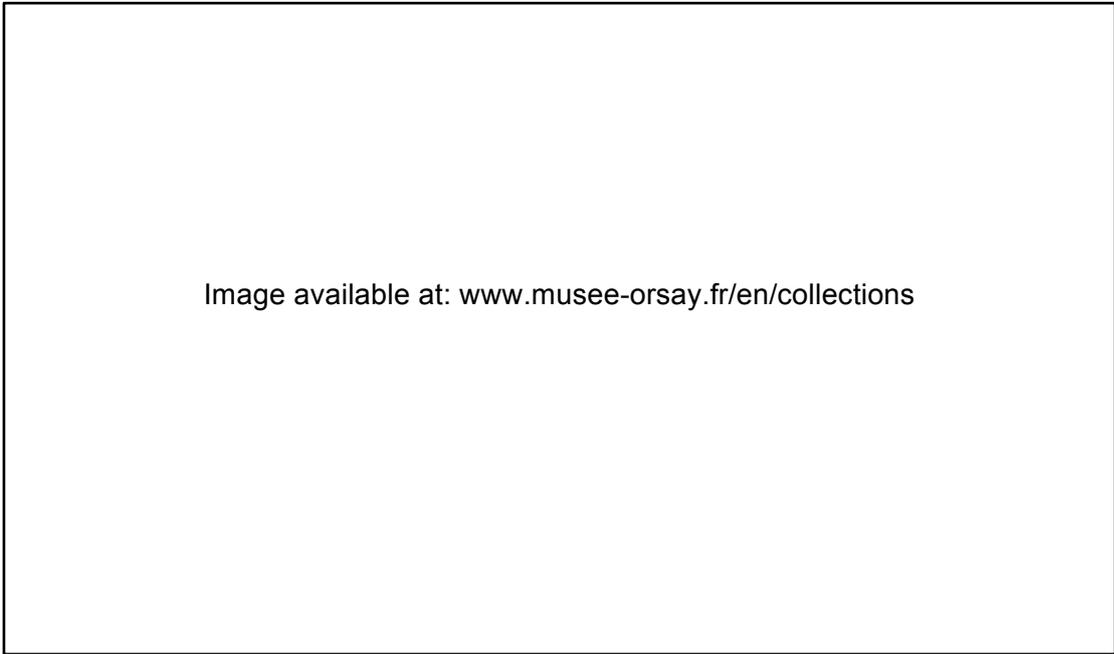


Image available at: [www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections)

Figure 9. Gustave Courbet,  
*The Painter's Studio: A real allegory summing up seven years  
of my artistic and moral life* (1854-55)  
Oil on canvas, 361 x 598cm  
(Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

Foremost amongst these individuals, and most pertinent to its interpretation he suggests, is the Emperor Napoleon III who is portrayed seated to the left of Courbet, wearing long boots with two dogs sitting at his feet.<sup>68</sup> That he is not painted in prime position, but positioned to Courbet's left, is crucial to Herding's hypothesis (of four points), and derived by reflecting on the intended destination of the painting at Napoleon's 1855 Paris World Fair.<sup>69</sup>

Herding initially highlights how, by painting himself receiving Napoleon in his studio, Courbet has bestowed upon himself an honour he never received, and in doing so has reversed a tradition of painting actual meetings of artists and rulers in the studio by the masters.<sup>70</sup> And in painting himself centrally, Courbet has made himself 'the fulcrum around which everything revolves' (ibid.: 56). Thus, Herding argues, Courbet is suggesting it is not the artist dependent on the social position of this man of power, but in fact the opposite.<sup>71</sup>

The second point Herding raises relates to Courbet's gathering of key figures in this painting. He argues that Courbet is likening his studio to Napoleon's international gathering of the World Fair. By bringing Bonapartists, socialists, Frenchmen and foreigners together Courbet is 'symbolically demonstrating the possibility of the peaceful coexistence of diverse opinions and stances' (ibid.: 57). Therefore, the *Studio* could be described as a petition for peace and reconciliation at a time when France was the scene of numerous warfronts.<sup>72</sup> With this petition Courbet is presenting himself as 'intermediary and his art as an instrument to solve and cure' (ibid.: 58), to serve the 'more comprehensive end of human understanding and peaceful coexistence' (ibid.).

---

<sup>68</sup> Napoleon was renowned for wearing such boots, and illustrations of boots were often used in caricatures or in place of him (Herding 1991: 49).

<sup>69</sup> Courbet hoped to exhibit *The Painter's Studio* at the Exposition Universelle des Beaux-Arts as part of the World Fair 1855, but the Exposition Jury decided it couldn't exhibit two of his large works. This angered Courbet so instead he mounted an exhibition of his own work in his 'Pavillon du Réalisme', as near to the Exposition Universelle as was possible (Fried 1990: 156).

<sup>70</sup> Herding suggests: 'Leonardo Dying in the arms of Francis I, The Pope Paying His Last Respects to the Dead Raphael, The Pope's visit to Raphaels's Studio, or Emperor Maximilian Visiting Dürer at Work' (1991: 56).

<sup>71</sup> 'Courbet himself disarmingly stated in 1870, a few weeks before Napoleon's downfall, 'I am the foremost man in France' (Herding 1991: 57).

<sup>72</sup> 'The French fleet had been dispatched to the Dardanelles, Napoleon had declared war on Russia, Greece was occupied by British and French troops, and the battles of Alma and Inkerman were taking place' (Herding 1991: 57).

The third point concerns the landscape painting within the *Studio*. Herding suggests that by positioning himself painting a landscape, Courbet creates a metaphor for a 'vision of *nature*' that is 'unsullied' and a 'fruitful soil of social regeneration' (ibid.: 59) derived from Courbet's long-held belief against the urbanisation of modern society (ibid.: 60).

Lastly, Herding's fourth point proposes that with the *Studio* Courbet is asserting his belief in the social role of art, his philosophy of a truth inherent in nature, and a new aesthetic. By giving himself, someone who is considered a 'bohemian and outsider' (ibid.: 61), central focus in the composition whilst painting a landscape, Courbet is stating that an art that mirrors nature is an art dedicated to freedom - and as such plays a role not just equal, but superior to philosophy, religion, politics and poetry. This was an 'art that was open, no longer dependent on previous knowledge, and accessible to all ... the prerequisite for the claim that art could occupy the *center* of society' [original italics] (ibid.). That being the case, Herding's reading of the *Studio* indicates that Courbet's allegory unfolds as a call for the reconciliation of society through art.<sup>73</sup>

Alan Bowness is in agreement with this emphasis on notions of freedom (1972). Here Courbet has created a painting where the artist and the activity of painting are foremost.<sup>74</sup> Bowness suggests that Courbet's *Studio* is 'the modern artist's declaration of independence, of absolute freedom to create what he wants to create' (1972: 30). He suggests that the *Studio* paved the way for a 'complete rethinking of art initiated by Manet and the impressionists', and that with this painting 'more than with any other ... we are at the threshold of modern art' (ibid.: 30).

Fried's analysis of Courbet's *Studio* also focuses on the centre of this painting and the activity of painting: of Courbet, the small boy, the nude model and the playful cat. Fried highlights how Courbet's unusual posture whilst painting seems to bodily join with the lower part of the canvas in a kind of quasi-corporeal merger similar to Courbet's other works such as the *Wheat Sifters* (1853-54) and *Wounded Man*

---

<sup>73</sup> Herding considers that Courbet's controversial message led to the *Studio* being suppressed and prevented it from being widely exhibited in its time (1991: 48).

<sup>74</sup> Herding also draws attention to Courbet's technique, describing it as a 'continual tension between integration and disintegration' (1991: 141) and how it developed towards a simplification of form, resulting in a type of 'dissolution' (ibid.: 145) and 'dematerialization' (ibid.: 149) of the object. According to Champfleury, objects were often surrounded by 'incorporeal' zones (ibid.: 150), which began a departure from realism, creating the antinomy where 'abstraction advanced to become the most realistic method of appropriating reality' (ibid.: 155).

(1844-54). Fried brings to our attention how the landscape painting Courbet is working on within the painting features a river that flows into a waterfall, which seems to continue in a symbolic sense. It flows from the canvas by way of white pigment: through the small boy, the cat, the discarded clothes of the model, by the material that she holds (1990: 161), and this cascade continues by seeming to flow into the figure of the painter. Fried shows us how the contours of the model echo the trees within this landscape and the lines of the seated Courbet, effectively leaving him 'physically enclosed, one might say subsumed, within the painting he is making wherever the ultimate limits of that painting lie' (ibid.: 162).

In these readings we have seen it argued that Courbet has specifically constructed his painting the *Studio* in order to express many beliefs; of the Kantian call for an art that mirrors nature, of the social role of this art, of this 'art as an instrument to solve and cure'. Significantly, that he is using a picture of his own studio to do this and how he becomes almost 'subsumed' by the painting suggests it is all to do with what he ultimately thinks his painting practice is about, what it can be used for, and how this might potentially come to be. As such, this painting is about a particular position made available only to the painter, and a staking of a position of independence, of a freedom from outside agendas.

If Bowness, like Zola, is correct in declaring Courbet the father of Modernism, I suggest it is not only for his technique, his formal considerations or avant-garde compositions, but also through the radical stance he takes and the position and role he claims for the painter, for himself. Here Courbet is using the *Studio* as his manifesto, as his programmed intervention into a normative regime of vision, to change our way of seeing the world against dominant modes of perception. This differs from the role of an artist like Greuze, who represented scenes of social relations as a way to 'touch us, to instruct us and to invite us to virtue' (Diderot cited in Starobinski et al. 2007: 138). It is this position that makes Courbet's work relevant to this research, in the way it has helped define painting practice today, and as such opens up the potential for that in the painting practice of my collaborators. In the following chapter, I will discuss how from this approach a discourse on art historical aesthetics has now emerged as a dialogue on studio aesthetics.

## 1.6 Caravaggio's Distinctions

It isn't until we look at Fried's later book *The Moment of Caravaggio* (2010), that he gives greater consideration to what occurs during painting process. Of specific interest is the passage where Fried speculates about two particular 'moments' of Caravaggio's process, which he suggests are made evident in his paintings, Caravaggio's painting *Boy bitten by a Lizard* (c.1594-5) (Fig. 10) being one example.

Fried suggests that in this painting we can see two 'moments' of its production (2010: 39). The '*immersive*' moment where the painter is 'so caught up, so immersed, in the work on the painting as to be less than fully aware of any sharp distinction between the painting and himself' (ibid.). Here he describes the rose in the vase in the bottom right corner of the painting.

...the marvellously delicate rose surrounded by dark green leaves that obscures the neck of the vase even as it seems to draw the light to its own internal articulations may perhaps be seen as figuring, if not for the first immersive "moment" as such, at any rate a nonspecular relation to the rose as a motif—as if we are invited to imagine an act of painting that could render that motif only by "blindly" submitting to it, losing itself in its folds.

(Fried 2010: 54)

And the second moment Fried names as '*specular*', which he describes as associated with violence, pain and shock of the bitten boy. This moment is:

...notionally instantaneous, of separating or recoiling from the painting, of becoming detached from it, which is to say of no longer being immersed in work on it but rather of seeing it, taking it in, as if for the first time; I call that "moment" *specular*, meaning thereby to emphasize the strictly visual or optical relation between the artist-viewer and the image. (ibid.)

Later, Fried suggests that these moments offer structural rather than temporal distinctions, as each could be 'in play throughout the production' of the painting (ibid.: 50). However, in contrast, in a note at the end of the book, Fried adds:

to speak of a "moment" of immersion is not *necessarily* to posit an actual stage in the production of a given painting; my claim is rather that Caravaggio's paintings characteristically invite us to imagine such

a “moment” along with a subsequent “moment” in which the work is given over to beholding – in other words, that such a distinction should be understood in the first instance as structural rather than literal.

(Fried 2010: 275)

Fried’s qualification leaves the status of these moments as something we ‘imagine’ through the structure of Caravaggio’s paintings, moments that are possible, but not ‘*necessarily*’ actual. Yet earlier he clearly describes his thesis as the ‘two “moments” in the production of Caravaggio’s paintings’ (ibid.: 50). Fried’s caveat in a footnote that these ‘moments’ are ‘structural rather than literal’, may indicate Fried’s recognition of where his hypotheses from his analytical position outside the studio falls short of any corroboration. Fried himself highlights this struggle to understand from his position of art historian, writing that it can be ‘made intuitable, only by an act of interpretation that cannot quite point to knockdown evidence in its support’ (ibid.: 39). And as Alison Green notes: ‘Fried has a general tendency to use footnotes to refer to things that he’s not sure about’ (2017: 99).

Here we have seen how Fried describes both Caravaggio’s and Courbet’s attempts to quasi-corporeally merge themselves in the painting. Fried suggests this is an effort to negate the presence of beholder – even the painter-beholder - in order to resolve the issue of a theatrical address to the beholder. Thus a painting can entirely escape the presence of the beholder by denying or subsuming both the painter-beholder and painting-beholder. (2010: 44). In order to address this moment of specularity, that is, the separateness of painter from painting, Fried suggests Caravaggio confronts these ‘issues of spectatordom’ (ibid.: 48) by depicting moments of violence, whereas Courbet, in contrast, paints himself as subsumed by the painting. These approaches both highlight the importance of aligning beholdership with theory/practice relationships. What I find particularly interesting is Fried’s distinction between immersive and specular. As was discussed in the introduction, this hypothesis on Caravaggio’s process when considered through Joselit’s theory of the disorganized/organized ‘aesthetic threshold’ (Joselit 2016: 16) gives us new insights into practice, which I discuss further in Chapter 3.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> A similar description arises where Fried describes Courbet’s work as ‘absorptive thematics comprising a range of states from (relatively) active to (relatively) passive ... grounded in the painter-beholder’s vigorous yet also automatic engagement in a sustained act of pictorial representation that the painting itself, virtually in every feature, can be shown to represent’ (1990: 182).



Image available at: [www.nationalgallery.org.uk](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk)

Figure 10. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Boy bitten by a Lizard* (c.1594-5)

Oil on canvas, 66 x 49.5cm

(National Gallery, London)

## 1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the genealogy of aesthetic absorption, tracing how this concept has developed over the centuries from Ancient Greece, to Pliny, the Salon writings of Diderot, to a modernist trajectory via Greenberg and the art critical and art historical writings of Fried.

I have examined Wollheim's theory of the spectator 'of' and the spectator 'in' the painting through the work of Friedrich, and how this was an attempt at providing an experience apart from the banal for the painting-beholder. This compares to Fried's *Vortsellung* where the self is '*brought before* itself in the activity of representation, of which this new sort of beholder could be satisfied by the 'fully realised' tableau.

We have seen how Courbet's approach of using the *Studio* as a manifesto stakes a position of independence and freedom from outside agendas for the painter, a position which has had a huge impact on painting practice today. In claiming this position, Courbet secured the possibility of creating a programmed intervention into dominant modes of perception from the studio as a site of analysis. As such, this idea of a programmed intervention enables a focus on the possibilities of absorptive strategies, a position which helps establish both the approach and justification to the studio as site of analysis.

I have discussed Fried's distinction of the immersive and specular moments in Caravaggio's painting process, which Fried suggests is made evident in his paintings. And we have seen how this distinction can align with Joeslit's theory of an aesthetic threshold to provide a framework to further understand the process of making paintings.

By tracing the development of the concept of aesthetic absorption I have shown how this concept has evolved over time, through moments of great historical change and how it continues to form a vital point of engagement for artists and art historians alike. In juxtaposition to these written theories produced by art historians and critics, the following dialogue generated by the collaborative group of actively practicing painters takes the discussion from the realm of the hypothetical to the reality of what is happening in painting practice today. Their discussions, from both individual interviews and two round table discussions, has highlighted particular areas where there seem to be gaps or limits to these existing theories on aesthetic absorption and painting practice, as I will now go on to discuss.



## **Chapter 2: A Dialogue on Absorption**

2.0 Summary

2.1 Introducing the Collaborators

2.2 Quantitative Results

2.3 Dialogical Results

2.4 The Dynamics Of Absorption

2.5 The Problematics of Theory and Practice

2.6 The Uncertainty of Agency

2.7 Staking Claims

2.8 Conclusion

### **Index Of Collaborators**

AB: Andrew Bick

SC: Simon Callery

SE: Stuart Elliot

AG: Alison Goodyear

AMJ: Andrea Medjesi-Jones

KP: Katie Pratt

GW: Gary Wragg

### **2.0 Summary**

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, it was decided to use a dialogical methodology to examine the question of absorption, an experience that in Diderot and Fried is aestheticized, achieved through the activity of painting, and realised in the studio.

To generate this dialogue with my collaborators, I interviewed each of them in their respective studios. As the research is about painting practice, this was the prime location to enable this type of discussion. It allowed for particular works to be referred to and examined, discussion of technique and process, and a deeper scrutiny of the studio environment. As this was familiar territory for the collaborators it helped them feel more at ease. Prior to each interview, I sent each collaborator the Lexicon and History of Engagement documents to allow for a uniform understanding of the concepts the research was engaging with. How much the collaborators studied these documents was entirely up to them. Inevitably some were more engaged or

familiar with the material than others, but this would be the case outside of the research context, and somewhat beyond the control of this project. I asked each of the collaborators the same 25 questions; this was in order to set a baseline from which the answers could be judged. These questions were designed to interrogate issues such as: does aesthetic absorption have a role or function in painting practice? Some questions were designed to prepare the interviewee for questions that interrogated a deeper understanding of what is actually occurring within the painter to painting relationship. For example, asking about each collaborator's practice was a way of formulating a basic understanding of how each painter produced their work and talked about that practice.

These individual interviews were followed by two round table events, which were designed to enable a dialogue that was used to understand what the case is for absorption. This dialogue looks at what terms map onto what parts of process or experience that we can use to account for this thing called absorption in painting process. The result of all these discussions is that the foundation for this research is not the individual artist's experience, but the dialogue itself.<sup>76</sup>

In this Chapter I begin by discussing the quantitative findings derived from the individual interviews, and the picture the results start to build. This is followed by an analysis of the interviews and the two round table discussions. This calls to attention the concerns and hesitations that the collaborators experience in relation to the hypotheses of Diderot and Fried, as discussed in Chapter 1.

This analysis reveals how absorption does or does not work for the collaborators, namely what occurs in the studio. It shows how hesitant they are to declare themselves for or against absorption as a state of making, and how they may or may not utilise absorption in practice, which brings to light confusion surrounding Fried's terms. Nonetheless, what is clear is that all of the collaborators claim that they experience absorption in some form or another in relation to painting.

However, as a result of this research what becomes apparent is that those claims might be confused between the banal and the aesthetic mode of absorption. This is made evident where absorption is likened to 'checking Facebook, or cooking' (SE INT: 48.40), compared to a process that is 'definitely cognitive' (AMJ INT:

---

<sup>76</sup> The questionnaire and transcriptions of all of the interviews are included in the appendix.

51.00). It is these claims that can be clarified with reference to the threshold, that is, which mode is being encountered or contended with; the banal or the aesthetic.

This research highlights how Fried's terms compel the collaborators to raise questions of agency, asking whether what the artist experiences or intends matters for the absorption of the painting-beholder, and how this relates to Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring. This highlights the collaborators' further hesitancy, of what artists feel they can or cannot claim of their work. What becomes apparent here is how the relationship of theory to practice falls short, and as a result how the issue of absorption becomes increasingly hard to negotiate, as they go on to describe.

## 2.1 Introducing the Collaborators

These six painters were chosen because they demonstrate the capability to engage, interrogate and enter into a dialogue on aesthetic absorption, whilst sharing an interest in formal considerations, such as methods of repetition, interplay of surface and layering, of gesture, making marks, composition, construction and a serial approach to painting practice. This is manifest in the work of Andrea Medjesi-Jones<sup>77</sup> (Fig. 11 & 12), who describes her practice as 'concerned with the nature of painterly image in relation to material processes, distribution and value assessment of image production, underlined by different cultures and traditions of painting'.<sup>78</sup> These values are consistent with debates on tableau, and absorption and theatricality. This can also be seen in the work of Stuart Elliot,<sup>79</sup> whose paintings employ various systematic methods that have been described as if they 'do not dramatically seek the attention of the spectator, rather it is that the spectator must become attentive to them (Fig. 13 & 14). This quality can be likened to a 'turning away' from the spectator. I'm tempted to position Elliot's practice here in line with the Diderot/Friedian mode of absorption' (Finch 2010).

Katie Pratt's process has been described as a 'system of rules that ... serve to mediate and regulate the image. There is a reciprocal relationship between the chaotic and the ordered and the artist is interested in the decision-making process

---

<sup>77</sup> Andrea Medjesi-Jones has presented her paper 'A Shock to Thought – conditions of the emerging image' at the: Tableau Project Research Symposium. Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London. May 21 2011, and in: *Tableau: Painting Photo Object* symposia. Tate Modern, London, 28–29 October 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Bath Spa University, 'Andrea Medjesi-Jones'. Available at: <<https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/our-people/andrea-medjesi-jones>> [Accessed 28/06/2017], (non-paginated).

<sup>79</sup> Stuart Elliot has exhibited at *Painting, Tableau, Stage* (2013) [Exhibition]. Urban Arts Space, Ohio State University, Ohio. 24 September–November 4 2013.

and relation between intuition and concept.<sup>80</sup> It is this relation between intuition and consideration of concept in Pratt's paintings that indicates potential insights on the consideration of absorption in painting process (Fig. 15 & 16). This use of certain rules or systems can also be seen in the process of Andrew Bick (Fig. 17 & 18), whose geometric paintings experiment with texture, surface, opacity and composition, in what has been described as a 'serious engagement into the way material objects and qualities generate particular qualities of attention' (2012).<sup>81</sup>

The process of Simon Callery has developed more recently from large-scale paintings into what he describes as 'physical paintings' (SC INT: 14.22) (Fig. 19 & 20). These works concentrate both on the stretcher and pigment-imbued canvas in order to consider what the beholder experiences. This practice, of all the collaborators, could be described as closest to the expanded field.<sup>82</sup> Whereas Gary Wragg's paintings work toward what might be considered a more traditional approach, 'reinventing the life of mark-making's tactility, colour and the optical/physical presence. In the remote and temporal imagery of the Internet age, he puts emphasis on the feeling and passion of the 'here and now' of painting regardless of shifts and trends',<sup>83</sup> hence his suitability as a collaborator in this research (Fig. 21 & 22).

My own painting practice, over the course of this research, has grown out of this process of exploring aesthetic absorption: my own and that of the beholder, in order to further understand its theoretical and practical implications. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

---

<sup>80</sup> Madden, N. (2003) 'Katie Pratt'. Available at: <[http://www.an.co.uk/artists\\_talking/artists\\_stories/single/83276](http://www.an.co.uk/artists_talking/artists_stories/single/83276)> [Accessed 25/05/2014], (non-paginated).

<sup>81</sup> Hales Gallery (2012) 'Andrew Bick: School Studies'. Available at: <[http://www.halesgallery.com/exhibitions/50/installation\\_shots](http://www.halesgallery.com/exhibitions/50/installation_shots)> [Accessed 14/07/17], (non-paginated).

<sup>82</sup> What counts as painting is examined in the exhibition and accompanying book *As Painting: Division and Displacement* (2001) by Armstrong, Lisbon and Melville, and discussed further in Chapter 3.

<sup>83</sup> Wragg, G. 'Gary Wragg'. Available at: <<http://www.garywraggstudio.co.uk>> [Accessed 11/10/15], (non-paginated).



Figure 11. Andrea Medjesi-Jones, *Paintings as tools* (2016) [Installed in studio]  
Wood, canvas strips, canvas fringing, canvas tape, pigment and spray paint,  
(variable sizes) (Collection of the Artist)



Figure 12. Andrea Medjesi-Jones, *Pink Flag (small)* (2017)  
Acrylic and pigment on canvas, 65 x 50cm  
(Collection of the Artist)



Figure 13. Stuart Elliot, *Untitled [41]* (2010)  
Acrylic paint, unprimed canvas, wood, 185 x 127cm  
(Collection of the Artist)



Figure 14. Stuart Elliot, *Untitled [42]* (2010)  
Acrylic paint, unprimed canvas, wood, 185 x 127cm  
(Collection of the Artist)



Figure 15. Katie Pratt, *Bluixcity* (2015)

Oil and canvas, 180 x 150cm

(Galerie Peter Zimmermann)

Photo credit: FXP Photography

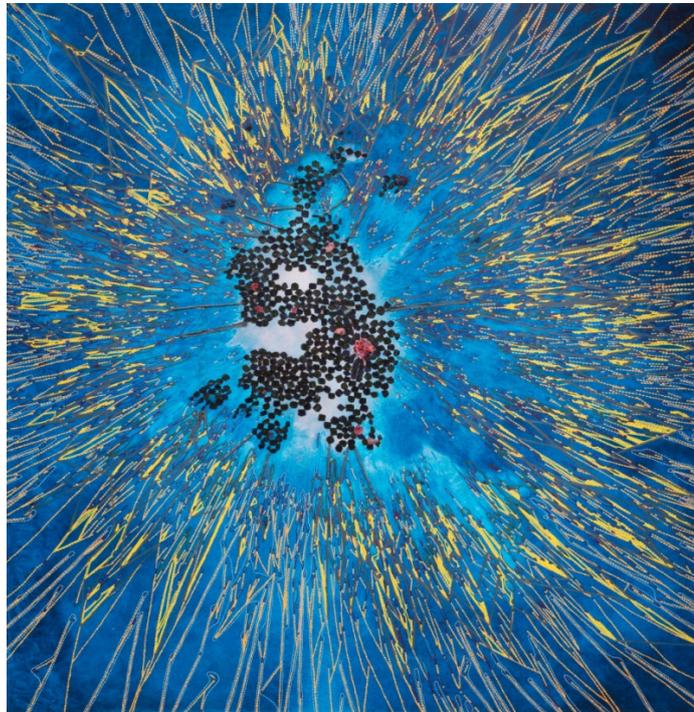


Figure 16. Katie Pratt, *Siscicily* (2017)

Oil, encaustic and canvas, 170 x 150cm

(Collection of the Artist)

Photo credit: FXP Photography



Figure 17. Andrew Bick, *OGVDS-GW #2 v3* (2015)  
Acrylic, oil paint, marker pen and wax on CNC machined perspex, 76 x 64 x 3.5cm  
(Private Collection)



Figure 18. Andrew Bick, *OGVDS-GW #7* (2016)  
Acrylic, pencil, oil paint, watercolour and wax on linen on wood, 76 x 64 x 3.5cm  
(Collection of the Artist)



Figure 19. Installation photograph: *Enantiodromia*, Fold Gallery,  
London, 15 March–10 May 2014, showing:  
Simon Callery, *Horizontal Black Pit Painting* (2014)

Distemper, canvas, wood, and aluminium, 33 x 62 x 49cm (Collection of the Artist)

© Simon Callery



Figure 20. Installation photograph: *Flat Paintings*, Fold Gallery,  
London, 9 October–14 November 2015, showing:  
Simon Callery, *Horizontal Black Pit Painting* (2014)

Distemper, canvas, wood, and aluminium, 33 x 62 x 49cm (Collection of the Artist)

© Simon Callery

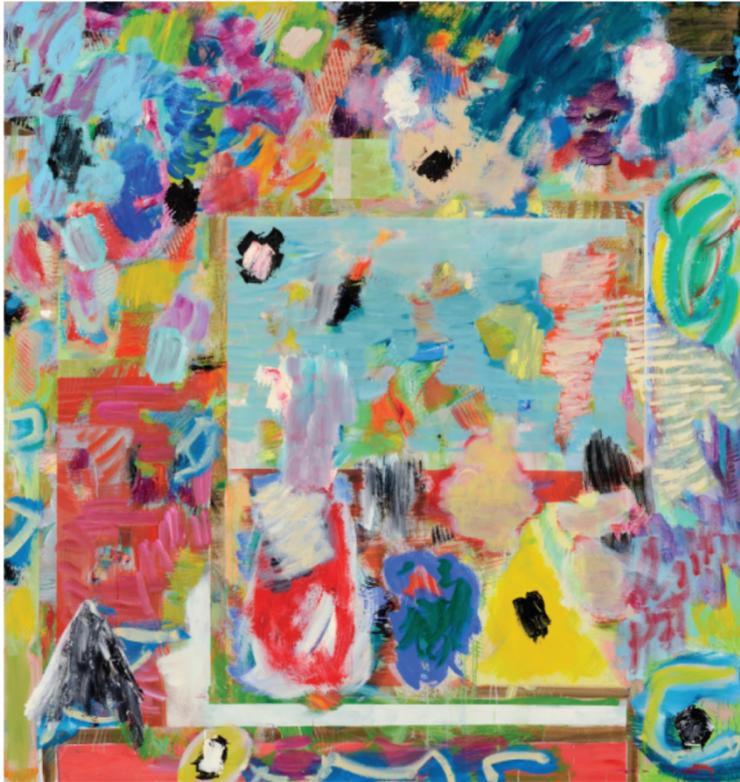


Figure 21. Gary Wragg, *Eddie's Café* (2005)  
Oil on canvas, 208 x 201cm  
(Collection of the Artist)



Figure 22. Gary Wragg, *Orange, Red Staggered Circuit* (2012-13)  
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 213 x 345cm  
(Collection of the Artist)

## **2.2 Qualitative Results**

As discussed in the introduction, over 104,000 words were transcribed from the individual interviews and round table discussions. Qualitative analysis of these dialogues allowed key findings to emerge. For example, in relation to the research title '*Privileged, unique and temporary: interpreting aesthetic experiences of the painter-painting relationship through an address to and from practice*', when asked if they would consider or describe themselves 'a privileged beholder at any time: before, during, or after painting process' all the collaborators said that they didn't feel privileged in this way, although three added that they felt privileged in many ways to be an artist. And when asked if they would describe 'the experience of painting each painting as a unique occurrence' only half of the collaborators agreed this was the case for them. And when discussing absorption in painting practice, all of the collaborators described having encountered the experience of being 'absorbed artists in their own painting process'. Although when describing themselves as absorbed beholders of their own paintings only four collaborators suggested they had or could act in this way, with two clarifying that this was a rare occurrence. However, over the course of the dialogues all of the collaborators described how they had encountered the experience of being the absorbed beholder in the painting of others. As such, the role this qualitative analysis played is that it clearly establishes the importance of claims on aesthetic absorption in painting practice for the collaborators. They are unanimous and confident in asserting that they have been the absorbed painting-beholder in the work of others, and also of their own painting process, but hesitant or uncertain towards their own finished work. Consequently these results indicate a crucial difference in the positions of painter-beholder and painting-beholder, and how they are negotiated.

## **2.3 Dialogical Results**

Following the individual interviews, two round table events were held with the collaborators. What follows next is an analysis of that combined dialogue. It highlights certain questions, issues and concerns that become apparent, as seen by the threads that appear within the dialogue. These threads are sectioned into four groups: the dynamics of absorption, the problematics of theory and practice, the uncertainty of agency, and staking claims.

This first thread of the dialogues, The Dynamics of Absorption, highlights how collaborators discuss absorption, and whether they encounter it in practice. This is

followed by a discussion about how this relates to the studio, which in turn reveals the hesitations of the collaborators, and how they respond to Fried's theories.

## **2.4 The Dynamics Of Absorption**

Both Diderot's and Fried's art historical theories hypothesize what is happening for the artist in painting practice. It was realized that a fundamental understanding needed to be reached from the dialogical material on whether the collaborators feel that they have encountered aesthetic absorption in painting practice. And added to this understanding was the consideration that if this was the case, the question is whether they consciously use that encounter and somehow put it to work in their practice. It is from the responses gained here that all other understandings and concerns grew. The initial dialogue began out of questions concerning these issues. Here AMJ describes how the process worked for her, shedding some light on what might be happening under the term of absorption:

When it comes to this absorption, it really has always for me been about a thought, that I would not be able to think unless I made a painting that sparked. So for me, that absorption, it is actually providing me with something I didn't know before, and to me that's usually something that is cognitive. It is provoked by the visual analogies, but it is definitely cognitive.  
(AMJ INT: 51.00)

AMJ's description of absorption as education brought about through a type of thinking to and from practice is echoed in SC's response when I asked, whether in the course of making a painting, had he ever encountered absorption? He replied:

...what's important is my engagement in the work when I'm making it. So I do remember making some works and they kind of appear without me really being involved in them and as a result of that they seem to have no meaning. It's important that my engagement is part of the process of making the painting. If I'm not, then I don't expect anyone else to be. And also I suppose it's to do with the fact that when you make work, certainly in my point of view, is that it's a learning experience, and if I just go through this kind of making a product then I'm not engaged, and I've not learnt anything. So I suppose that's why I would say I'm suspicious of it, of the result. I don't understand its value, because I haven't been through a process with it. (SC RT1: 10.19)

Similarly to AMJ, this suggests that for SC, absorption is not only about engagement with his work, but about a form of personal development, and if it isn't experienced in practice the detachment he experiences raises his suspicions as to its worth. For SC, this has everything to do with what he hopes the beholders of his work experience. Whilst this is a confirmation of absorption gained through practice, it also seems to correlate with Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring, that is, 'if I'm not engaged by the work then how can I expect it of others?' (SC RT1: 10.19).

To gain appreciation of how absorption might work from different positions, I asked the collaborators had they ever experienced a sense of absorption from other artists' work? AB replied:

I think it's what I am always looking for when I go and look at a collection, or a museum, or even in art fairs, which are incredibly pressured kind of competitive commercial contexts. I am looking for artworks which somehow contain something, which demand from me, a particular form of attentiveness; so this is the measure of everything really, finding works which do that, in art fairs as well, becomes a very important means of understanding how works of art contain and stimulate forms of attention. (AB INT: 39.00)

What is interesting here is AB's use of the term a 'particular form of attentiveness'. I would suggest this description could be substituted by the term absorption without change of meaning. Does this suggest that as a term absorption is wide ranging, or perhaps lacks specificity? I also want to question whether there is a notable reason why AB used this term instead of Fried's term of absorption. In response to the same question SE describes his experience and the reservations it provoked:

...that experience was so sudden, and so just like this, and so intense, but it was also the point at which I realized, or became deeply suspicious of claims made for this kind of lightning bolt effect, because I'd seen those paintings (by Poussin) a hundred times before and they'd done nothing. So something had happened to me, and I'd been conditioned or primed, or I acquired certain techniques of looking, or terms of understanding that somehow I'd been sensitized in a way. Next time I walk through the charged field of that room I will... you know something happened. (SE RT1: 51.21)

It is clear here that SE is not denying what he experienced from the position of painting-beholder, the strength of it ('charged field of that room'), or that it was the Poussin painting that initiated it. But what is interesting is the caveat or suspicion that SE attaches to this experience, because previously nothing on that scale had happened to him in front of that particular work. It seems that the reason SE struggles here is that the concept of absorption doesn't explain what happened; it needs clarifying to enable deeper understanding of such encounters.

To gain further understanding of how this might work from the position of painter-beholder, I asked the collaborators if at any point in their painting practice they had acted as the beholder of their own artwork? KP replied:

I think about how I've studied going round museums right across Europe, and spending days in the Prado, in Vienna, looking at other people's work, absorbing it, looking at everything, and thinking about it, contemplating it. Trying to draw connections across works and artists, and I would never do that with my own work in the same way. (KP INT: 57.55)

Here KP is explicit, how for her the roles of painter and beholder differ. GW's response differs slightly: 'that does happen occasionally, but on the whole you are the painter. However, there is a meditative detachment aspect within the development of a work that manifests in varying ways specific to a work' (GW INT: 44.30). This suggests that for GW there are different levels of attention that occur during practice. This correlates with SE's description:

I don't think of the way I work quite in that way, that's to say as primarily a painting process. I think of it as a group of quite disparate activities out of which painting is produced. I guess an idea of process implies a focus on the physical procedural stuff of painting, and that that is somehow where the centre of the work lies. And it's not for me. It is the point of intensity, but my mind might not always be on that, my attention might be somewhere else, and so I kind of think of writing, and teaching, and conversations like this, and other things as being just as instrumental. (SE INT: 16.05)

Where SE describes how his 'attention might be somewhere else' it implies a similar detachment from his process to that of GW, but not in a meditative sense, and perhaps not in an absorptive sense. Considering different levels of attention,

AB says:

I'm very fond of a quote I can roughly paraphrase by Roger Hilton ... who somewhere in his journals says something like 'sometimes my paintings are completed when my back is turned' and I think what that tells you is that the dynamic relationships of a studio practice are actually very particular. (AB INT: 16.55)

Here AB connects particular levels of attention, or absorption as he goes on to say, with practice in the studio, thus underscoring the prominence of its role in that 'dynamic' relationship. Diderot intimated those dynamics when he wrote on Greuze's process: 'When he works, he is completely absorbed by his picture; it affects him profoundly, he carries around with him the personality of the figure he is portraying in his studio, sad or gay, foolish or serious, flamboyant or reserved, according to whatever has occupied his brush and his imagination that morning' (Thompson 1989: 5). These reflections reveal the painter-beholder as a particular kind of specialized beholder, developed out of painting practice and the studio. AB further describes his relationship as artist to practice via the studio as apparatus:

The studio is very much designed to do everything it possibly can to create the scenario where I am critically absorbed in my work while I am here (AB INT: 23.17). Later adding: It's a tool, so I think everyone attunes to the space they have ... you attune it to what you want to do, and that's normal, you know it's just an instrument. (AB RT2: 2.26.14)

AB has even described constructing a simple and non-functional brick wall in his studio. Which seems like quite an extreme step to take in order to create or modify a tool to enable absorptive practice, in 'attuning to the space'. I would suggest this is a significant form of constructing the painter-beholder in the place where the painting-beholder is imagined. In the same way that some people might prefer a particular type of desk, or order materials in a certain way to be able to work, AB has 'ordered' his studio space to cultivate a certain condition to enable consideration of an absorptive programme or strategy. This suggests a particular set of principles underlying the process and practice of work, where the studio evolves to facilitate a hierarchy of absorption and establish an aesthetics of the studio.

This relationship of absorption of the painter-beholder to an aesthetics of the studio seems to be a highly intertwined series of processes. However, although he doesn't

deny encountering absorption in practice himself, SE questions how much we should attribute to the absorption of the artist in relation to what the painting-beholder experiences. When asked about absorption in practice he said:

Obviously that happens, but then how much to invest in that fact is another question, because there are lots of the times when it doesn't, and then there are times when it happens checking Facebook, or cooking. So whether or not that is an index of anything important, or how much that could be connected to what Fried has been saying, I'm not sure. I'd question that, because there's a temptation there, with that idea that I am cautious of. I think that the temptation would be to try to re-coup a particular value for making or value for painting, in particular that is kind of contrary to all those things that went against Fried's schema since 1967, so that's to say theatricality. I don't have his sensibility at all. I think he asked an important question and he identified at that moment quite clearly, a set of ideas, a set of things that were happening, but I think he was totally wrong on what that meant, or what was good or bad about that. So that would be the temptation that I would want to avoid with this idea of absorption, of carrying it over into some state of making. (SE INT: 48.40)

SE questions the relationship of the painter's absorption to the painting-beholder by asking if it is an 'index of anything important', comparing it to other banal processes, which raises his concerns about defining absorption in practice as a state of making. Alternatively SC describes how he considers his process in relation to how his works are interacted with:

...the process of making the work and the process of experiencing the work are immensely interrelated. The machinations of this process do not end when the making process is completed. The painter's experience of how to make a painting relates to the experience of the person that stands in front of it. It's one of the things that allows the work to operate in the present tense as lived experience. I would say an exhibition does not mark the end of the work; it's another part of the work, the person standing in front of your work is another part of the work. (SC INT: 21.05)

When asked if he contested Fried's theory that by having to walk around a minimalist sculpture you are physically reminded of yourself in that space,

thus inhibiting absorption, SC responded:

I would, I would say actually the reality is that both of those things can be combined quite easily. Like actions, the terminology, but the actual action and how you respond are contained in both of those terms. (SC RT1: 2.05.11)

Consequently, for SC, Fried's concept of theatricality, of what makes a work theatrical, is limited. He suggests that physically manoeuvring around a work doesn't occlude the potential for absorption to occur, the two can be combined 'quite easily'. This puts in mind Mulhall's hypothesis about anti-theatrical alternatives: 'works which acknowledge their own literality and thereby construct a beholder capable of acknowledging his own literal presence' (Mulhall 2001: 12). It is possible that SC's works construct a beholder capable of 'acknowledging their own literal presence' (ibid.). This suggests that for SC, what the painting-beholder undergoes in front of his works is very much a part of the programme for his work, much in the same way Zeuxis wanted to achieve a shift in the thinking of Parrhasius. It also suggests that SC believes this 'lived experience' defeats any theatrical impact a three-dimensional work may be suggested to yield, which relates to Serra's use of 'parallax' as discussed by Bois and Shepley (1984). Here parallax is explained as: 'from Greek parallaxis, 'change,' displacement of the apparent position of a body, due to a change of position of the observer'. In his works SC considers the moving beholder, which he believes allows for an absorptive experience to occur. As such, SC, whilst seeming to correlate with Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring, nonetheless finds himself in conflict with Fried's terms of theatricality.

SC's process differs somewhat to the process of SE. When asked to describe how he felt during his painting process SE replied:

So if I'm doing it right it should be just like buttering toast, very quotidian ... there's nothing special about it, there's nothing kind of 'other stately' about it, it's really straightforward. (SE: 29.53)

Here SE describes a banal process, whilst his disparaging use of the description 'other stately' highlights a particular concern, which KP also picks up on when describing the practice of Varda Civano:

...some people kind of, as artists I guess, and I am absolutely, resolutely not one of them, are able to get absorbed in a kind of intuitive process and have a kind of vision. I suppose if you're talking about intuition, an example might be Varda Civano who talks about it. About seeing something in the beginning and being so involved in the moment, and in yourself, in your studio, and the conversation with the work, that you're able to construct something.

(KP RT2: 49.47)

KP's absolute insistence that her process does not work in this 'intuitive' manner, which she later interprets as 'constructing something' further exposes concerns surrounding authenticity, and in using the term 'construct' in this context suggests that KP sees this approach as a form of fabrication. AB also shows similar concerns:

The idea of existential abandonment, which in certain artistic positions privileges certain kinds of behaviour, such as spontaneity, and gesture, is fraught with the potential for self-delusion. It's my personal position that this way of approaching art-making doesn't interest me at all, because I think it very quickly becomes fake. (AB INT: 49.03)

By using the terms 'self-delusion' and 'fake' AB confirms that concerns of authenticity are of paramount importance in his approach to practice. Here both KP and AB equate a 'different state' as potentially inauthentic. SE describes what has led him to think in that way, to distrust his own experience of making:

This has to do with what lens you are looking at the work through historically, or which bits of the language one feels are yours, or explicitly borrowed, or un-locatable. The work can highlight those things in you, as much as you guiding the work. I feel very much rewritten by the work as often as I do that I am making it ... and looking at the times when I thought I knew that something was really working, I've been wrong too often, and that's why I guess I'm wary of fetishizing the act of making too much, as if that's where things happen. Because too often for me it's not. (SE INT: 41.00)

SE is cautious of this 'other state', because previously he has found that relying on it has been misleading in his own practice. This suspicion is manifest in his circumspection towards 'fetishizing the act of making'. He explains:

I think painting is so vulnerable to this to be honest, particularly in this country. It's that there's a romanticization of painting, wanting to try and pull away from the world in some way, and I think the attractiveness of some of those ideas is really, really, owed to that. I personally really try to shake that off, because again I think it excludes too much. (SE INT: 54.23)

Here SE shows similar concerns to both KP and AB in his dislike for these romantic connotations, because as he puts it they 'exclude too much'. I suggest this is because by 'excluding' you limit the position and possibilities of the painter, and as such reduce the freedoms of practice. AB sums up the response to such concerns:

I think it was interesting looking at what Stuart had to say ... that of his generation, and I think the same is true of my own, people are much more aware of every position that they take, having caveats. (AB RT2: 13.26)

AB's comment highlights the results of their concerns, the sense of caution or hesitancy artists have to 'every position they take', of which practice as an artist is for them the key position.

## **2.5 The Problematics of Theory and Practice**

This second thread of the dialogues, The Problematics of Theory and Practice, brings to attention how the collaborators hesitantly embrace the possibility of absorption, whilst finding that Fried's restrictive principles and ambiguous terms leave them in a vulnerable position.

In the dialogues what emerges is how the collaborators struggle with Fried's terms, with SE stating: 'I guess it's whether one accepts those terms in the first place' (SE INT: 54.23), later adding that he feels Fried is 'placing so much on the notion of experience, but at the same time a version of experience that is so sort of bureaucratically managed' (SE INT: 56.55). This indicates that SE's concerns are more to do with where Fried draws the line on what is or isn't theatrical, and in doing so what he then excludes. These limits are just *too* limited for SE, working in a way that for him actually restricts rather than defines. He continues:

I think when he is talking about Manet it is a useful point because that's an example of Fried being very historically particular, which in fact a lot of his detractors don't realize about him, he does try to be quite careful. I think

nonetheless he returns to universalizing a historical event again and again and again. I think he just keeps at it, but he does try, and in a very scholarly and thorough way, but still the question that was always in my mind reading him was 'what's so good about absorption?' Because you know absorption after all is the thing that makes him not able to digest Judd for example, or to digest Carolee Schneemann ... But what about say Valie Export then, or a performance artist, who is saying 'here I am, I'm a social polity, I'm in the room with you'? That's theatricality to Fried. That's the sphere of experience to the everyday ... And that's the order of experience that art has somehow to defeat, or suspend right? ... How come that's not too high a price to pay? Art's sudden involvement with the real world that's here, and artists in New York in the 60's, you're involved in the civil rights movement and making art is all part of that, it's all part of that milieu. In Fried's scheme you can't have that, and how come that's not too much of a high price to pay for this thing called absorption? That I'm not clear about, what's so good about it anyway, other than some appeal to transcendence that is always possible to make? And you know it becomes a platitude, because it's transcendent, and transcendence is a good thing. (SE RT1: 40.01)

In questioning 'what's so good about absorption?' SE points out why Fried's line drawn against theatricality is problematic for him, because acknowledging this theory precludes certain types of work that SE considers of great significance, hence his reasoning that absorption is 'too high a price to pay'. SE acknowledges Fried's thorough historical research, but sees it as a process of universalizing theories (absorption/theatricality) across art history, which he sees as laying down prescriptive principles that actually start to invalidate meaning rather than inform it. What starts to become apparent is the uncertainty as to how Fried's theories function. SE calls attention to this:

I suppose what I'm not happy about is the idea of engagement [absorption] being clear. What that is. What Fried is saying would presume that we know what engagement is, and we know what it means, you've got it, or you've not got it ... So the idea of engagement, there's 24 questions right there. (SE INT: 54.23).

And later adding:

...this is perhaps my question, about talking or relating an individual sense of absorption in making, to what Fried is talking about in absorption with painting more generally. Because actually he's talking about quite a philosophical level, about how painting is in the world, what the nature of that structure is. And it's a very different thing to my subjective experience, or one's subjective experience being immersed in a task for instance. So there is a question there about whether or not they might be very different things. (SE RT1: 12.25)

Here SE raises questions as to what absorption is, and how it functions. The problem arises because Fried uses the term absorption from both positions: to describe the relationship between a beholder and the painting they are standing in front of, and using engrossment/absorption to describe experiences of painting practice for the painter. Effectively SE is questioning the relationship of theory to practice in Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring, asking how, or even if the painter-beholder relationship is related to the painting-beholder relationship.

This problem of clarity can also be seen when discussing absorptive strategies as Fried describes in eighteenth century France. These are not the same strategies used by artists like Manet, Wall, or Gordon and Parreno.<sup>84</sup> This is because, as Fried puts it, absorptive strategies adapt as our sensibilities shift (as discussed in Chapter 1) although it seems the language or terms do not, hence the difficulties we find in their communication. This dialogue reveals how problematic that lack of clarity can be; how an art historical theory that touches upon what is happening in painting practice creates confusion and more questions than answers, complicating an already complex theory of viewing. SE describes this problem:

Fried, he's actually making a really specific argument that the experience of a successful modernist work of art is of a different order to one's everyday experience of an everyday object, and in some sense separate from the world. This is a real position that's actually been very powerful and quite a lot of that's been dismantled. So there are two different orders of discussion I think in that way, and I suppose it's very easy for there to be a slippage from one to the other, for those things to be conflated. (SE RT1: 33.27)

---

<sup>84</sup> Fried discusses Manet's strategies in *Manet's Modernism* (1996) and the strategies of Jeff Wall, Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (2008).

By asking how an individual's sense of absorption relates to Fried's theories about the beholder's experience in front of a work of art, and proposing that they could be very different things, SE is highlighting the need for clarification. Fried has stated that people shouldn't conflate his art historical writing with his art critical writing, yet he evidently draws upon both spheres when writing on either one. This is demonstrated by how *Absorption and Theatricality* (1980) (art historical) is a continuation of the issues Fried raised in 'Art and Objecthood' (1998 [1967]) (art critical). As such we can see that the relationship of painting-beholder and painter-beholder that is described by proleptic mirroring, which is a relationship of theory to practice, requires clearer definition, and similarly the terms used in relation to them.

It becomes apparent how this lack of clarity leaves the collaborators diffident, even though it is clear that all of them say that they have experienced aesthetic absorption in one form or another in relation to painting practice. They seem to embody a certain kind of hesitant embrace towards the possibility of absorption, but also indicate instances of uncertainty. This could be for several reasons. It could be because it is hard for the collaborators to articulate what they are trying to say because there isn't necessarily the language to communicate their encounter. Or because they are hesitant towards what they feel they can or cannot claim for their work. Or it could be because they do not conceive of absorption as a programme or a strategy. But the results are the same; it leaves them feeling in a vulnerable position. Consequently, it seems that Fried's restrictive principles and ambiguous terms may exacerbate this struggle. This is indicated by SE:

I think the question about absorption is that I don't know the price, of whether that's too high or not ... it's not absorption as such it's the universalizing use of that term. (SE RT1: 1.58.53).

As we see, SE struggles with acknowledging absorption. I suggest he wishes to refute Fried's theories in all forms because of how he feels they constrict and reduce the freedoms of practice. It is a label he is not willing to wear.

## **2.6 The Uncertainty of Agency**

This third thread of the dialogues: The Uncertainty of Agency, continues the questions raised around whether what the artist experiences or intends matters for the absorption of the painting-beholder. It asks whether Fried's theory of proleptic

mirroring is relevant, and what this might mean for artists and practice, for the painter-beholder and painting-beholder.

We have seen previously how some of the collaborators find Fried's theories to be constricting, working in a way that they feel limits the freedom of artists. Questions have been asked regarding proleptic mirroring, whether the painter-beholder relationship can even be related in any way to the painting-beholder relationship. This is highlighted here, where AB introduces the idea of an alternative position:

People who come into the studio may point out when something is functioning in an interesting way in pieces of work, which the artist themselves may not have spotted quite so quickly. So it's a sort of de-privileging of the artist's studio, the arduous occupation position, which is then resolved. Meaning that what franchised the artist to say to the audience 'This has been a long, difficult, ferocious form of concentration, therefore I expect of you certain things', it's very much saying you can't make those claims anymore ... It shifts the authorship, doesn't compromise it. It kind of puts it in a less exalted, or falsely exalted position. Puts it in a more utilitarian position in relation to the other kinds of thought and engagement, which feed into making and looking at works of art. (AB RT2: 16.53)

This example of the 'de-privileging of the artist's studio', where visitors might become involved in process, provides the opportunity to 'level out' the artist's view of intention. As AB describes, this has the potential to bring a pragmatic element to practice, subtly shifting authorship. It suggests that there is an opening where both painting-beholder and painter-beholder could engage as author, where agency can be apportioned.

Considering the beholder, Fried describes the primordial convention that all paintings are made to be beheld (1980: 93) along with the supreme fiction that we should paint as if the beholder does not exist (*ibid.*: 103). This fiction is an approach that SC has clearly dropped, where considering the beholder, or constructing the beholder, as he describes, has become central to his practice:

I use myself as an example of a person, so it's generally to do with scale. It's to do with standing up against something, measuring something in

terms of my own height, or understanding a spatial dimension, physically using myself as an example of a human being. So I stop being the artist for a second, I say right, here I am, I am a human being stood up in front of this, how does it relate bodily? So it's not really about being a 'beholder', it's much more as an example. I am a physical example of a human standing next to a physical object: a painting. (SC INT: 20.50)

Such an approach raises questions as to whether what the artist experiences or intends matters for absorption of the painting-beholder. In using a sense of bodily experience, SC is going about constructing his beholder; drawing on what he himself undergoes in front of other artists' work:

Part of what I'm interested in with painting is to try to go about finding a way to bring other senses back into it. For instance with that Olitski today (*SC viewed Olitski's works prior to the discussion*), one of the things for me that makes it really involving is the proportion, and the way that it makes you walk in front of it, and that's an experience that is not just visual, that's a bodily experience, and that's what for me is a really important part of that particular painting. (SC RT1: 21.02)

The way SC draws on his own experiences of being a constructed painting-beholder corresponds with the experience of GW:

SC: I suppose the idea of making a judgement, and deciding whether you can call it successful or not, there's a kind of satisfaction in seeing someone, not just get your work, but also, you imagine, relating to what it was you were interested in, and that works in different ways. I imagine for all three of us that what it is would give us a sense of satisfaction, in other words someone else understanding something about what you're trying to do, would be manifest in different ways. For me, I can tell if someone is actually doing what the work is supposed to make them do by watching them walk around it. So it's actually the way they behave in front of it, that to me is a sign, and I can go away and get on with the work.

GW: Absolutely, I mean what a painting does to you when you are standing in front of it tells you so much. There's one artist I know, I won't mention his name, but his favourite thing was to watch people looking at paintings, and

to really make notes and register certain aspects about it. Similar to what I was saying about the Rembrandt in the National Gallery, I had a similar experience to a Rothko exhibition in '71. I think it was at the Hayward Gallery, and they were hung absolutely beautifully with about that much space between them (indicating a relatively small gap), similar size for all canvases, and being absorbed in the work, and looking around I felt myself being specifically moved, not just randomly, but I had to really, really move in on work from where I was standing and looking, and then changing. And then I found myself absolutely mesmerized by the spaces between the paintings that suddenly became charged like electric, and that was an extra aspect to the spectator viewing, or where it put you. And I find that looking at any painting is really a matter of where you are going to look at it and how long you look at it, and where you come back to it. It is a whole process of looking and how it effects you that's kind of...

SC: Bodily.

GW: This live thing that happens, this huge thing, but it's very precise, there's nothing random about it.

SC: The artist has created that.

GW: Yes, exactly, and...

SC: Has built that in. (RT1: 49.56)

How this has worked personally for the collaborators, that is, being 'moved' around, provides them with a sense of shared understanding between painter-beholder and painting-beholder. Here both SC and GW have encountered a sense of being the constructed beholder, an experience that is pivotal to how they themselves go on to consider or construct the beholder in their own works. Jonathan Crary (1999) points out that this form of constructing the beholder is also evident in the work of Seurat:

One of the most obvious ways we experience the work is through our own physical movement – back and forth, from a position close enough that the individual touches of colour are distinguishable and the constructed

nature of the surface is evident, to a more distant point at which the surface coalesces into a shimmering image of a recognizable world ... Seurat shows a self-conscious and systematic awareness of the part played by the spectator in the making of the work. It is very likely that he thought carefully about the different effects of the surface from specific distances and thus made his art for a mobile spectator who could occupy multiple viewpoints. (Crary 1999: 160)

However, some of the collaborators have encountered opposition to this form of consideration or construction:

AB: You have this implication, if you like from the regressive old guard that I've worked with in art schools, obviously meaning none of the present company, who sort of say that if a painting is good all you need is a plumb line, and you just put them in a line on the wall with a convenient amount of space between them, and that's all you need to do to make an exhibition. And if you somehow manipulate by putting paintings at different heights, or different intervals, if that makes a painting look good it inherently implies the painting is not good enough. In other words it's like saying someone looks good because they've had a spray tan, or bought a nice suit, or...

KP: That's what's so interesting about Mary Heilmann<sup>85</sup> and David Reed.<sup>86</sup> I've only seen the one image on Hyperallergic.

AG: The 'anti-hang'?

KP: Yeah, the 'anti-hang', and it's an assertion, it's not an anti anything, it's a collaboration, it's a deliberate statement and it's a re-making. So we've got these two autonomous practices represented in these two objects, and the artists have opted to make something new. You've got the ingredients, but you've also got this new thing and it brings us back to temporality, a moment in time, particularly because however open-minded they are, other projects they may have done, these works will be taken apart again, and won't belong together for eternity, it's just for the duration of the exhibition.

---

<sup>85</sup> Heilmann, M. 'Mary Heilmann'. Available at: <<https://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/12/mary-heilmann/images-clips>> [Accessed 11/07/17], (non-paginated).

<sup>86</sup> Reed, D. 'David Reed'. Available at: <<http://www.davidreedstudio.com>> [Accessed 10/10/15], (non-paginated).

AB: And something exists in the tension between them, and the way that they're not being installed in an accommodating manner. (RT2: 2.33.41)

KP and AB see the Heilmann and Reed hang *Two by Two* (2015)<sup>87</sup> (Fig. 23) as a 're-making', refuting that it indicates weak work (negative comments that had appeared on Twitter). This alternative hang suggests a further extension of authorship. This is where two different bodies of work are brought together, what might be described as two separate lexicons of painting practice, and through a temporary amalgamation can create a new extended lexicon. Each artist previously worked independently, and could not have envisioned what this new hang would have been like as works included in the exhibition were made over a period of four decades. Some individual intentions of the artists would have been left behind in the studio space, and some would have migrated, here they joined together to produce new intentions that emerged through the unconventional collaborative hang of the gallery space.<sup>88</sup> This results in a new way of constructing the beholder, potentially providing a new viewing experience for the painting beholder, and more so with those that might have been familiar with the artists individual works.<sup>89</sup>

What is being revealed is how some of the collaborators, rather than rely on experiences during practice, that is, in the way proleptic mirroring suggests, have a more consciously evolved programme aimed at achieving some sort of absorptive encounter for the painting-beholder. SE says: 'this to me is part of what's interesting about working with these materials, is that they're deeply historical, they're very much public, yet my immediate relationship to them is very intimate' (SE RT1: 2.54.17). That painting can be both public and intimate, and in both studio and gallery, highlights the characteristics that might convey the intentions or strategies of the artist to the painting-beholder.

---

<sup>87</sup> *Two by Two: Mary Heilmann and David Reed* (2015) [Exhibition]. Hamburger Bahnhof Gallery, Berlin. March 6–October 11 2015. Available at: <<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2015/10/mary-heilmann-david-reed-at-hamburger-bahnhof>> [Accessed 10/10/15]. (non-paginated).

<sup>88</sup> The dynamics of this relationship pose more questions (potentially for future research) such as: Did you construct or attempt to construct the spectator out of your collaborative partner? Did you feel yourself become the constructed spectator as a result of your collaborative partner's hang? Did the hang merge or oppose intentions?

<sup>89</sup> It would also have been interesting to examine how painting-beholders, that are familiar with the respective artists individual works, responded.

Of his approach to practice, SC describes how 'it's important that my engagement is part of the process of making the painting. If I'm not, then I don't expect anyone else to be' (SC RT1: 10.19). This statement completely aligns with Fried's hypothesis of Chardin's practice, suggesting a striving for prolepsis, however this contrasts with the fact that SC doesn't solely rely on his own engagement, for example where he physically uses his own body with which to assess his artwork when constructing his beholder.

For AB, his approach extends from his own experience as both absorbed painting-beholder and painter-beholder: 'In a way, I am interested in being absorbed by the work, and the thought of some of the artists who I research, as much as I am in creating conditions within my own work for that idea of absorption to happen' (AB INT: 1.07.02).

Image available at: [www.smb.museum](http://www.smb.museum)

Figure 23. Installation photograph: *Two by Two*, Hamburger Bahnhof Gallery, Berlin, 6 March–11 October 2015, showing:  
David Reed, *#550* (2005-2006)  
Oil and alkyd on canvas, 260 x 92cm (Collection of Schauwerk Sindelfingen),  
and Mary Heilmann, *Yoshimi*, (2004)  
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 132.7cm (Private Collection)

In discussing the intentions of these artists, it becomes evident how some of them might seem to initially rely on proleptic mirroring, yet deeper scrutiny reveals they have what might be described as 'backup plans'. We see this with SC's bodily approach, and AB's research on other artists. Here supporting methods are put in place. I suggest that is because, on some level, they do not trust or cannot trust proleptic mirroring in the way Fried's theory suggests.

Alternatively, SE says he can encounter engagement/absorption in process, but differs in that his practice does not rely on it as a form of self-judgement or critique: 'I don't necessarily have to feel that for each particular work' (SE RT1: 12.25). This is because his experience of proleptic mirroring is misleading or skewed, that is, what he thinks works doesn't, but some other element does:

It's funny the things people like about your work are sometimes the things you're not sure about. So there's this mixture, it's about what counts, it's not straightforward, like you think this is ok, it works, therefore this is what is going to make it work for others. And that's why I think showing is so important actually, because it is like hearing your voice on tape, it's coming back to you. (SE INT: 1.49.28)

What is interesting is SE's description of how exhibiting work is 'like hearing your voice on tape'. This kind of dislocation alongside the skewed prolepsis suggests this allows him to see, and judge the work from a distance or different perspectives, essentially finding different methods to trust in the work aside from proleptic mirroring. AB describes using a similar wariness within practice:

I'm suspicious. So for that reason I often work very slowly, so work can get suspended on a painting, sometimes for months, or years even, and in a way it will be external forces that trigger more decisive episodes, such as being under pressure to complete work for an exhibition, having to build a larger body of work, or simply reaching a point of impatience with a certain work so I do something completely out of character (or so it would seem to be at the time), which I then come back to and review, often realizing it is probably what I actually needed to have been doing for quite a while, a sort of sideways approach to it' (AB INT: 18.12).

He continues by adding:

‘And I’d be suspicious of the painting becoming formulaic or becoming a recipe that could be used again and again. A number of painters of my generation, who are UK based, produce work defined by process, and I always felt that process in those terms could become an alibi for a lack of attentiveness if not handled with a degree of scepticism. (AB INT: 20.03)

These descriptions, of different approaches to judging practice, bring to attention the collaborators’ concerns. For AB, it’s about avoiding formulaic approaches, and using suspicion as a kind of filter. His awareness of the issues with trust in practice is highlighted by his use of the terms ‘self-delusion’ and ‘fake’. This emphasizes how concerns of authenticity are of paramount importance in his approach to practice, as previously demonstrated where both KP and AB have equated a state of making as inauthentic. The concern of self-delusion is echoed by some of the other collaborators, and in very similar ways to AB. For example, GW says:

When it seems to be good you can dupe yourself, you come in the next day and it looks terrible, we’ve all had that experience, it’s not uncommon. This is why time is a very important element in the painting for me. You can see the painting in different lights, and I like to see the painting upside down, sideways, on the floor, leaning against the wall in different lights so the light catches the surface in different ways, and to see this in different ways as the painting develops. So you really get to know the painting, and the criteria of when to leave it. When I’m happy with it I’m allowing it to leave the studio, and if there is a hesitancy about it, it doesn’t go. (GW INT: 36.31)

AMJ has also developed her own strategies to avoid self-delusion:

Sometimes I make things and I wouldn’t be able to cast a judgement on it or place it necessarily, so walking away from it and coming back to it can have a surprising reaction on my behalf, because there are instances when you think ‘Oh I’m up to something, something really is happening’ and then you come back to the studio and it’s like, nothing. Other times you think ‘it’s absolutely not going anywhere’ and then you come back to it and ‘Ah, ok’, there is a perspective to it that I have not explored. And I guess in that respect there

would be some paintings, very seldom, but there are some paintings I would be more reactive to once they've kind of left my interest to some extent. And I return to them and re-evaluate them, sometimes making different works and progressing, and then you look back and you think 'Ah, ok' I understand this much better ... it's funny, there are some instances when I can't wait to go and see it again, or when I'm dreading to see it again. But still you go back. And a lot of preparation goes into this, mentally, going back to the studio. I know that when I come into the studio, the first couple of hours I probably won't be able to do anything. I have to find my way in. I have to find a very constructive way of not just going in and attacking something or approaching something without giving it a thought. And that thought doesn't always happen just by looking, sometimes it's like catching glimpses. This is why I have this big mirror. I absolutely adore looking at the paintings through the mirror. David Ryan and I have talked about this in the past, there is something really interesting that happens between coming to and walking away from painting, and I think we all have that, that you can develop certain strategies like; you must not look for a certain amount of time, and only then can you turn. But it's so important. (AMJ INT: 1.03.10)

Whereas the approach SE describes is almost a contradictory position, that often what he and the work demands differs:

There's been lots of times when I've put something to the side, thinking I'll leave that, not even indifferent to it, and then later realizing that that's actually quite important, and it just took longer for that painting to skin over in a way, somehow. In a way I think about that being like a discomfort of new ideas. (SE RT1: 1.28.10)

And later adding:

What the work sometimes wants is often not what I want ... I'm aware that this is likely a very personal feature, one I want to spread out. In my case I find that's very often the way, or at least that's the sort of encounter in making paintings that I found desirable, that's maybe the most provocative, the most likely to resolve an outcome that makes me feel rewritten by the work in some way. (SE RT1: 29.37)

Here SE describes an alternative process where he has learnt to work in the opposite direction to his instincts, using a type of disregard and a feeling of discomfort. I suggest this is a turning of Fried's prolepsis completely on its head. Although it could be argued that what the work wants is still essentially what SE wants. Nonetheless, it seems for him a successful approach, especially if he achieves an outcome that makes him feel 'rewritten by the work'. Here proleptic mirroring is being used in an alternative fashion to how Fried originally hypothesized, almost an anti-prolepsis.

The need to see their work anew, by putting themselves into different positions, has become part of the collaborators' daily practice. All in an effort to cast sound judgement on their own work. I suggest this is because on some level they realize that they cannot rely on their own absorptive encounters of practice to be mirrored in their painting-beholder in the way that proleptic mirroring indicates. This is reinforced by SE, who challenges the relevance of his experiences of absorption to the content of his work:

I think there are certainly these qualities of absorption in the making of the work, but I am very clear that that's not the content of the work. What that becomes for others is where the making of art meshes with its experience and interpretation, and becomes something very collective and something gets made of it or not, or it becomes visible or it doesn't, or it gathers meaning or it doesn't, and all that's a very different learning in a way, isn't it? So I can say yes, there are these configurations of experience that I might have as the artist, but as far as being transferable in any way, I'm not sure. (SE RT1: 45.47)

This querying of the transferable qualities of absorption in practice underscores the key issue that has been identified with Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring, namely the issue of trust that arises.

## **2.7 Staking Claims**

This fourth thread of the dialogues: Staking Claims, brings to light how hesitant the collaborators are towards Fried's theories, which reveals them to be in a vulnerable position, about what they feel they can or cannot claim for their work.

As indicated in the previous threads, when encountered through practice, proleptic mirroring is found to be problematic, that is, questions arise over the transferable qualities of absorption in practice. Aware of these issues, the collaborators attempt to work beyond the problems in various ways, by being dedicated in their practice, resolute about issues of authenticity, demonstrating the seriousness of their intent. Here SC outlines part of the the rationale behind his own practice:

We probably don't have a sufficiently developed language to describe experience. We can talk about what something looks like, but we can't talk about what something feels like quite so well. I guess that's why I make the work I make, because we don't have the language for it, so I'm interested to develop the language we need as painting. (SC INT: 14.22)

As highlighted in the first thread, at times there isn't necessarily the language to communicate certain experiential encounters, which SC sees as an extension of his practice, of developing that language. GW discusses the results of such processes and focus in practice:

I think in a way we are all involved in something that is about educating our senses, that's what we do. Throughout your life as an artist you educate your senses, and actually that makes us different from people who don't do that. (GW RT1: 30.30)

These specific approaches in practice, as GW points out, can create a different outlook, which is what possibly helps in SC's development of a language, of something that is shared with a reflection of the contemporaneous:

There are examples in art history where the painting which is being made, for instance, is aligned with everything that's happening at the time. Like at the turn of the twentieth century we have Schoenberg splitting up space, Einstein splitting up space, Picasso splitting up space, it was happening at every level, and that's continued, and it continues, and we're all part of it. And however other people perceive what we do, we just have to do what we have to do, because we are part of that flow. And we may not even be able to find what the hell it is, but we know that doing that is the only thing we can do. (GW RT1: 1.52.11)

SE picks up on the power of reflecting on the contemporaneous through practice:

What you were saying about Picasso and Einstein (*to GW*), the same questions coming up in different disciplines, and different practices, there's a sort of commonality ... there's a historical urgency to asking that in some way, and in a way I don't think that's problematic. You could say it's more like a symptom of certain forces you know kind of bubbling up. It's as much of what we consciously think matters, but there's plenty that happens in the world that we don't predict and that's more than felicity or chance, or serendipity. And a great thing about being an artist is that you can take frameworks, or ways of looking at things from other disciplines ... There might be big things working for each individual, that are tied to bigger structures, and one of the ways in which they manifest themselves is in terms of what we do, what we say. So art's particular way of intensifying has a kind of publicness to it as well. It takes some way of making the personal social in a way, and it's very powerful, without necessarily being straightforward biographical. (SE RT1: 2.54.17)

SE highlights that one of the strengths the artist can bring is how we can appropriate alternative frameworks to explore existing issues from different positions. His description of a quality of the arts that intensifies a subject, creating a sense of 'publicness', and making the 'personal social', leads us to consider these potential social qualities in painting. This recalls SE's earlier comments on the intimate yet public qualities of working with paint.<sup>90</sup> It is these characteristics, of transforming observations from one context to another, that enable a social connection, as AB discusses:

About the discursive nature of painting as a practice, inevitably there is social engagement within the way that painting functions. I mean the most useful paradigm of a kind of Richter Baader-Meinhof important political event, then reiterating the imagery through painting creates a form of social engagement, and we tend to divide everything, and professionalize everything. So we have social engaged practice almost as an entity in its own right, and the danger

---

<sup>90</sup> 'This to me is part of what's interesting about working with these materials ... they're deeply historical, they're very much public, yet my immediate relationship to them is very intimate' (SE RT1: 2.54.17).

in all these nomenclature is that you forget that you need to think across the different paradigms, and say 'Well, what am I doing with this kind of practice at this point in time?' And inevitably what enables us to continue to make paintings at any point is a combination of things. First what we give ourselves permission to do, but then also what is permitted by this society we're in. How we might challenge that, but also how we might address that discursively, as most of us are involved in working in art schools as well, because that's very much, as you were saying, a discursive commitment. So somehow the studio activity carries all of these things. (AB RT2: 35.59)

AB brings to attention how painting is often overlooked as a form of socially engaged practice. He advocates an inclusive viewpoint that sees discursive painting practice as working in that way. In suggesting it's something we give ourselves permission to do, and that we are given permission to do, AB reminds us that choosing to pursue this kind of practice relies on certain freedoms. Highlighting how a studio activity combines all of these elements we might come to see as painting practice. Key to this is a process of revisiting assumptions:

Things get re-explored, we investigate them and re-contextualize, otherwise everything operates on so many assumptions, so people think they know what a Newman is without even maybe revisiting a Barnett Newman painting, or seeing an exhibition. (AB RT2: 2.18.33)

It is clear throughout the dialogues that revisiting assumptions is a prime concern to the practice of all the collaborators (as is the purpose of this research). As a result, it leads them to repeatedly re-examine that practice, their role, and their position. We have found that because of the ambiguous yet limiting qualities to Fried's theories, this leaves the collaborators feeling vulnerable. It leaves them in a position where they are reluctant to make declarations, as is the case with absorption, but also about what they feel they can or cannot claim for their work.

This is because, as discussed earlier, when considering the artist's intentions, Michaels (2011)<sup>91</sup> suggests that in order to create absorptive (anti-theatrical)

---

<sup>91</sup> 'How to create anti-theatrical works of art at the moment when the very effort to do so (indeed, any effort at all) had begun to register as theatrical. The theoretical solution was to deny not that those efforts took place but that they were in any way constitutive of the meaning of the work of art. It was the syntactic and semantic rules of the language, not the author's consciousness that determined the meaning of the work' (Michaels 2011: non-paginated).

work requires us to deny the creator's consciousness has anything to do with the meaning of the work (attempts at anti-theatricality being inherently theatrical). That instead the meaning of the work is constituted from the language of the work itself. Michaels suggests that as a consequence the artist's intentions become irrelevant, for how can any work of art be more absorptive (or less) than any other? Michaels names this theoretical argument the crisis in absorption, a solution that threatens to undo the 'absorptive project' (2011: non-paginated) where the negation of theatricality becomes the negation of the artist's agency to affect the beholder.

Consequently, this situation creates a paradox for the artist: to declare one's intentions as absorptive is to invite invalidation where absorption is absent, but in denying one's intentions to affect the beholder the artist denies their agency, effectively denying the need of the artist. The upshot to this is a stand-off, where artists could potentially end up talking themselves out of their role, leaving what they feel is the most prudent option for the artist – to declare nothing. The results being that the collaborators find the matter of absorption becomes increasingly hard to negotiate, which initially comes across as diffidence, of holding reservations, for as AB has pointed out, there is a 'sense of caution as to how and what exactly we can claim about what we are doing' (AB RT2: 14.43).

This diffidence is not just about avoiding derision or negative comments, but because the collaborators realize they can't be, and more to the point, don't want to be, prescriptive, and certainly not in the way Fried is. They do not want to inflict restrictions in the same way they feel Fried's principles work against the freedoms of practice. The same freedoms that Courbet took his radical stance for. For the position he claimed for the artist, the painter, and for the studio as site of making paintings. For the support of that zone of freedom against dominant modes of perception, in order to intervene into those dominant regimes to change our way of seeing the world. Which is why the collaborators feel that the position Fried's theories leaves them in is untenable and dysfunctional. Rather than preserving an idea, it seems to have instead restricted it.

Regardless of this position they find themselves in, for the collaborators those experiences gained through painting practice either as painter-beholder or painting-beholder, are what drive that practice. When asked whether he had ever experienced absorption in relation to another artist's work SC replied: 'Of course, of course, because that's what it's all about' (SC INT: 32.51). Likewise GW responds:

Oh yeah. Absolutely. I mean the reason one paints, is one loves painting. And part of that is looking at all the wonderful paintings in the world: the great paintings, the not-so-great paintings, and the awful paintings, it's all part of it. (GW INT: 1.03.39)

Similarly, AMJ observes of her own experience of absorption in painting practice:

I think this is why I paint. I *really* think this is why I paint, because of that sense of unfamiliarity, and that's actually through the process of being in the studio and making paintings. It is obviously about excitement, but it's beyond excitement. To me it's about the intellectual growth, and sensual approach to who perhaps I could be in this world. It kind of defines the meaning in the instances of making, and I know that I have other experiences like playing the guitar, which is a different experience, listening to music is a different experience. Making something and having equally a visual as well as a cognitive response, I have never, ever come across in any other facet of life. So, for me, that is why I do it. It doesn't always necessarily manifest itself in one piece of work, or even a body of work, but it's an acknowledgement that it does happen. (AMJ INT: 54.40)

And as discussed earlier, SE talked about how he had passed a Poussin painting countless times before without anything unusual occurring, until one particular day when he had what he described as a lightning bolt aesthetic experience. Reflecting upon this experience SE said:

You know, one learns, and that was an incredibly liberating experience of painting, to know that it was possible for me to one moment not have that experience, and another moment to have that experience. So that was extraordinary to me, that was part of the work and the collected work of culture and what's possible with it, that things can change, and that it can change you and that we can make something out of that which makes us. (SE RT1: 52.56)

SE found this realization, of what is possible through the work, as a liberating experience, because his particular encounter with aesthetic absorption reminded him of how art has the potential to change us, as we can change it. As such, in considering approaches to practice SE suggests:

...how you invest it in something new, that's the trick in a way isn't it? To animate it in some way. It's unwieldy and particular because as artists we all know the experience of producing things in the studio that exist already and that seem inert in a way. That it's certainly not a simple matter, even though sometimes the making of something might turn out to have a simplicity about it. Putting those things together is delicate in other ways. (SE RT1: 2.26.43)

This method of working that SE describes is, I suggest, how the problematic theory that is proleptic mirroring can be addressed, or worked beyond. That in getting past 'the experience of producing things in the studio' there is the potential to think objectively, that is of working through the problem of aesthetic absorption to strategically address the painting-beholder relationship.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

In this Chapter on the dialogue on absorption, I began by introducing the qualitative findings derived from the dialogues with the collaborators. These findings have built a picture of aesthetic absorption in practice, showing us how all of the collaborators had encountered the experience of being absorbed artists in their own painting practice. Four of the collaborators stated that they could also act as the absorbed beholder of their own painting practice, whilst all of the collaborators described how they had encountered the experience of being the absorbed beholder in the painting practice of others. These qualitative results clearly establish the substantial presence of aesthetic absorption in relation to painting practice today for the collaborators. But the results also show the inner conflict between hesitancy as painter-beholder and confidence as painting-beholder.

The further analysis of the interviews and the two round table discussions continued through the four threads. The first thread of the dialogues, The Dynamics of Absorption, revealed what the collaborators actually encounter in relation to absorption in painting practice, and how an aesthetics of the studio is negotiated. It exposes the particular set of problems they are having in relation to Fried's theories. It shows how the collaborators are hesitant to say if they are for or against absorption, with some being suspicious of encountering absorption whilst making work, and some being suspicious if they don't. Many of the collaborators show how they are in opposition to describing absorption as a 'state of making', because of the romantic connotations it invokes, and the resulting issues this raises around authenticity in practice and the blurring of the categories of banal and aesthetic

absorption. It also highlights how on one hand proleptic mirroring might seem to be in operation, but how the positing of proleptic mirroring then conflicts with Fried's theory of theatricality. Consequently, what is being revealed here is how the collaborators are struggling with claims on absorption while feeling that such claims are necessary to their encounter with art and how the reality of practice is positioning many of them at odds with Fried's theories.

The second thread of the dialogues, *The Problematics of Theory and Practice*, brought to light what problems the collaborators are having. It highlights how some of the collaborators feel Fried's theories are prescriptive in the way they seem to be 'bureaucratically managed'. That in drawing the line on what is or isn't theatrical Fried precludes certain types of work, which for some of the collaborators has the effect of invalidating meaning rather than informing it, and gives rise to doubts as to whether absorption is actually too high a price to pay.

It is made evident that this relationship of theory to practice requires clearer definition, because as it stands the collaborators are diffident, they hesitantly embrace the possibility of absorption, whilst finding Fried's restrictive principles and ambiguous terms leave them feeling left in a vulnerable position. This has uncovered how this relationship of theory to practice is felt to be constricting, and as such is seen as limiting the artists' freedom, which forces their hand. We find there is uncertainty as to how Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring functions, raising questions of how or even if, the painter-beholder relationship is related in any way to the painting-beholder relationship.

The third thread of the dialogues: *The Uncertainty of Agency* examined how the collaborators have negotiated absorption in practice. We have seen how concerns have been raised over whether what the artist experiences or intends matters for absorption of the beholder, which highlights the problems encountered with Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring. This has led the collaborators to question their agency, and consider times where a 'de-privileging of the artist's studio' has occurred. Here more pragmatic elements to practice are envisaged to level the modes of intention, which might be facilitated by an opening up of the studio, or through unconventional collaborative hangs in the way of Heilmann and Reed.

What is made apparent is that where proleptic mirroring isn't trusted there are two

approaches that emerge. There is the artist's strategic programme, where some collaborators have encountered being the constructed painting-beholder, which they describe, is what has led them to strategically consider their own beholder, and construct their beholder as they themselves were constructed. Or there is the more speculative approach of proleptic mirroring, but many of the collaborators question whether what they experience in practice has any transferable qualities. They describe how they experience suspicion in relation to the quality of the work. With proleptic mirroring they don't trust it, they question it. In this case we find the collaborators often have a form of backup plan. This might be in how they view their work from alternative positions, how they examine the work of others, or even as we have seen described, a form of anti-prolepsis. I suggest these alternative ways of judging practice are because they realize that they cannot rely on their own absorptive encounters of practice to be mirrored in their painting-beholder in the way that proleptic mirroring suggests.

This highlights the various methods the artists use in an effort to maintain an authentic practice when negotiating the painting-beholder relationship, because relying on proleptic mirroring, as we see, ultimately raises an uncertainty of agency.

The fourth thread of the dialogues, *Staking Claims*, examined how hesitant the collaborators feel towards Fried's theories, and what they feel they can or cannot claim for their work. We have seen how the collaborators work beyond such problems in various ways, by being dedicated in their practice, resolute about issues of authenticity, demonstrating the seriousness of their intent. As artists our approach to practice puts us in a different position, which allows us to reflect on the contemporaneous through alternative frameworks, as GW highlights. Exploring these alternative positions enables us to revisit existing assumptions. That we can create a sense of 'publicness', and make the 'personal social', intimates the potential social qualities of painting. AB highlights how the studio activity that is painting practice can combine all of these elements. That this is possible is all down to a distinct zone of freedom, not only in terms of what artists give themselves permission to do, but also what is permitted by society. These are the freedoms that Courbet initially paved the way for.

We have found that because of the ambiguous yet limiting qualities to Fried's theories, the collaborators are reluctant to make declarations with absorption,

and with what they feel they can or cannot claim for their work. Consequently the collaborators find the matter of absorption becomes increasingly hard to negotiate. But regardless of this position, we see how those experiences of absorption gained through painting practice either as painter-beholder or painting-beholder, drive that practice. This is because, as SE points out, art has the potential to change us, as we can change it.

Consequently, I suggest that it is through a particular approach to practice that the problematic theory of proleptic mirroring can be worked beyond. I suggest if we get past ‘the experience of producing things in the studio’ as highlighted by SE, by working through this experience as we work through the artwork, there is the potential to think objectively, to strategically address the painting-beholder relationship. In Chapter 3 this research explores that notion in greater detail, and like SE, proposes that there is a way to invest in something new for absorption in painting practice.

## **Chapter 3: An Address To And From Practice**

### 3.0 Summary

#### 3.1 From Diderot To Fried To Contemporary Practice

#### 3.2 Address To And From My Practice

#### 3.3 My Painting Practice

#### 3.4 The Quantitative Findings

#### 3.5 The Limits Of Fried's Theory of Prolepsis

#### 3.6 Negotiating The Limits in Practice

#### 3.7 An Alternative Theory/Practice Relationship

#### 3.8 Conclusion

### **3.0 Summary**

In Chapter 2, I gave an analysis of the collaborators' dialogue gathered from the individual interviews and round table discussions. These results clearly establish the presence of conflicting claims on aesthetic absorption in relation to painting practice today. They reveal a conflict between how confident the collaborators feel about being absorbed in the work of others as a painting-beholder rather than feeling absorbed in their own, and how hesitant they are towards what they feel they can claim as a painter-beholder for their own work, which highlights the differences in these positions. This is made more evident where the collaborators indicate their confusion over Fried's terms, leaving absorption in painting practice an increasingly difficult issue for them to negotiate.

In this Chapter, I begin by examining the legacy of aesthetic absorption in order to see how Fried's theories have been actively addressed through contemporary practice. This includes Diderot's original theories of tableau through to recent discussions with Fried at the Tate Modern symposia 'Tableau: Painting Photo Object' (2011). This is continued through a focus on *As Painting: Division and Displacement* (2001), an exhibition held at the Wexner Centre for the Arts, Ohio, USA, which examined what counts as painting and included the expanded field.

This is followed by a reflection on the collaborators' dialogue, in an address to and from my own practice. Here I give an introduction to my painting practice, followed by my qualitative responses to the questionnaire. This is to situate my position and practice in relation to that of my collaborators as co-collaborator. From here I revisit the problems and confusion that have become apparent when considering Fried's

theory of proleptic mirroring through the lens of my own practice, which identifies particular limits that arise between this theory/practice relationship.

From outlining these problematics, I re-stage the aesthetic and art historical frames within the studio as site for this analysis. This is achieved by examining the experiences, concerns, hesitations and resulting limitations raised by the collaborators, and comparing and testing them against my own.

I follow this by reflecting on how the collaborators have negotiated those problematics, and the possibilities this might provide to consider an alternative theory/practice relationship. Through the contributions of the collaborators, the role of agency in painting practice is reconsidered, in order to develop the concept of 'Studio 2.0', which addresses the traditional and inherited limits of painting practice. I conclude by suggesting a new way of considering aesthetic absorption in painting practice through Joselit's concept of thresholds. This proposes a new relationship between theory and painting practice that is different to the one suggested by Fried in proleptic mirroring.

### **3.1 From Diderot To Fried To Contemporary Practice**

Despite the differing academic interpretations of Fried's theses, which I discuss in Chapter 1, Fried's work continues to be actively discussed in relation to contemporary practice, concerning the legacy of modernist painting; including medium specificity, the autonomy of painting, and the tableau. Fried himself remains an active participant in those debates, especially on issues surrounding the tableau, and absorption and theatricality, as established through his many art historical papers, publications and presentations.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the emerging concept of the tableau as formulated in the writings of Diderot during the eighteenth century. This continues in the twenty-first century, where it is still actively discussed, as exemplified by the Tate Modern symposia 'Tableau: Painting Photo Object' (2011). In his keynote presentation 'About the Tableau' Fried concludes that 'the artistic regime or episteme that began in the mid 1750's in France and received its initial theorization in the scintillating, profound writings of the great Diderot is still in force ... the continued relevance of the concept tableau is one indication that this is so' (2011).

Translated from French, the word tableau might be broadly understood or described

as a 'fully formed' painting. This description is unsatisfactory because it leaves us asking what is or isn't considered 'fully formed'. Jonathan Harris describes the concept of the tableau as an 'obscure ideal' of a 'realized whole' (2005: 171), whereas the morceau he characterizes as the 'momentary fragment standing for, replacing, intimating, an occluded totality or tableau' (ibid.: 160).

In his presentation 'Inside the view: Tableau form and document' (2011) at the 'Tableau: Painting Photo Object' (2011) symposia, Jean François Chevrier describes the tableau as a form that presents itself as a frontal plane with clear borders. And it is through this frontal nature that it sets up an implicit relationship between viewer and image, the image of its [the tableau's] own body, and through an historic and anthropological form establishes the vertical stature of the human body. Whereas Michel Foucault suggests that the tableau is the culmination of a 'series of series' (Foucault cited in Armstrong et al. 2001: 46), and of this process Armstrong and Lisbon suggest that 'serial practices elaborate decisive ways of thinking through the work's exposure' (ibid.).

Fried continues his discussion on the tableau through his books on Manet, Courbet, Caravaggio, and more recently in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (2008). Here he uses tableau as a term to help define what is taking place in large-scale photography, that he sees as having inherited the same fundamental problems centred on the relationship between work and beholder that had been central to modern painting. This connects with Fried's previous research, for as Mick Finch writes: 'Diderot is in the background here, absorption and theatricality is at work here behind the scenes' (2010).<sup>92</sup>

One example of how the tableau, absorption and theatricality are actively engaged, that is, knowingly employed within contemporary practice, can be found in the significant exhibition *As Painting: Division and Displacement* (2001) held at the Wexner Centre for the Arts, Ohio, USA. This exhibition featured 110 works by 26 artists from the United States, France, and Germany, dating from the 1960's to 2001. Its intention was to be an exhibition of, as Stephen Melville simply puts 'what counts as painting' (2001: 1). The exhibition addressed debates around the issues of medium, language, and materiality in painting. It examined methods of division,

---

<sup>92</sup> Finch, M. (2010) 'Introduction to the Symposium 1'. Available at: <<http://tableauproject.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/transcript-of-mick-finchs-introduction.html>> [Accessed 05/08/2013], (non-paginated).

of techniques that pushed those divides; experimenting with thickness, folding, weaving, collage and un-painterly materials of rope, wood and glass. It explored how these techniques modified or blurred the boundaries of painting, allowing for its transformation or redefinition. This relationship between paint and what is interpreted as painting was shown through the variety of the exhibits, which included: photography, sculpture, and installation, alongside more traditional paintings on canvas. The exhibition was organized and curated by Professor Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville of Ohio State University, and amongst the established and emerging artists included were: Polly Apfelbaum, Christian Bonnefoi, Agnes Martin, Gerhard Richter and (as discussed in Chapter 1) Donald Judd.

The exhibition covered developments in more recent art history and theory, giving new perspectives on the evolution of painting since minimalism. It paid particular attention to developments in French painting since the 1960's, as seen in the work of: André Cadere, Daniel Dezeuze, Simon Hantai, Michel Parmentier, and François Rouan. The catalogue, alongside texts by Melville, Armstrong and Lisbon, introduced French texts that hadn't been translated into English before, and included essays by some of the exhibiting artists, allowing for a further interplay between text and painting practice, its limits and opportunities.

Further examples of how absorptive strategies are actively engaged with in contemporary painting practice are seen in the work of Andrew Grassie. In his paintings Grassie presents a fiction much in the same way Courbet does. This can be seen in his *Tate: New Hang* series (2006) (Fig. 24 & 25). Here Grassie paints paintings (from photographs of the original works hung in situ, but not as an actual exhibition) of a fictional exhibition of paintings made up from the Tate collection in the same gallery that Grassie's paintings were then hung. Both Courbet and Grassie intervene in the visual field of the painting-beholder, and in doing so they compel the beholder to question their understanding of a particular reality.

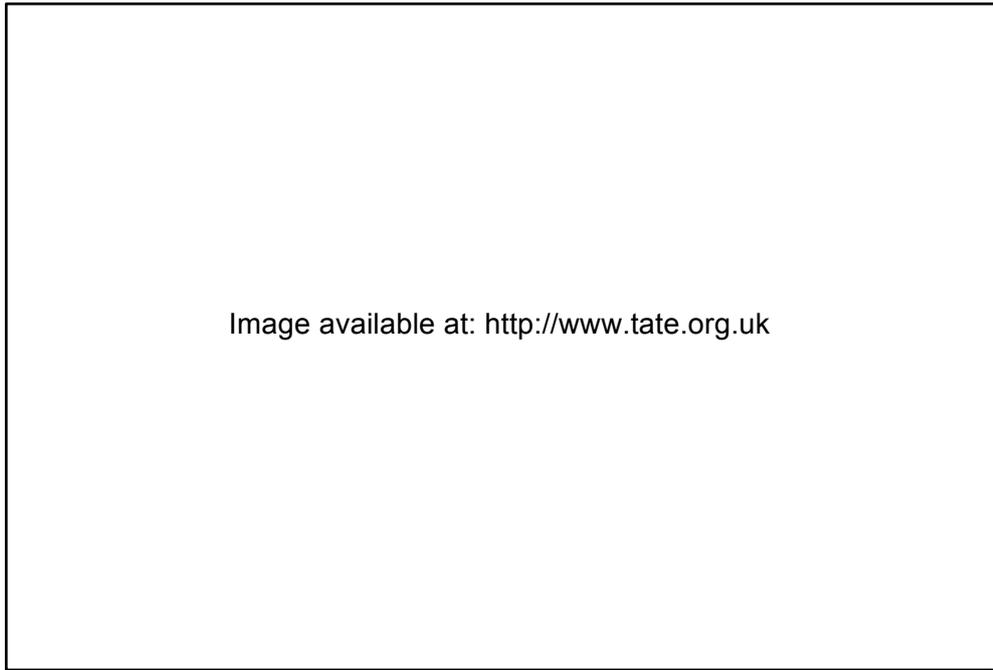


Figure 24. Andrew Grassie, *The Hanging of New Hang* (2005)  
Tempera on paper, 15 x 30 cm  
(Tate Collection)

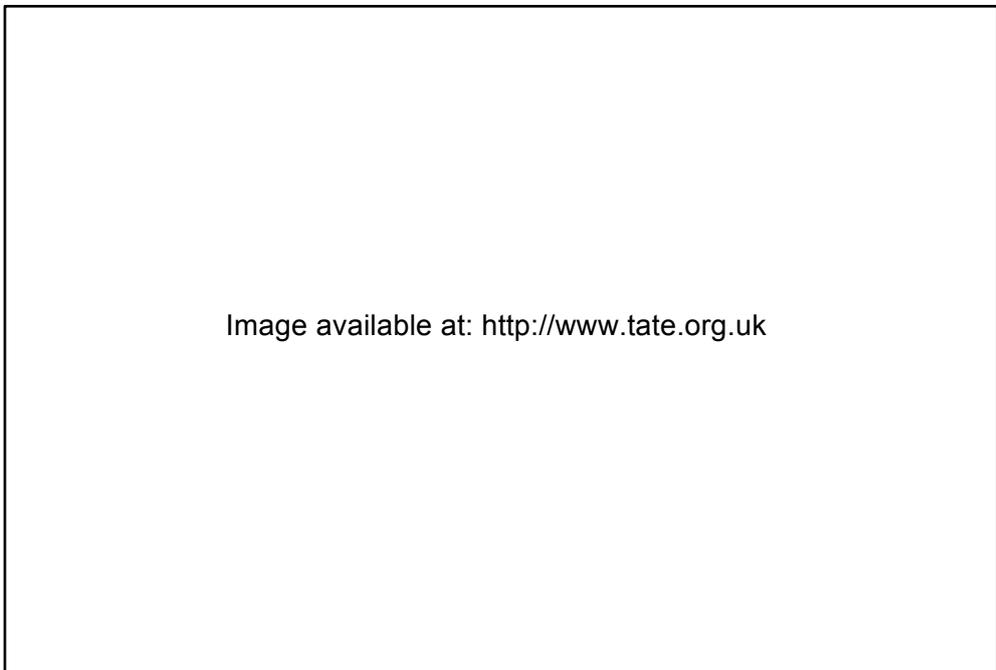


Figure 25. Andrew Grassie, *Tate New Hang 8* (2005)  
Tempera on paper, 24.3 x 31.9 cm  
(Tate Collection)

Each has what can be described as a programme or an absorptive strategy with which they aim to alter the traditional mode of viewing of the painter-beholder. One example of where Courbet does this (as discussed in Chapter 1) is in creating a fictional gathering of figures of power in his painting the *Studio* (Fig. 9). In this way, Courbet constructed a position of power for the artist both within a real and an imagined context, thus occupying a specific position in the name of art, while at the same time claiming this activity as a particular right of the artist. Whereas Grassie does this by painting a fictional gathering of powerful paintings within the gallery (painted in a photo-realist manner), thus constructing and positioning the painting-beholder in both a real and an imagined space.

Grassie's direct and strategically considered programme differs to the practice of some of the collaborators who might be described as having an indirect or less strategic approach, that is, brought about by the anticipation of the painting-beholder through the experience of the painting process of the painter-beholder. This approach, I suggest, is closer to what Fried had in mind when considering proleptic mirroring, as I go on to discuss.

### **3.2 Address To And From My Practice**

After discussing approaches to practice and defining the issues with the help of my collaborators in Chapter 2, here I use that dialogue to examine the issues raised on aesthetic absorption and proleptic mirroring from the position of my own practice.

I begin by first offering a brief description of my painting process, this is to invite the reader into the space, both physical and psychical, from where the reflection on the collaborators' dialogue takes place. Next, I discuss my response to the same questionnaire asked of the collaborators, comparing my responses to theirs to give an idea of where our similarities and connections lie. This is followed by an address to and from my practice, where I have recapitulated the dialogue of Chapter 2 in more detail to give greater insight from the position of painting practice from the studio as site of both practical and conceptual analysis. I do this by examining and reflecting first on the limits to Fried's theory of prolepsis, followed by how those limits are negotiated by the collaborators, and conclude by proposing a new theory/practice relationship.

### 3.3 My Painting Practice

The place where the majority of my paintings are made is in my studio. It is in a building based next to a very busy road in a poor and multicultural neighbourhood. It is rundown, suffers chronic noise and air pollution from traffic, and has high crime rates. This road is also the route for emergency services, consequently sirens are a regular interruption. It is not a quiet or calm place, and perhaps not always the safest of neighbourhoods to work in. But these negatives tend to be mitigated by its advantages: the studio has good lighting, daylight bulbs, individually controlled under-floor heating, a butler sink with filters, car parking with remote controlled gates, and some level of security, which is more than can be said of the many London-based studios visited through the course of this research. It also has an Arts Council England NPO (National Portfolio Organisation) funded arts organization based on-site called Bedford Creative Arts,<sup>93</sup> that has an Artists' Development remit as well as maintaining the site.

Whilst the interviews of the collaborators and thesis writing were taking place, painting practice in the studio was also continuing. Here new methods were being developed, which included an extrapolation of documenting process through process. This involves combining paintings with painting palettes. Here paper palettes are used as opposed to wood or glass specifically because they are easier to collect (Fig. 26). The palettes are photographed and digitally printed onto silk (Fig. 27). These silks are then stretched over a canvas that already bears several layers of painting. This is followed by applying an acrylic medium onto the silk making it semi-translucent and allowing the background painting to appear through. This medium also acts as a primer and protects the silk threads from degeneration. Once this has dried, painting then continues on the new surface. This silk painting approach is combined alongside other paintings that are painted directly onto canvas. This approach combines: painting, digital photography, digital printing, and is finished with more physical painting. It can involve acrylics, oils, spray paints and various paint mediums. It has developed into what could be described as a hybrid painting or even a form of meta painting, embracing new technologies in a way that is historically common to painting.

---

<sup>93</sup> Bedford Creative Arts, Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (2017). Available at: <<http://bedfordcreativearts.org.uk>> [Accessed 22/07/2017].



Figure 26. Alison Goodyear, *Paper Palettes* (2013) [On studio wall]  
Oil on paper palettes, 60 x 84cm  
(Collection of the Artist)



Figure 27. Installation photograph: *Wild Things*, Animal Gallery,  
Bedford, Bedfordshire, 5 September–9 October 2014, showing:  
Alison Goodyear, *Silk Palettes* (2014) *Ink on silk*, variable sizes,  
(Collection of the Artist)

As such, it tests our understanding of authenticity. Through various processes and approaches these paintings explore the threshold of the 'real' i.e. paint, and its 'representation' i.e. the photograph of paint on the palette. This use of painting and photography can be seen in the work of Ian Wallace who describes it as a relationship where 'the referencing power of photography returns to the 'deconstructed' materiality of painting, and its canvas support the possibility of representation, but now as field rather than figure' (2012: 176).

This process emerged over several years, but initially after reading David Reed's book *Rock, Paper, Scissors* (2009). Reed documents his process using notes and palettes, which encouraged my own reflection on process by collecting my own palettes, which had long drawn my interest.<sup>94</sup> In particular it is how these artefacts of painting are created by the results of what could be described as unthinking, or of a mindless activity of mixing paint to be applied elsewhere, which also documents a specific period of painting. This new process combines: the mindless with the mindful, digital with physical, production with reproduction, 'authentic' with 'inauthentic'.

The starting position for these paintings is taken from a central reflection of undergoing the experience of absorption (which may or may not be described as aesthetic), that is, in looking at works of different artists (art historical or contemporary), or reading a particular book, or being attracted to a specific pattern or texture (natural or constructed) that produces a heightened or greater level of engagement. Here it is something particular to the aesthetics of this element that has driven an address to it through paint, because of how that element may then be used in a programme of work. This is distinct from banal absorption in that it is in some way unusual or unique, and not pathological because there is no irrational or compulsive behaviour because of it. This element is then reflected on through painting process, whether it be a colour combination, a certain form, structure or pattern or even the way the paint is behaving on a surface. This involves many painting sessions over a multitude of layers, some more detailed than others. Often there is a process of experimenting with different effects for grounds, which may involve playing with various tools to achieve different marks. This process of experimentation works towards questioning the beholder's (both painter and

---

<sup>94</sup> Kandinsky wrote: 'praise be to the palette for the delights it offers ... it is itself a 'work' more beautiful indeed than many a work' (1982: 372). See: Kandinsky, W. (1982) *Kandinsky Complete Writings on Art*, Boston: Da Capo Press.

painting) experience of the work by toying with or obfuscating the viewing process, which is achieved by using various painterly methods that act as veils or semi-translucent blockages.

After each painting session the work is photographed on a camera phone so that it can be considered whilst away from the studio. This is an effective way of seeing the work at a reduced scale, rotated or reversed, to consider it from all angles. It is at this point that some sense of how the work is progressing is formed. If the painting is working the need to continue painting is all consuming, and it is repeatedly viewed on the camera phone. If on the other hand it is proving troublesome, then the opposite is true and steps have to be taken to force some kind of resolution to it. This describes a subjective and perhaps sometimes compulsive experience of painting practice.

For the purpose of this research the paintings *Blue Depths* (2015) (Fig. 29) and *Tiger Tiger* (2016) (Fig. 31) have been used as case studies. *Blue Depths* (2015) is a painting over four canvases, of which two utilize the printed palette silk approach, painted over with acrylic and oil paint and paint mediums. *Tiger Tiger* (2016) is a painting over five canvases, all of them utilizing the printed palette silk approach. It is painted in acrylic and oil paint, paint mediums, and spray paint with the use of stencils. These paintings employ: pictorial gesture, multiple layers of paint of various levels of translucency, play of perspective, painting on photographic print, and seriality. As a result they are in dialogue with the work of Bernard Frize, David Reed, Christian Bonnefoi, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Katy Moran, R. H. Quaytman and Elizabeth Neel. As discussed earlier, Foucault suggests the tableau is the culmination of a 'series of series' (Foucault cited in Armstrong et al. 2001: 46), and Armstrong and Lisbon suggest 'serial practices elaborate decisive ways of thinking through the work's exposure' (ibid.), therefore my practice could be considered to be a continuation of such practices.

Recently I gained a new understanding of myself when I was diagnosed as having Irlen syndrome. Irlen syndrome, otherwise known as visual stress, is a disorder where it is believed the brain cannot tackle the vast sensory influx, and in response produces movement and colour into the field of vision where they do not exist. On reflection, this may be why my paintings have steered towards greater abstraction, because they are a result of my 'abstract' experience. This experience is echoed by painter Nicolas de Staël who said he turned to abstraction because he 'found it

awkward to paint an object as a likeness because of the awkwardness I felt when faced with the infinite multitude of coexisting objects in any single object' (de Staël cited in Gamboni 2002: 19). This is just perhaps an obstruction, which I didn't understand prior to the diagnosis. I was not aware of seeing/experiencing things differently from the majority of people, for after all, how can I tell that what I see is not what you see, and vice versa?

Does this set me apart as an untypical painter? I don't think so, we all develop idiosyncrasies due to our physical or mental make-up to the extent that there can be no typical painter. Research also suggests that 46% of dyslexia sufferers undergo perceptual processing problems such as Irlen Syndrome (see footnote 17), which would suggest, considering the probabilities, that I am not alone in being a painter that experiences Irlen Syndrome. This syndrome could be what has made me more susceptible as to what is or isn't going on with aesthetic absorption in painting practice, and perhaps it is this slightly less common position that has compelled me to address these questions with this level of detail. From this description of my practice I will now discuss my responses to the questionnaire and how they relate to those of the collaborators.

### **3.4 Qualitative Findings From My Practice**

At the beginning of Chapter 2 I discussed the qualitative results from the collaborators dialogues, from which I built up a set of qualitative results. Here I have answered the same key questions.

The results found that: I have encountered the experience of absorption during my own painting practice, as the absorbed artist in painting process. I have also encountered the experience of absorption in response to other artists' works as the absorbed beholder in paintings of others. Finally, I have also encountered the experience of being the absorbed painting-beholder of my own works, however I would add a caveat that this is mainly from works that have been 'off of my radar' for some time, that is, that I have somewhat forgotten the process I went through in making them. Consequently this doesn't happen very often with the paintings I remember the most, as these tend to be the ones I feel are most pivotal to my painting practice.

This suggests that if we are present during the physical unfolding of the work, that

is the painting stage, then a memory of the psychological making of the work positions us differently to that of the painting-beholder. Only if we are no longer connected to the experience of painting the work do our positions become more analogous with the painting-beholder.

My responses to the questionnaire follow the majority of the collaborators, even in declaring my occasional experience of being an absorbed beholder of my own painting process. These results give a sense of my position in relation to the responses of the collaborators, as a painter and fellow collaborator, and from where the following reflections to and from my practice sit, as I will now discuss.

### **3.5 The Limits Of Fried's Theory of Prolepsis**

For the collaborators, considering the role of absorption, in general, is not a part of their painting practice, or something they would have necessarily contemplated until I asked it of them. After re-examining their discourses on absorption in Chapter 2, I found that there are particular issues they encounter when considering Fried's theories, struggling with how they function in relation to painting practice.

When we reconsider Fried's speculative theory that the artist Chardin possibly found the 'absorption of his figures both a natural correlative for his own engrossment in the act of painting and a proleptic mirroring of what he trusted would be the absorption of the beholder before the finished work' (1980: 51) we find that so much hinges on the word 'trust', of what the painting-beholder is meant to mirror. This ambiguous description is problematic for the collaborators. For example, several of them reject that what they feel is the implication of intuition in this process, because it is associated with romantic notions of existential abandonment, which they see as a potentially inauthentic, confected and self-delusional approach (AB INT: 49.03). This suggests that some of the collaborators fear such an approach can interrupt clear judgement. So how can Fried's theory of prolepsis come in to play? It implies that it provides some sort of gauge to judge the work by, perhaps in the way SC described earlier. This raises the question that if absorption is a state of making, how could this state of making be used as a measure of itself? Is it that finding yourself aesthetically absorbed whilst making a painting is enough to convince us, as artists, that this experience could be proleptically mirrored, thus ticking the appropriately judged box?

This leaves us asking of practice - what is it we are exactly supposed to 'trust' in? Is it that my experience of practice as painter-beholder is what the painting-beholder will mirror?<sup>95</sup> I would agree that there can be a physical trace left in a painting, that is, a mapping of how a body has moved over the canvas by tracing a line of paint, where a dynamic quality to the painting reflects an intense or energetic moment in process. But how an element of painting that was a perfunctory completion of a task could be differentiated from an aesthetically absorbed moment in painting, or even how this may be intimated, is not clear. What this demonstrates is a lack of detail in this theory in that it fails to fully explain, to use Fried's terms, how exactly this 'trust' correlates with practice.

Further problematic issues are found in the way Fried uses the term 'absorption' from both positions: to describe the relationship between a beholder and the painting they are standing in front of, and (less frequently) using engrossment/absorption to describe experiences of painting practice for the painter. Here SE questions if Fried's theories on how painting is in the world, and how a subjective experience of being absorbed, might be very different things (SE RT1: 12.25). Although I would agree they are related through reflecting on my own experiences, I find myself, like SE, wanting more than just absorption or theatricality to describe my experience as painter-beholder and painting-beholder. Like the collaborators, I feel that Fried's theory of prolepsis, whilst it might hold rudimentary truths, continues by simplifying complex processes, and as the collaborators highlight, leaves us with many questions. The collaborators reveal how they find this theory curiously both ambiguous and prescriptive, suggesting that it is a tricky area to navigate, and the edicts drawn from it do not necessarily fit practice.

We have seen how Fried dedicatedly pursues his theories across art history, and through his scrutiny of the roles of 'beholdership' has given us great initial insight into those positions and their relationships. However, SE, like many of the collaborators, sees this as a universalizing approach and a reach too far (SE RT1: 1.58.53). It becomes clear, the collaborators have difficulty with the limits they feel Fried's theories impose. SE says: 'he's placing so much on the notion of experience, but at the same time a version of experience that is so bureaucratically managed' (SE INT: 56.55). With feeling so 'managed' it is unsurprising that the collaborators

---

<sup>95</sup> Mirroring might not be the good thing it's initially thought to be. For an opposing stance see: *Against Empathy*, Paul Bloom (2017).

are against, what appears to them, to be an imposition or restraint on practice. This predicament is a case of a problematic theory versus the license of practice, that is, a license for artists to do whatever it is they want to do, but not on the terms suggested to them by an art historian, especially when those terms, as they see it, do not fully extend to the studio and practice.

As such these restrictive principles colour both the collaborators' experience and understanding of aesthetic absorption. For as SE states: 'Arts ... involvement with the real world ... in Fried's scheme you can't have that, and how come that's not too much of a high price to pay for this thing called absorption ... I'm not clear about what's so good about it anyway?' (SE RT1: 40.01). This leaves the collaborators embracing the encounters of aesthetic absorption, but not wanting to be party to the limiting nature of Fried's theories of it, hence for some, acknowledging it becomes too high a price to pay.

Fried grasped a critical idea at a significant stage based on the pivot of aesthetic experience, but has continued to examine it from his initial precepts, using the same terms. However in doing so he gives the same account to practice, which as we have seen, falls short. His interpretation of the painter-beholder position struggles to capture the *modus operandi* from the position of practice. He does not give absorption sufficient interpretation, in recognising how the difference in positions between painter-beholder and painting-beholder are operative in aesthetic absorption. Without this understanding to work from, as the collaborators have stated, Fried's theories become prescriptive, compromising freedom of practice. And by following his theories across an art historical trajectory, it seems to some like a form of retroactive embedding of that position.

Fried does touch on certain shortcomings by writing in caveats such as 'defeat or suspend theater' in 'Art and Objecthood' (1998 [1967]: 151) or the 'shifting interpretations of the issues of theatricality' (1998: 49). He has also acknowledged that 'a great deal more remains to be discovered about the vicissitudes of the relationship between painting and beholder' (ibid.: 53). But whether he means by himself (Fried has since published more books), or that he is open to the enquiry of others, is unclear (he is staunchly committed to his position). Regardless, what this research does is revisit that relationship between the painter-beholder and the painting-beholder, because it finds the very fact that we, as artists in the studio, don't have adequate terms to deal with or describe this issue, highlights the need

for its further consideration.

### **3.6 Negotiating The Limits Through Practice**

After examining these discourses on aesthetic absorption, it is clear that what this research has found with the aid of the collaborators' contributions, is a relationship between theory and practice that has proven dysfunctional. Here I follow how this relationship has been negotiated in practice to date by myself, and through the insights offered by the collaborators.

In Chapter 2 I focused on building a fundamental understanding of aesthetic absorption in painting practice through the dialogues with the collaborators. This was in order to understand if it is something the collaborators encounter, and if so, how that is the case. For AMJ, encountering absorption was where something 'sparked' that provided her with 'something I didn't know before' (AMJ INT: 51.00). This is similar to SC, whose approach to practice is common to many of the collaborators: 'when you make work, certainly in my point of view, is that it's a learning experience, and if I just go through this kind of making a product then I'm not engaged, and I've not learnt anything. So I suppose that's why I would say I'm suspicious of it, of the result. I don't understand its value, because I haven't been through a process with it' (SC RT1: 10.19).

This suggests that where a practice relies on proleptic mirroring, absorption could be described as central to gauging how a work is progressing. Another way of putting it would be to say that no *engaging* effectively amounts to no *gauging* for the painter-beholder. By which I mean that where SC describes how without connecting with the work he cannot judge it – he is detached from it, and as such, is disengaged. This lack of engagement could be described as the point where he doesn't trust the work to do what he wants it to do, because he is relying on his experiences of making, and without those experiences his suspicions are raised towards its efficacy.



Figure 28. Alison Goodyear, *Blue Depths in development* (2015)  
Acrylic, ink and oil paint on silk and canvas, Variable sizes,  
(Collection of the Artist)

For myself, and prior to undertaking this research, I also connected aesthetic absorption with the experiences of making in paintings.<sup>96</sup> I considered it as a moment in the process of painting that I would equate with a feeling of rightness. Where what was encountered as a good experience of painting in the studio, was, to some extent, equated with a good/successful painting. Terry Atkinson in 'Phantoms of the Studio' (1990) describes this as the theory that 'art reflects the reality of experience' (ibid.: 50). In the introduction I describe this process as the romance or the myth of making, where people confuse the experiences gained in making, (absorption within the banal) with aesthetic practice (a conscious perceptive mode).

However, my understanding has changed, developed as a result of this research, which was made clear when reflecting on the process of painting *Blue Depths* (2015). I realized that I found it a similar experience to the one AMJ and SC describe, that it provided me with something I didn't know before, but this was because through making this painting I opened up possibilities within my existing process, which allowed me to consider a shift in the experience of the painting-beholder. I realized that it was because through making this painting I was objectively focused on outcomes and strategies, and not the experience of making.

---

<sup>96</sup> On considering how my own understanding of aesthetic absorption developed I recall my own first aesthetic experience as a painting-beholder. I was around 10 years old and in the National Gallery for a school trip. It was the first time I had been to a gallery, so there were many new things for me to encounter. Towards the end of our visit, after seeing many paintings, I came across Henri Rousseau's *Tiger in a Tropical Storm* (1891), also called *Surprised!*, which is a fair description of how my experience of it left me. I remember on first seeing this painting (which was very large to me as a child) how I really felt the force of the storm as it tore through the forest. I have since realized that I was experiencing the onslaught from the perspective of the tiger. I felt we were crouching side by side, and rather than being ready to pounce on unwary prey as others have interpreted this painting, it was fear of the lightning that drove us to hide into the undergrowth. I was awed by the intensity of it. I not only felt but also heard the storm in the forest. I only tore myself away on realizing my school group had left and I would soon lose my ride home.

On reflection I would say that this formative experience was pivotal in setting me on path I have been on ever since (as artist, educator and researcher), and could potentially be the founding reason for this research. I would describe it both as an emotional and cognitive encounter. My experience of aesthetic absorption as a painting-beholder was almost identical to the lightning bolt SE experienced from the Poussin painting (the lightning was also present in Rousseau's painting as well as my experience of it). Perhaps I too had acquired certain 'techniques in looking' (SE RT1: 51.21) from all of the other paintings I had encountered that day. These were my first true experiences of large-scale paintings i.e. not from photographs in a book, but it was only the Rousseau that provoked an absorptive experience in me. I certainly felt it 'charged like electric' as GW and SE describe (RT1: 49.43). It was some time till I saw the painting again, as at the time I had no other access to it, or even the understanding or capability to fully discuss the encounter. When I did return to it many years later I was curious to see if what I recalled matched the reality. I didn't encounter the lightning bolt experience again, rather it was more like meeting an old friend.

Essentially this research provided me with ways to exorcise my own 'Phantoms of the Studio' (Atkinson 1990), which in my case arise out of the relationship between experiences of making and aesthetic practice.

This process partially came about because of the new silk techniques I was developing, learning how the paint behaved with various mediums on a different surface in relation to the photographic elements of my palettes. This interaction is seen in the first canvas of *Blue Depths* (Fig. 28 & 29), where the impasto paint of the printed palette silk interacts with the yellow acrylic paint that is underneath it, and with the various shades of blue and green oil paint which then overlay it. Here there is interplay: between how the vertical and horizontal axes are represented on the substrate with *real* paint, combined with the photographic *representation* of paint.

The resulting toying with a sense of depth is created through this layering, constantly shifting our sense of foreground to background, so that it becomes hard to 'tie down' what is where. Within this shifting, the forms themselves create a kind of abstract landscape implying mountainous contours or forested expanses. Here the paint is applied through various techniques. In some cases it is almost scratchy and rough, whereas in others it is flat and without marks. This contrast continues the interplay in its cognition. It becomes apparent on closer inspection that there are different surface qualities to each canvas. Where there are silk processes used there is a more uniform smoothness. However small imperfections appear, bumps in the otherwise calm surface. This is because the paint underneath the silk in some places doesn't lie flat, and this raised element creates a disruption in the following layers. These flaws work as a key to tracing where the paint lies in relation to the shifting foreground to background effect.

As a result of how this interplay unfolded, I realized that previously I would have placed importance on whether I encountered aesthetic absorption during painting process. I would have agreed with some of the collaborators in describing aesthetic absorption as being about this process of learning, and specifically for me the painter-beholder. However, it is not that I don't encounter aesthetic absorption in painting practice now, but as a result of this research and process I place greater importance on whether a certain approach can trigger a shift in the register of experience for the painting-beholder through a strategic address to aesthetic absorption.

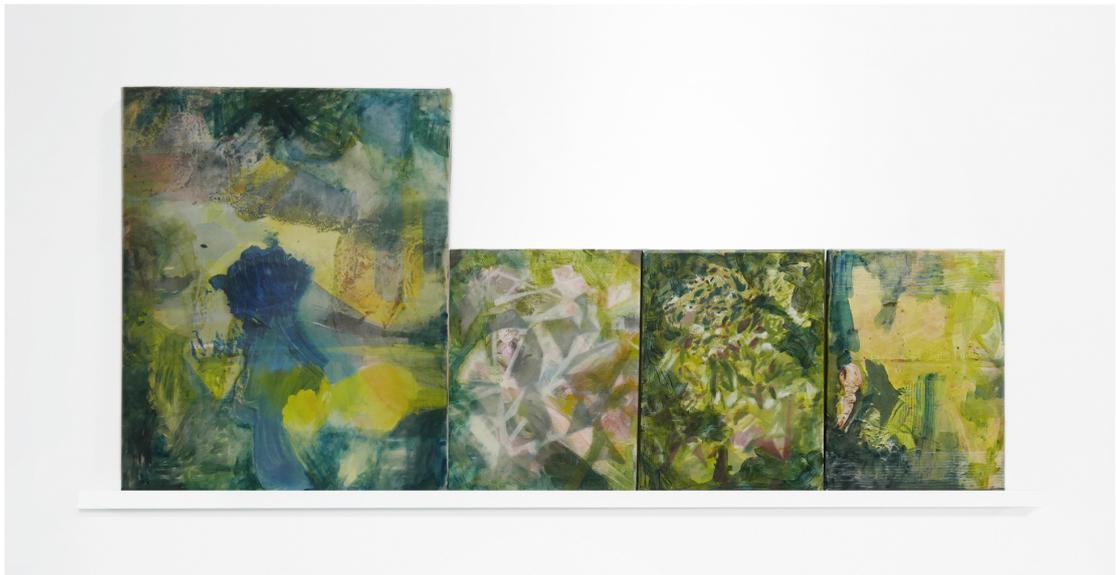


Figure 29. Alison Goodyear, *Blue Depths* (2015)  
Acrylic, ink and oil paint on silk, canvas and wooden shelf, 46 x 110 x 3cm  
(Collection of the Artist)

This process was dominant during making the painting *Tiger Tiger* (Fig. 30 & 31), which took place over a period of 10 months. Normally my works don't take that amount of time to come together, but this particular work seemed inert for a very long time. I tested ideas, tried different processes, but it wasn't holding any value for me in that I felt it achieved nothing, and it remained this way for some time. I did encounter absorption during the making process, but I wouldn't necessarily describe feeling suspicious toward it in the way that both SC and AB describe (SC RT1: 10.19) (AB INT: 20.03). I was aware that I felt I couldn't trust the work - it was a leap in the dark as to how it would be received.

However, this changed when it came together, because I found the key to a shift in the register of experience, a strategy for the work. It was through the simplest, and what proved to be the final, applications of paint that I found a resolution to the work. This took the form of applying luminous pink spray paint with stencils at various points over the five canvases. Once applied, it had the effect of opening up the dialogue between the individual canvases, making it work as one work.

This application of paint helped place emphasis on the: differences of surface, depictions of surface, and the interplay of materials on those surfaces as seen with the work *Blue Depths* (2015). But *Tiger Tiger* (2016) differs in that every canvas contains a layer of silk. In some it is closer to the surface, that is, under less mediums and paint, in others it is more concealed. This continues the toying effect discussed previously between a sense of depth and a coming to a surface created through the layering, with a shifting sense of foreground to background.

I would suggest that in this group work there is also more of a dynamic re-reading from left to right and back again. This is to do with the connecting forms, imagery, and colours within the five canvases. Here the larger canvas works as a way of 'breaking out' from the uniform sizes of the other canvases, as a kind of overspill or unfurling. Which accentuates what is seen within the confines of the stretcher, and intimates what lies beyond, where it continues out of sight.



Figure 30. Alison Goodyear, *Tiger Tiger* in development (2016)  
Acrylic, ink and oil paint on silk and canvas, Variable sizes,  
(Collection of the Artist)



Figure 31. Alison Goodyear, *Tiger Tiger* (2016)  
Acrylic, ink and oil paint on silk, canvas and wooden shelf, 46 x 130 x 3cm  
(Collection of the Artist)

What is poignant is the distinction between how I felt about the painting without having a strategy for it, and the difference I felt when I did. Without a plan for it I felt this painting was problematic, it served no purpose, I felt that I had nothing to rely on with it. Whereas when I found a solution it had the opposite effect. From this I realized that previously I would have relied on my sole experiences, and of satisfaction in making the painting as painter-beholder. This was operative to my understanding of how to achieve a shift in the register of experience through recognising and realizing the differences in the positions of painter-beholder to painting-beholder. Consequently, I don't think that I could construct the painting-beholder without, at some point in the past, having undergone aesthetic absorption as a painting-beholder. But having said that, I now consider the experiences encountered through practice as painter-beholder redundant to the actual strategic considerations of the practice.

This understanding is paralleled by KP: 'the process is for me, the act of making them is for me, but once they are objects in the world, I'm not really their audience' (KP INT: 1.20.27). As such it is crucial to understand that the process of making is more about being aware of the possibility of a radical difference in position between banal and aesthetic absorption in a 'state of making', that enables us to consider how a shift in the register of experience may be achieved, where a programme of work is imagined for the audience, for the painting-beholder.

Fried's theory of prolepsis pivots on the term 'trust': 'what he [Chardin] trusted would be the absorption of the beholder' (1980: 51). Drawing from my own experience, and reflecting on the collaborators' responses, I would suggest that trust for the artist comes from an awareness developed over the lifetime of a practice from many disparate sources, aside from what Fried describes of proleptic mirroring. Which can also help build an intense understanding of what absorptive strategies might or might not work, that is, a change in the register of experience. In which case trust here is more about trusting our own judgement. That is not to say that anyone at any level of practice cannot produce absorptive work. But that where the work goes out into the world and has the opportunity to make those connections with the painting-beholder allows the artist to perceive how the work is encountered. This was discussed by GW, who said: 'There's one artist I know ... his favourite thing was to watch people looking at his paintings, and to really make notes and register certain aspects about it' (GW RT1: 49.43).

Without such alternative forms of learning about the work there can be nothing for the artist to build that trust upon. Trusting that encounters of aesthetic absorption can occur through proleptic mirroring, as discussed earlier, is more akin to guessing, or taking a leap of faith, that is, faith in the intimate connection of absorption and making and faith in the beholder's empathy with this intimate connection. The painting-beholder cannot actually be trusted to traverse aesthetic absorption in the same way as the painter-beholder, unlike other forms of absorption such as banal everyday tasks, which you can trust will occur in more-or-less the same way for everyone. This is why some artists might choose a programmatic approach through absorptive strategies, because they decide not to put trust in proleptic mirroring of the painter-beholder to the painting-beholder.

Of these absorptive strategies AB describes seeking to understand them in the work of other artists: 'I'm looking for artworks, which somehow contain something, which demand from me a particular form of attentiveness. So this is the measure of everything really, finding works which do that, in art fairs as well, becomes a very important means of understanding how works of art contain and stimulate forms of attention' (AB INT: 39.00). It is also evident where SE describes how differently painters behave in galleries: 'you're probably looking at it from some funny angle, because you approach it like you do your own work' (SE RT1, 33.27).

These examples expose the painter as a particular type of beholder, of inhabiting many positions at different times and sometimes even synchronously: painter-beholder and painting-beholder. It also supports the idea that the painter-beholder is an 'expert' beholder, because not only do they understand the difference in these positions, but how to deliberately and strategically work the distinctions between them.

Of this process, when it comes to constructing the painting-beholder in the painter-beholder, we see GW discuss a 'meditative detachment' (GW INT: 44.30) that occurs for him during the development of the work, which sounds similar to a Roger Hilton quote paraphrased by AB: 'sometimes my paintings are completed when my back is turned' (AB INT: 16.55). Here AB points out that the 'dynamic relationships of a studio practice are actually very particular' (ibid.). For myself, the relationships of a studio practice have always been focused on facilitating or enabling absorption to occur. In the course of this research I have become no less interested in facilitating absorption, but I have become more wary of the potential

confusions that might arise in identifying it. The studio is the place that contains my tools and materials, a place of safety, and to some extent comfort, it is more than just these things by themselves. It is the sum of them that enables this hierarchy of absorption to be established. For most of the other collaborators and myself, the studio has become the site where aesthetic absorption is addressed, just as Diderot described it for Greuze.<sup>97</sup> Through the process of this research I still use the studio as site to consider this hierarchy of absorption, but now my focus has partially shifted in that I find myself using it to reconsider the differences in the beholder positions rather than primarily facilitating aesthetic absorption for myself, the painter-beholder. This is to better understand the differences in the register of experience, which allows me to strategically address aesthetic absorption, rather than taking a non-strategic approach in the way Fried's proleptic mirroring seems to suggest.

From the dialogues, we have seen many of the collaborators discuss different levels of detachment during painting process. SE also recounts experiencing a similar form of detachment, but highlights how similar levels of engagement can occur when doing everyday tasks like checking Facebook, or cooking, querying whether it is an 'index of anything important' (SE INT: 48.40). KP also points out how some 'artists ... are able to get absorbed in a kind of intuitive process and have a kind of vision ... I am absolutely, resolutely not one of them' (KP RT2: 49.47).

What is interesting is that both SE and KP agree that they encounter aesthetic absorption in painting practice as the painter-beholder, and that they might experience a banal form of absorption in mundane tasks such as producing repetitive marks on a canvas. But both state that they do not actually use these experiences to formulate their practice – for them it is probably better described as a side-effect: 'if I'm doing it right it should be just like buttering toast, very quotidian ... there's nothing special about it, there's nothing kind of 'other statey' about it, it's really straightforward' (SE: 29.53).

This corresponds to AB who identifies the root of these concerns: 'The idea of existential abandonment, which in certain artistic positions privileges certain kinds

---

<sup>97</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1: 'When he works, he is completely absorbed by his picture; it affects him profoundly, he carries around with him the personality of the figure he is portraying in his studio, sad or gay, foolish or serious, flamboyant or reserved, according to whatever has occupied his brush and his imagination that morning' (Diderot cited in Thompson 1989: 5). Like Greuze, I also 'carry' around this thing that has 'occupied my brush' (and almost literally), as seen by my frequent focus on a photograph of the work on my phone or other devices once I am away from the studio.

of behaviour, such as spontaneity, and gesture, is fraught with the potential for self-delusion ... this way of approaching art making doesn't interest me at all, because I think it very quickly becomes fake' (AB INT: 49.03). And SE explains: 'when I thought I knew that something was really working, I've been wrong too often, and that's why I guess I'm wary of fetishizing the act of making too much, as if that's where things happen' (SE INT: 41.00). Here the collaborators highlight the romantic connotations linked to the term 'state', which underscores their concerns of authenticity in practice. This concern, we see throughout the dialogues, is one of the critical drivers toward how the collaborators act in relation to Fried's theories.

### **3.7 An Alternative Theory/Practice Relationship**

By following how the collaborators have negotiated Fried's theories in practice to date, I have demonstrated where this theory/practice relationship is failing. I find the collaborators to be struggling with the problem I have faced them with, that is, Fried's terms on absorption, which isn't something that they would have addressed until I presented them with it through the dialogues.

As we have seen earlier, Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring raises issues about the role of trust, whilst not adequately communicating the process it attempts to describe. It comes down to whether, as an artist, you put your trust in the painting-beholder to mirror your experience of practice as Fried's prolepsis seems to suggest. This is what I have described as a non-strategic consideration of aesthetic absorption.<sup>98</sup> Or in contrast, a strategic approach is taken, where the painting-beholder is addressed through a directed programme of work aimed at creating a shift in the register of experience. Without understanding the difference in these approaches, developed out of the dialogues with the collaborators, it is apparent how hard it is to negotiate Fried's theories, which is the position the collaborators find themselves in. As they have shown, authenticity in practice is a prime concern for them, which leaves them reluctant or diffident to declare a position on something that remains obscure, that they see as potentially endangering this authenticity.

Part of the difference between the painter-beholder and painting-beholder position occurs because of the accumulation of thinking generated during the making of the

---

<sup>98</sup> I am aware that even a non-strategic approach can still be considered a strategy of sorts, however I qualify this term because proleptic mirroring as we have found, is more of a 'hit or miss' approach rather than a planned strategic one and moreover confuses states of making with aesthetic absorption.

painting. It sets them apart. Which raises the question as to whether it is possible for both painter-beholder and painting-beholder to experience these considerations through shared authorship, and be similarly—or at least more closely—informed of thinking through painting process. What would the capacity or the role of aesthetic absorption even be here?

Questions regarding the role of authorship and agency within painting practice are highlighted by Michaels (2011), who suggests any attempt at anti-theatrical work is inherently theatrical. Similarly, the collaborators discuss alternative modes of authorship, where visitors to the studio may introduce modes of de-privileging through interaction with the artist during practice (AB RT2: 16.53). Such encounters engage both painting-beholder and painter-beholder, where both parties become accountable and responsible to each other, and to the final realization of the work.

For the artists, these approaches can be about how we negotiate alternative voices in the studio, entering into dialogue, and even the possibility of collaboration. I have undergone similar experiences where an external party enters into the studio whilst paintings are being made, where observations made by them can completely alter the original track of the work. Sometimes I have addressed such comments with fervour, as a fresh perspective can provide a renewed focus beyond what was initially being worked towards. This new vigour can drive practice for a considerable time, and although I am the painter who made the paintings, as a result of this dialogue I feel the visitors part in the creation of the work through this shared mode of authorship.

Unfortunately, I have not always found this to be a positive experience. With a rare few visitors to the studio I have felt somewhat trapped, where comments have drained the studio dry of vivacity. And I have found that this situation often results in that particular work being put aside, sometimes for a very long time. Experiences like this effect how an artist addresses such modes of authorship and de-privileging. It could make them reconsider allowing visits to the studio and the potential to compromise practice, its balance sometimes being fragile in nature. Alternatively, it might be possible to embrace such comments by thinking about them in a different way, as more of a provocation towards practice. By factoring in this element of friction these encounters could perhaps fuel an area of focus, rather than quash it.

As a research student there is also the studio tutorial as another adjunct to the painter and painting-beholder relationship. The voice of the tutor (in this instance Dr. Daniel Sturgis) is one that can have great consequences for a practice. In this case it is often materialised as a kind of 'sounding board' relationship, where guidance is offered based on, amongst many other things, a large experience of painter to painting-beholder relationships.

Accordingly, over the span of this research, as this practice has progressed so has the thesis, and with it my understanding of both my practice and that of the collaborators. In my case, consideration of the painting-beholder has become more focused towards the notion of aesthetic absorption, in constructing a particular type of beholder. Through finding greater understanding of these positions my practice continues to look for more symmetry in the painter to painting-beholder relationship, that is, where aesthetic absorption can be put to work. It attempts to enable a relationship where the painting-beholder takes something from the painting, and as painter-beholder, I take something from that interaction. As such, this can result in a painting-beholder and painter-beholder that are more aware of this address or discourse, familiar with the mutual positions, and as a consequence empowered by this knowledge.

If there is a space for both painting-beholder and painter-beholder to engage as collaborative author it would have to be a process sensitive to both needs, perhaps where both parties formed a kind of happy symbiosis, each responding to the vision of the other. Such collaboration raises further questions as to what approaches may be productive in this respect, and what could evolve out of such a relationship. If the painting-beholder is present during the painting stage it is possible that they may view the painting in a similar way to the painter-beholder. Similar, but not the same, as it is not their direct actions that have made the painting. As a consequence, there is an element of what might be described as a physical understanding that can be surmised through direct observation of a work unfolding, but not directly lived. That is, not having the experience of the artist as the hand that held the brush, and hence producing their own version of a psychical unfolding of the work. Which raises further questions about how such forms of collaboration could even negotiate a shift in the register of experience. As such this approach would be less about a state of making, and more about relationships developing through jointly encountering and negotiating thresholds, as I go on to discuss.

In the past I have attempted to make works that adapt conventional approaches to the painter-beholder and painting-beholder relationship. The painting experiments were called *Move me 1* (2013) (Fig. 33) and *Move me 2* (2013) (Fig. 34), which were painted on seven wood panels, each panel measuring 10 x 40 x 4cm, and designed to work as an 'explicit invitation to exercise choice' (Eco 1989: 1). This was attempted by inviting the painting-beholder to physically rearrange the seven panels on wall-mounted pegs. Here each choice was one of 5,040 possible permutations of the painting.

Rather than expecting a traditional 'passive' viewing, the works were designed to encourage the beholder to reflect on their own aesthetic encounters through the work and to re-position it accordingly. This piece could be seen as 'open', often in flux, drawing on our natural urge to make sense of the world around us. It attempted to collapse conventional relationships of artist and painting-beholder, where only one version of the artwork is presented, that is, the version the artist made as a way to intervene in the 'normal' regime of vision. It considered that there could be other versions that could also intervene, through which the painting-beholder could re-assess their understanding of themselves in the world.

This process theoretically allows for a shift in agency and authorship, a levelling of positions through de-privileging the artist's position, and elevating that of the painting-beholder position through this sharing, albeit at a basic level by moving the painted panels, whilst also enabling a more pragmatic approach to painter-beholder and painting-beholder relationships. Here it was hoped that the painting-beholder might gain insight into what could be described as their own personal aesthetic brought about through an autodidactic journey, self-learning prompted by interaction with the piece. This recalls the interactive works of Roy Ascott such as *Change Painting* (1960) (Fig. 32), which is made up of clear perspex panels containing different marks painted in black paint. These panels can be shifted in front or behind each other allowing for the painting to be changed if required.



Figure 32. Roy Ascott, *Change Painting* (1960)  
Cellulose on perspex panels in wooden frame, 53 x 167.5cm  
(Collection of the Artist)

Fried suggests that 'art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre' (1998 [1967]: 164), when an artwork acknowledges the beholder before it. Therefore, it was speculated that these *Move Me* works could open up understanding of the painting-beholder relationship, and become an anti-theatrical alternative by creating as Mulhall suggests: 'work[s] which acknowledge their own literality and thereby construct a beholder capable of acknowledging their own literal presence' (2001: 12). And thus work towards an expanded understanding beyond just the absorption/theatricality limit that Fried implies. As a result, rather than the 'death' of one position, through the work it evolves into something else, and in some aspects provides for the novice, that is, the non-artist beholder or non-expert beholder to become an expert-beholder, of sorts, through the work.

Consequently, I wondered if it was possible for the beholder to experience aesthetic absorption through the re-positioned work. I was interested in how the work could develop through and with the painting-beholder, how many permutations would be explored, and if a dominant order would prevail. I was also curious as to how the traditionally forbidden act of touching an artwork to manoeuvre the panels would be overcome, and whether it would engage 'critical agency' (Foucault) as Michael Kelly highlights:

the issue is a subject's capacity to act with some degree of autonomy (freedom) in public practices and institutions that are the material embodiment of heteronomy (constraint), where the measure of autonomy is whether the subject can rationally critique and transform the norms of such practices and institutions and, eventually, the practices and institutions themselves. (2013: 243)



Figure 33. Alison Goodyear, *Move Me 1* (2013)  
Oil on seven wood panels, 10 x 280 x 4cm  
(Collection of the Artist)



Figure 34. Alison Goodyear, *Move Me 2* (2013)  
Oil on seven wood panels, 40 x 70 x 4cm  
(Private Collection)

In asking the beholder to aid in the entropy of the artwork, and then its potential rebirth through the shared temporary language individual to these works, the relationship between artist and painting-beholder had the potential to become something else, like artist-beholder-artist. From observations and feedback gathered over the course of the exhibitions where the works were displayed,<sup>99</sup> the painting-beholders did in some sense 'lose' themselves, but this was more in a sense of play, that is, absorption closer to the banal, and not aesthetic (Fig. 35 & 36). The painting-beholders, once assured they were free to move the pieces, embraced the concept, although it often took a more 'brave' individual to initiate the engagement of others. Overall no dominant order was found, and instead this play element took over with elaborate ways of stacking becoming the main focus. Here engaging 'critical agency' through the work was more akin to game playing rather than an aesthetic absorptive encounter. Consequently the relationship between artist and painting-beholder was more like artist as games-master to player, rather than one of extending considerations of aesthetics or emphasizing the similarities or differences between these positions.<sup>100</sup>

In theory this work was offering a different approach to the painting-beholder, but in reality through this testing it opened up a whole new set of practical concerns such as safety, mechanical logistics and security. It highlighted that what might have started out as an absorptive interaction related to aesthetics soon evolved into a very performative encounter, disrupting any absorptive strategy that the paintings might have hoped to employ (that is in the way forms and colour interact within each panel and the way those elements may or may not connect with the next panel), which seems to reaffirm Michaels' theory of inherent theatricality (2011). Which suggested that extending authorship in this particular way exacerbated theatrical concerns, effectively diffusing any absorptive encounter in relation to aesthetics, whereas absorption of a banal type through play, seemed to grow. To address this issue, one would need to reconsider how the painting-beholder could interact with the installed work. Whilst this is not impossible to resolve, it would become an on-going intrusion to painting practice for the painter-beholder and the focus of this research. As such this particular approach wasn't pursued further at this time.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> *Visual Symposium* (2013) [Symposium and Exhibition]. Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall (BGV), London. 26 April 2013., and *Recalculating* (2013) [Exhibition]. Triangle Space, Chelsea College of Arts, London. 24–27 April 2013.

<sup>100</sup> This is not to say that there is not a place for 'play' within art, but that it wasn't the focus for this experiment.

<sup>101</sup> As discussed earlier this type of programme could be described as a post-conceptual approach (Osborne 2013) in its social and critical focus.



Figure 35. Photographs of interaction at: *Recalculating*, Triangle Space, Chelsea College of Arts, London. 24–27 April 2013, showing: Alison Goodyear, *Move Me 1* (2013) Oil on seven wood panels, 10 x 280 x 4cm (Collection of the Artist)



Figure 36. Photographs of interaction at: *Visual Symposium*, Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall (BGV), London. 26 April 2013, showing: Alison Goodyear, *Move Me 2* (2013) Oil on seven wood panels, 40 x 70 x 4cm (Private Collection)

Another approach to engagement encountered in the studio is seen in the relatively recent practice of painters posting images and films of work in progress on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. This practice (often performed to raise awareness of an artist's work or project) effectively brings a whole new audience 'into' the studio, or at least its psychological space. By this I mean when an artist is in the studio making and considering a new work, and posts an image of work in progress online, this audience can respond instantly. This can even include what might be considered as the banal elements of painting practice, as seen by the trend towards films of paint being mixed as reported by the BBC online magazine (Bownstone 2016). As Caitlin Jones suggests: 'The internet ... provides access to an unprecedented platform for sharing and collaboration' (2012 [2010]: 118). This is what Caroline A. Jones might describe as an example of the 'dispersed studio and its de-authorizing presence' (1996: 373).

With online posting there may be responses from admirers and enthusiasts, as well as the 'if I 'like' yours - you'll 'like' mine' response. But there is also the potential here to enable a critical dialogue on the positions of absorption with peers, and enter into a more utilitarian mode. This can come down to how the post is written – perhaps opening a line of enquiry like 'I'm not sure of this, what do you think?'. Here the work can serve a practical purpose other than just the artists' absorptive strategy, and work as a way of opening up painting and potential dialogues. Although the dialogue itself could also be described as an absorptive strategy of a kind, where an emerging theory is left open or dangling like bait on a hook – waiting for someone to become caught up in it. As such, a painting could be recognized as a 'thought object' (Goldenberg and Reed 2008), and the painting process as the mode of that thought process.<sup>102</sup>

Aside from notions of collaborative authorship, in reflecting on the relationship of painting-beholder and painter-beholder through my painting process, there are various approaches I take to explicitly consider how others might receive the work. To do this I have to almost trick myself, as if I am seeing the work for the first time. To achieve this I use various techniques, such as turning my back to the painting in question, or getting as far away from it as is possible whilst staying within viewing distance. I close my eyes and relax for a considerable amount of time, then turn to face the painting and open my eyes. The immediate thoughts that go through my

---

<sup>102</sup> The term 'thought object' arises in relation to models of participatory practice in a conversation between the artists David Goldenberg and Patricia Reed (Goldenberg and Reed 2008).

mind are the ones that I pay the most attention to. Alternatively, I may take photographs with my phone (as described earlier) and flip them so I can look at the work mirrored and at a smaller scale. Sometimes these attempts, of what I will describe as methods of dislocation, are enough to pursue a particular hunch, or to understand if the work has reached completion. At other times it takes longer to consider, and where there is no conclusive reaction I will continue further work on the piece until it is complete, or alternatively painted over and recycled.

I have also found that since some of my works have started coming together as groups of paintings there is a point where I construct the beholder. The earliest example of this grouping is the painting *Blue Depths* (2015) (Fig. 28). This came about through working on several small canvases in succession. It was not my intention to produce a group work, but whilst one canvas was drying I quickly worked on others. Over several days I had painted many canvases with many layers, some under the printed palette silks, some over, and some on canvases free of silk. I had also experimented with different paint mediums and primers, as discussed earlier. This created a semi-translucent effect when the printed silk was stretched over the canvas, allowing the under-painting to show through.

I think because all of these canvases were painted together they naturally became a group that carried a form of dialogue between them. It was as if each canvas represented a phrase or part of an abstract narrative created through the process of making (Fig. 28 & 29). In some ways these groupings of paintings visualize 'networks' operating within them, of the explorations of aesthetic encounters through the work (Joselit 2009). This approach is similar to the 'Network Painting' of R. H. Quaytman who creates chapters of interrelated works: 'the chapters are typically installed in such a way that a beholder is drawn to move from panel to panel as opposed to lingering with any single work' (2016: 18). As Richard Birkett writes: 'Quaytman's chapters are complex sites in which Quaytman describes as seeking to 'maintain and simultaneously disrupt painting's absolute presence' (2015: 92), a notion I am continuing to explore with this abstract 'narrative' approach in my own process. As such, these works 'talk' to each other, they involve a kind of thinking inside and outside the work that is reinforced by the way they are put together, and potentially how they may 'talk' to the beholder. This is where the work drives the beholder to negotiate the representation of paint through: the printed palette silks, the actual paint on the surface, and what might also be represented by the paint on its surface as a strategy to achieve a shift in the register of experience. The kind

of dialogue these group works display, the relationship each canvas has to the next, is akin to a type of 'articulation' that has 'thinking internal to it' as Melville discusses (2001: 19), which is similar to GW who says 'what happens in the studio is a dialogue between the paintings' (GW INT: 16.05).

Considering these relationships, Joselit highlights (2009) how painting cannot exist outside the networks that it is a part of, including the networks of exhibition, of distribution, its art historic relations, or even more recently its online digital networks that I have just discussed. And as all of those networks cannot be 'quarantined' this leaves painting, as he puts it, 'beside itself' (ibid.: 134). If we extend this notion to the painter, then not only the relationship of painter-to-painting and painting-beholder are a part of this network, but also an artist's peers. An example of how this network expands is seen when remembering how all the collaborators have experienced aesthetic absorption in relation to the work of other artists. These encounters have then (in the majority) driven them to work as artists themselves, to go on to produce art that may provide encounters of aesthetic absorption to others, and potentially drive them also to work as artists. From one work, to network.

What has become clear here is the importance of the position of the studio, both to these considerations of aesthetic absorption, and also my practice. As Daniel Buren highlighted, Brancusi discussed how there is a contradiction between the work and the way the work was shown (2012 [2007]). This sums up to me why I am producing group works, because together they mitigate this contradiction. Buren describes works that are 'torn from their context' (of the studio) as losing their meaning (2012 [1971]), which he sees as 'the unspeakable compromise of the portable work' (ibid.: 86). What these works do, to some extent, is extend the setting of the studio as site where the dialogue between the works emerges, and through the grouping, work to retain some of the context of their original construction.

This also echoes the dialogic processes of this research, where one voice has the potential to connect or feed off another. For example, during the development of the paintings I often prop them on a narrow shelf (Fig. 29), because it allows me to consider the 'voices' and 'dialogue' between each canvas, and allows me to easily reconfigure the combination to best accommodate any narrative or dialectic that might emerge. It also alludes to displays of reading material placed on shelves suggesting the potential to be picked up and read. It is like a book that is folded out

where many pages can be seen at once, and perhaps where pages are not seen but alluded to, like an 'and next...' type of expectancy. I consciously bring this familiar association into play in order to encourage and build a sense of narrative within the works. And this practice of placing group works on a shelf has now migrated from the studio to exhibitions in general, continuing the studio setting as such.

It also occurs to me that encapsulated in my palimpsestic way of working is trapped a multitude of temporal modes, in what Joselit has described as a way of 'storing of time' (2016: 14). By this I mean the slow procedure of the initial painting and drying, followed by an instance captured through the printed palette on silk, the layers of sometimes laboriously applied paint, and finally in how the works are presented as a group arranged on a shelf to unfold as abstract narratives. The way these works are put together is what I would describe as a kind of editing process. This is where a programmed strategic address to absorption for the painting-beholder is taken, because as discussed, I can trust myself, at some point, to be an absorbed painter-beholder, but what I cannot trust is the same of the painting-beholder.

This understanding of Fried's theory of prolepsis as a non-strategic address raises a question, because it implies that Chardin didn't have a specific approach planned for his work, and relied on experiences of making paintings instead, that is, proleptic mirroring. As a result, on deeper inspection, what Fried seems to have conceived with proleptic mirroring is paradoxical. To explain, Fried's lifetime project has been one of tracing the absorptive strategies of a group of painters throughout art history, but by hypothesizing that Chardin used proleptic mirroring as part of his painting process, I suggest, works against such a project. By inferring that Chardin trusted in proleptic mirroring as the way he considered what his beholder might experience before his works implies that he had no planned formal approach. Yet we know this is not the case; Chardin's portrayal of figures deeply absorbed, or even his unique still life paintings, are strong evidence of a specific formal approach. Chardin either had a specific approach to work, or he relied on prolepsis as Fried hypothesizes, which would suggest that one of Fried's theses here works to establish the failing of the other.

From the understandings developed through this research, I suggest that although initially there seems to be some truth in proleptic mirroring, it cannot be assigned to the process of an artist where it is almost certain there is a conscious programmatic approach to practice or a 'backup plan', because of the problematic issue with trust

that has been discussed. You can only have a strategy for your works if you are not absorbed in a romance of making. Therefore we find Fried both right and wrong at the same time, Fried against Fried, and depending on which approach you understand to be correct, declares the other approach to be mistaken: of either prolepsis, or programmed absorptive strategies.

Time and time again throughout this research, descriptions of banal absorption in painting process have arisen, but they have seemed irrelevant in relation to the roles of beholdership. That is because banal experiences of painting process are positioned between the non-strategically absorbed painter-beholder and the strategically absorbed painting-beholder, and as such on the margin of our understanding of its place in these relationships.

Looking to my own practice for understanding, I need to reflect on what I experience when I am working. Whilst painting *Blue Depths* (2015) I noticed that when my process consumes me, that is, through absorption in the banal, time truly does fly by, and everything external to practice is separate and distant. This might happen though mundane tasks such as stretching canvases or silks, applying different mediums, or blocking in certain areas of paint etc. And when looking at the painting once it is finished, I find I can recall what I was listening to (music, radio etc.), what I was thinking, and what I was experiencing during its painting. As KP states: 'It's a kind of chart of thinking and decision-making, very literally' (KP INT: 47.45). It is as if the work has become a type of manuscript or score, but in a very abstract and non-linear sense. Joselit also makes this association: 'The accumulation I'm thinking of may function as a SCORE ... in painting, marking time and storing affect leads to SCORING experience' (2016: 15). To illustrate this point, Joselit uses Pollock's paintings, in particular because as he suggests they 'opened an aesthetic threshold between disorganized sensation and organized form' (ibid.).

Considering Joselit's description of this aesthetic threshold, I suggest that we can expand it further and describe it as the confluence of banal absorption with aesthetic absorption, where the banal/disorganized is worked through within an aesthetic/organized programmed approach. Therefore, this threshold marks the progression from a non-strategic approach to absorption (such as mundane blocking in of paint), to a strategic one (painting in a directed manner to complete a specific address to the painting-beholder). This knowledge can open up our understanding of the operation and capacity of aesthetic absorption in painting practice.

It could otherwise be described as the point where the painter-beholder chooses a direct approach to the painting-beholder because of what is achieved through painting process, in what I have described as a working through that takes place through the work. To apply this understanding to practice I take Andrew Grassie as an example. I would speculate that it is highly likely that Grassie encounters banal absorption in his painting process whilst reproducing major works of art in his paintings (Fig. 24 & 25). Where the aesthetic threshold is met, that is, the confluence of banal to aesthetic absorption, is where he represents the apparatus of the gallery within these paintings with which to strategically address the painting-beholder.

It is through this approach that the painting-beholder experiences what Fried describes as *vorstellung*.<sup>103</sup> *Vorstellung*, also described as a Friedrichian perspective by Richard Wollheim, suggests here the beholder (cognizer) is 'brought before itself in the activity of representation' (Fried 1980: 104) and made aware of their aesthetic positioning (whereas with banal or pathological absorption you remain unaware). As is the case with Grassie, he isn't proleptically mirroring his own absorption in painting process, instead he is bringing us 'before [ourselves] in the activity of representation' (ibid.), which is what he is actually putting trust in.

This is why there has been confusion, because we couldn't see how experiences of painting practice (disorganized/banal) fit within a strategy of work (organized/aesthetic) as seen in the work of Chardin. We were limited, because Fried's theory of prolepsis is about mirroring the painters' experience of absorption, which fails because we realize that trust in mirroring is not operative.

Fried's theories haven't examined painting practice from the position of the studio in the depth this research has, which is possibly what has led to this confusion. And as we have seen, this confusion and hesitancy is evidenced by the collaborators. They, independently of me, begin to separate making, that is the banal from the aesthetic, where painting is like buttering toast and is nothing to do with a programme of work. Based on the dialogues with the collaborators, it seems to me that what Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring doesn't confront are the facts of practice.

---

<sup>103</sup> *Vorstellung* was a central concern of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century German Idealist Philosophers such as Fichte (Fried 1980: 104).

However, in *The Moment of Caravaggio* (2010), as discussed in Chapter 1, Fried theorizes about immersive<sup>104</sup> and specular<sup>105</sup> moments that are made evident in Caravaggio's paintings. I suggest these immersive and specular moments can be reconsidered once aligned with Joselit's aesthetic threshold between disorganized sensation and organized form, which, as I have suggested, is the confluence of banal absorption with aesthetic absorption.<sup>106</sup> If we consider here that 'T' indicates a threshold I suggest this alignment can be written as:

Immersive (T) Specular  
Banal (T) Aesthetic  
Disorganized (T) Organized

Or: immersive/banal/disorganized (T) specular/aesthetic/organized

Here the distinction between Fried on Chardin and Fried on Caravaggio is only made apparent when considered through Joselit's threshold concept. And it is this expanded version of Joselit's and Fried's concepts, which I will refer to as the expanded thresholds model, that can provide us with a framework from which to better understand what is occurring in painting practice. These distinctions allow us to recognize and understand strategic programmes of work, whilst furnishing us with knowledge required to better employ these thresholds.

This relationship between the banal and aesthetic can be pursued through a particular approach to making. Where through practice, rather than focusing on making, an oppositional stance is taken to be able to work objectively. This is in order to prevent mistaking immersion (immersive moments) in making (proleptic mirroring, i.e. the myth or romance of making) with aesthetic absorption. As such, learning how to negotiate thresholds in painting practice could be described as the painter's argument with making itself, or the struggle between the banal and the

---

<sup>104</sup> Fried describes the '*immersive*' moment as where the painter is 'so caught up, so immersed, in this phase of his work on the painting (or rather, simply, in his work on the painting) as to be less than fully aware of any sharp distinction between the painting and himself' (2010: 39).

<sup>105</sup> Fried describes the '*specular*' moment as 'notionally instantaneous, of separating or recoiling from the painting, of becoming detached from it, which is to say of no longer being immersed in work on it but rather of seeing it, taking it in, as if for the first time; I call that "moment" *specular*, meaning thereby to emphasize the strictly visual or optical relation between the artist-viewer and the image' (2010: 39).

<sup>106</sup> This is not to be confused with aesthetics of the banal or banal aesthetic, a strategy inclined to banality.

aesthetic by working this difference through the work. Thus the focus on 'experience of making' is de-privileged, and given over to the 'experience of thresholds'.

The crucial fact is, as I have shown conclusively, the artist collaborators are more comfortable being absorbed in the work of others, than being absorbed in their own, and less confident about what they can hope for their own work. That they want to be free and clear of that confusion of making with being aesthetically absorbed. Which is precisely what can be demonstrated by this expanded version of the thresholds model. It helps us, as artists, to understand what the issue is, or what is not working with prolepsis, and how that reflects back into our own process. Consequently, what becomes clear through this research is how Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring in painting practice is inoperative, and can be succeeded by describing making in terms of thresholds.

This issue is highlighted by SE who states: 'there are these configurations of experience that I might have as the artist, but as far as being transferable in any way, I'm not sure?' (SE RT1: 45.47). Such a consideration explains why SE uses proleptic mirroring in an adverse way, that is, working in opposition to his absorption in practice (SE RT1: 29.37). I would suggest SE is still using proleptic mirroring, but alternatively employed compared to how Fried hypothesized it would be. That is because SE has realized, through his own approach, that it wasn't his 'configurations of experience' that could be mirrored (*ibid.*).

Without this understanding the collaborators describe how they employ other strategies to provide knowledge of the different positions with which to avoid self-delusion (GW INT: 36.31), and where they sometimes encounter suspicion towards their painting (AB INT: 18.12) (AMJ INT: 1.03.10). This is also seen when SE describes exhibiting as 'hearing your voice on tape' (SE INT: 1.49.28), which provides him with an alternative way of considering the position of the painting-beholder. I suggest this suspicion is a symptom of a latent awareness of the myth of making.

Considering the collaborators' different approaches to confronting issues of beholdership and the artist's agency indicates the many modes of working occurring within the studio. How they overlap in their relationship with aesthetic absorption, but differ in their set of responsibilities to the painting-beholder. This could be described as the conventional studio position, which I will refer to as Studio 1.0, reflecting the

Diderotian tradition of moral seriousness, carried over as a seriousness of intent through the painting, and as recognized by the painting-beholder. This is achieved through paintings designed to 'touch us, to instruct us and to invite us to virtue' (Diderot cited in *Starobinski et al. 2007: 138*), which has its roots based upon salon notions of public duty. Here the artist has decided upon the strategy to hold no responsibility towards the painting-beholder other than in depicting signs of the closed mind for them to perceive 'passively', from the outside looking in. That is, to consider the position of painting-beholder by tactically not considering the painting-beholder.

Alternatively, as informed through this research, there is a more open approach to practice, where the way agency functions can be shifted, which I will now describe as Studio 2.0. This might be because the painting-beholder is present during the making of the work: party to its development in the studio via some remote connection such as an online presence or dialogue, because of the way the work was installed and encountered in its exhibited state, or because the relationship to theory and practice is changed, and as such has altered our way of understanding the positions of beholdership. Thierry De Duve describes such alternative approaches to practice as a 'redistribution of the traditional division of labor within aesthetics' (1996: 179) recalling where Duchamp voiced that 'It's the viewers who make the pictures' (ibid.) consequently 'conferring on the viewer a share in the responsibilities of aesthetic choice' (ibid.), albeit a choice originated from the artist's strategic programme to alter what the viewer perceives.

As Claire Bishop highlights (2012), these concerns on disrupting the traditional and passive role of an audience can be traced back to the politically driven motivations of Futurist painting, where manifestos called for the audience to be positioned in the midst of an experience through new 'aesthetic modes' (2012: 47). It was their intention for the beholder to be 'placed in the centre of the picture', to not only be present, but to 'participate in the action' (ibid.: 45).<sup>107</sup> Although this was meant in the way that an audience interacted with the finished painting, and as a means to convert audiences to a nationalist and militaristic cause, rather than to participate in an 'aesthetic mode' of making paintings.

---

<sup>107</sup> Audiences (encompassing all classes) threw vegetables and eggs, brought car horns, cow bells, whistles, pipes, rattles and banners with which to participate in the Futurist *Serata* theatre exhibitions (2012: 46), and as such these responses gave validity to the artists' programme, where a more traditional mode of audience neutrality would have been deemed a failure.

One such art historical example of an experimental collaborative approach can be seen with The Blackie's exhibition and event *Towards a Common Language* (1973) held at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, where visitors were encouraged to paint on blank canvases hung on the walls above accompanying boxes of artists materials (Bishop 2012: 185). The Blackie saw itself as a bridge between artists and communities, stating 'Democracy cannot exist without a common language, and we don't have a common language' (ibid.). What is interesting is that in declaring a lack of a 'common language' and giving the means with which to make paintings to the visitors, suggests the project's proponents believed this 'common language' could emerge through painting, that is the act, the observation of the act, and in the finished paintings themselves. The success of this weeklong project was indicated by the 3,475 visitors, who watched 943 painters and their 692 works unfold.<sup>108</sup>

I must add that this exploration of Studio 2.0 is not meant as a way of judging Studio 1.0 in a negative light, in what Bishop calls the false polarity of 'bad' single authorship and 'good' collective authorship (2012: 8). Bishop suggests we should bear in mind that even if there are multiple co-authors at work there is no fixed recipe for good art or authorship (ibid.: 9). This focus on collaborative practice is also not meant as a manifesting of a 'social turn' as such (although I do not deny that relationship here), rather I am trying to argue for the approach of Studio 2.0, that enables a rethinking of the possibilities of painting beyond its traditional territory or conventional formats, and frameworks. With this in mind, perhaps Studio 2.0 is not only about negotiating the threshold between banal and aesthetic through mutual engagement by the painting-beholder and painter-beholder, but also about negotiating those relationships through the development of the work of art. This is in contrast to the work of Grassie, who uses this threshold to specifically direct you - *he shows you* this thing about aesthetics, here there is no negotiating through collaborative making.

This open approach of Studio 2.0 still retains the seriousness of intention from a mutual perspective, and perhaps because of this suggests a less exclusive relationship of beholdership. Bishop describes how a similar issue operates within participatory art, where by 'delegating control of the work ... confer[s] upon the project a guarantee of realism' and as such the artist 'outsources authenticity'

---

<sup>108</sup> Exhibition details archived and available at:

<<http://archive.theblack-e.co.uk/archive/category/participation/content/towards-a-common-language-22nd-28th-october-1973>> [Accessed 23/09/2016].

(2012: 237). Consequently, what Studio 2.0 gives us is a relationship between the painting-beholder and the painter-beholder of co-production, in which the artist has a responsibility towards the beholder in a way that they didn't have previously. Here the beholder has a responsibility towards the artist, recognising the existence of their programme, both recognizing each other's part. It gives us new conditions; it de-privileges the artist position, and through a shared seriousness of intent bestows a level of authenticity.

As such it emancipates the painting-beholder and painter-beholder, establishing for them painting as a shared zone of freedom, where these relationships are negotiated. Consequently this concept of art as serving needs suggests a Marxist aesthetic as described by Barbara Rose (Rose cited in Beech 2016: 211). And is indicated as a post-conceptual approach (Osborne 2013) in its navigation of transcategorical and critical focus.

The work produced through Studio 2.0 could also be described as a less finished thing that relates to *morceau* as a 'momentary fragment standing for, replacing, intimating, an occluded totality or *tableau*' (2005: 160). That is, something that is not finished, but formed or forming in the attempt to co-produce through the dialogue between painter-beholder and painting-beholder, who is perhaps less determined,<sup>109</sup> holding a different set of responsibilities. Therefore, Studio 2.0 becomes not only a physical space of democratic process, but also the space for re-imagining the *tableau* through the *morceau*. Similarly, Kate Hawkins argues for a renegotiation and expansion of the term *tableau*, where both artwork and beholder are at once 'activated' through a redistribution of agency (2013: 127), although this is from the position of how the paintings 'perform' as an installation, rather than during their production.

I suggest Studio 2.0 allows for a more outwardly open approach to aesthetic absorption and absorptive strategies using the expanded thresholds model. Opening the studio physically opens and declares an intentionality of both painter-beholder and painting-beholder. Therefore, through the pragmatic approach of Studio 2.0 the painter and painting beholders relinquish their traditional roles, and realize the possibility of exchanging positions through the progression of the work.

---

<sup>109</sup> That is assuming that the painting-beholder is a non-expert. If the painting-beholder is an expert i.e. an artist then this again changes the dynamic and as such is an area open for future research.

Taking this stance suggests an adaptation to Heffernan's closed mind (2009) and would also confront the 'crisis of absorption' (Michaels 2011), of the negation of theatricality as the negation of the artist's intent. Instead it would uphold the artist's intention and claim it as fundamental to the painting-beholder relationship, where in constructing themselves as painter-beholder builds in an integral understanding of the painting-beholder.

It wasn't till quite recently (about two years ago) that I realized that my pursuit of a painting practice is a continuation of a childhood 'affliction' of falling into bodies of water<sup>110</sup> (which I have only recently realized can be attributed to problems with depth perception common to Irlen Syndrome). The only difference being that it is not a body of water that I am peering into now, but paintings.<sup>111</sup> And in the practice of painting I am recreating my need to see not only what is on the surface, but beyond it. I believe this is part of the reason as to both how and why I construct myself as painter-beholder, and consequently the painting-beholder.

This was recently bought home to me when I was invited to take part in the Undead Painters Forum and pop-up exhibition.<sup>112</sup> These forums are a place where we, as a group of painters, can discuss our new works or approaches and air our concerns and discuss solutions. For this particular forum I took along the work *Blue Depths* (2015) (Fig. 29).<sup>113</sup> Through the making of this work I felt that I had constructed

---

<sup>110</sup> It is only recently that I have made a connection to my past as to how I construct myself as painter-beholder, how my practice has developed because of a significant and recurrent occurrence of my childhood. I learnt to swim at a very young age; I was 9 months old when my parents first took me to a swimming pool, being active swimmers themselves. This instilled in me a confidence in being in the water, so much so that I would describe it as a place where I feel very much at home. At once I feel supported, and yet incredibly liberated at the same time. Over the years I developed into a very strong swimmer with a strong curiosity for water, its surface, and what was going on below it. My parents were also keen on camping and hiking, and we used travel all over England doing both. Whilst I enjoyed this, for me it was about the opportunity to come into contact with new bodies of water. As soon as I found these bodies: rivers, canals, brooks, streams, ponds (wild and ornamental, garden and park), rock pools, seas, lakes, etc. I would be found peering in. I wanted to discover what was happening beyond the surface, to marvel at the underwater life, catch a glimpse of a silvery fish, and explore these strange and mysterious places. Unfortunately my curiosity always got the better of me, and I would inevitably fall in. It was always a complete shock to me (but perhaps not my parents over time), quite dramatic in its unfolding, but something I never intended. Once in I never hung around, as the water was often freezing cold, the spell was shattered and I just wanted out. As a result of this 'affliction' I can plant flags all over a map of the UK where I have unintentionally peered beyond the surface.

<sup>111</sup> I also recently discovered that Caspar David Friedrich had fallen into icy water. This was whilst ice skating with his brother Johann Christoffer, who saved Caspar's life at the loss of his own, an event that is said to have haunted Caspar for the rest of his life, as many see evident in his later work.

<sup>112</sup> *Undead Painters FLASH SALON*, 2016 [Exhibition]. Bondhouse Gallery, London, 22 July 2016.

<sup>113</sup> I also didn't even make the connection of falling into water and the title *Blue Depths*. I think this was because I saw it as an allusion to *Yellow Depths* (1950) by Ivon Hitchens, and not my propensity to 'dive' in.

myself as painter-beholder. Through my use of layering paint, silks and mediums I was enabling a peering into the depths. I was keen to see if this was the case for the painting-beholder, to see how they might react.

This critically engaged audience gave me positive feedback,<sup>114</sup> and of particular note was how the painter James Petrucci reacted to the work. His curiosity was made evident through his behaviour. It was as if he wanted somehow to climb into the work, to see beyond the surface. Other artists at the forum similarly highlighted this, although not to the extent that Petrucci embodied (Fig. 37).<sup>115</sup> Petrucci's behaviour as painting-beholder put into action what I was trying to achieve through the painting, and possibly when falling. As Dr. Daniel Sturgis suggested: 'You have to show the integrity of the project - that you believe it ... *You've got to believe it*'<sup>116</sup> (2015). And here I could see that this was the case. I felt as if in constructing myself as painter-beholder I had also constructed this painting-beholder. Effectively we had occupied the same position, and found the same route in, that I had strategically programmed.

This research process has crucially made me more aware of what is happening during painting practice, for the opportunity of a programmatic approach by understanding how to recognize the aesthetic threshold. As a result my practice now more thoroughly explores the idea and possibility of how an artwork might intervene in dominant regimes of vision. This shift is enabled through a dialogue between machine-made versus man-made, where digital representations are adjacent to, subsumed by, or even consumed by physical elements that themselves can seem semi-tangible. The strategy of this programme being to draw in the painting-beholder through modes of dislocation, to get them to check or question their previously understood position.

---

<sup>114</sup> The artists attending were: Richard Bateman, Dan Beard, Sasha Bowles, Rosalind Davis, Kristian Evju, Matt Gee, Alastair Gordon, Ben Jamie, Evy Jokhova, Hannah Luxton, Enzo Marra, Charley Peters, James Petrucci, Wendy Saunders, Paul Smith, Jessica Wilson, and myself.

<sup>115</sup> Exhibitors included: Rosalind Davis, Kristian Evju, Enzo Marra, Justin Hibbs, Evy Jokhova, Paul Smith, Hannah Luxton, Charley Peters, Sacha Craddock, Matt Gee, Jessica Wilson, Ben Jamie, Wendy Saunders, Anna Freeman-Bentley, Sacha Bowles, Dan Beard and Richard Bateman.

<sup>116</sup> During a tutorial at: i-create studios, Bedford on 16/04/15.

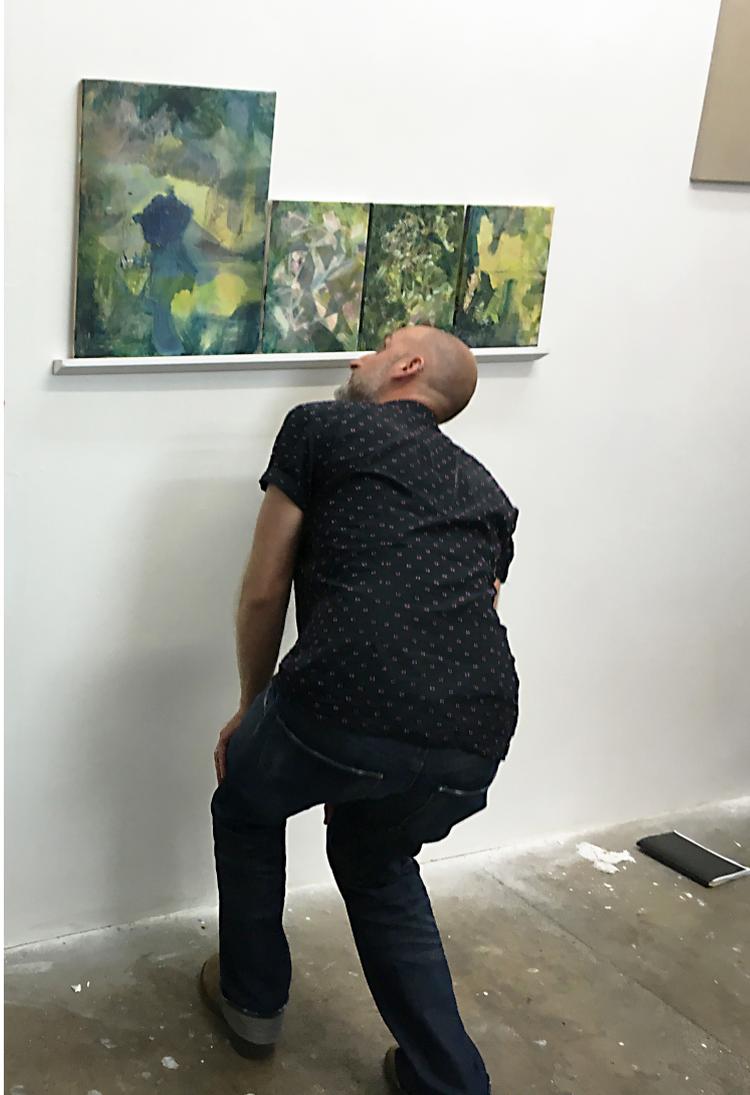


Figure 37. The artist James Petrucci viewing at:  
*The Undead Painters FLASH SALON*, Bondhouse Gallery, London. 22 July 2016,  
showing: Alison Goodyear *Blue Depths* (2015)

Acrylic, ink and oil paint on silk, canvas and wooden shelf, 46 x 110 x 3cm

(Collection of the Artist)

Photo credit: The Undead Painters

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In this Chapter, An Address To and From Practice, from the position of artist/researcher/co-collaborator, I have examined the legacy of aesthetic absorption and how Fried's theories have been actively addressed through contemporary practice, mapping from Diderot's original theories of tableau through to current day practice.

I have given an analysis of the qualitative data, of both mine, and the artist collaborators, and what they clearly establish is the substantial presence of aesthetic absorption in painting practice. All of the collaborators are unanimous in having been the absorbed painting-beholder in the work of others, and also of their own painting process, but less so of their own finished work. These results show the difference in positions of painter-beholder and painting-beholder, and how they are negotiated, with confidence in being an absorbed painting-beholder, yet hesitancy or uncertainty towards being an absorbed painter-beholder of their own finished work.

I followed this by reflecting on the dialogue of Chapter 2, through the lens of my own practice. Here, with the help of my fellow collaborators, I have reconsidered the aesthetic and art historical frames within the space of the studio where the beholder is imagined or constructed, and where these art historic theories are negotiated.

#### **The Limits of Fried's Theory of Prolepsis**

We have seen that when it comes to considering the role of absorption, many of the collaborators have indicated that it is not a part of their daily approach to practice. They have flagged particular issues when considering Fried's theories, primarily in how they fail to meet the depth of detail required to fully explain what is happening, about the role of trust, and how exactly this trust correlates with practice.

We have found that when it comes to Fried's theories, it is the limits that the collaborators struggle with, finding them too prescriptive. The collaborators are against what seems to them like an imposition of practice. This results in a set of principles that colour their experience of absorption, or at least Fried's interpretation of it, because they feel his oppositional definition of absorption versus theatricality imposes limits on the license of practice. But also because it is presented in such a way that suggests it is a fully resolved theory, which they find is not the case. Throughout the dialogues the collaborators have discussed undergoing the experience of aesthetic absorption in one form or another, but they have

shown confusion around Fried's terms. In using the term absorption to describe the relationship between a beholder and the painting they are standing in front of, and using engrossment/absorption to describe experiences of painting practice for the painter suggests it's the same experience. I have maintained that whilst they share similarities they are not the same, and conflating the terms works to diminish both. This leaves the collaborators embracing the experience of aesthetic absorption in painting practice, confident of experiencing it as painting-beholder in the work of others, yet revealing how hesitant they are about Fried's theories, and about what they feel they can claim for the painting-beholder of their own work.

### **Negotiating the Limits Through Practice**

Having first identified the limits that the collaborators encounter in Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring, it was clear that here was a theory/practice relationship that was proving dysfunctional. I continued examining those limits to see how they were negotiated in painting practice. This was achieved by comparing the collaborators' experiences, concerns and hesitations with my own, and reflecting on them from the position of painting practice.

Through this approach what emerged was how some of the collaborators describe encountering aesthetic absorption in painting practice from the position of the painter-beholder as a learning experience, which if not present raises their suspicions as to the integrity of their work, that is, no *engaging* effectively amounts to no *gauging*. That is because they are relying on experiences of making, and without those experiences their suspicions are raised towards the efficacy of the work. As such these responses seem to corroborate Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring. That is until we consider the role of 'trust', because whilst it might seem to be pivotal in how the painter-beholder considers the painting-beholder, we come to realize the painting-beholder cannot actually be trusted to experience aesthetic absorption in the way of the painter-beholder. Therefore proleptic mirroring is inoperative.

I reflected that prior to this research I too connected aesthetic absorption with the experiences encountered whilst making paintings. Where what I encountered as a good experience of painting in the studio was equated with a successful painting. However, as a result of this research, I now consider this process as the romance or the myth of making, where the experiences gained in making (absorption of the banal) are confused with aesthetic practice (a conscious perceptive mode).

As a result of this research and process I now place greater importance on whether a certain approach can trigger a shift in the register of experience for the painting-beholder, rather than my own experiences of aesthetic absorption. Although I have realized that encountering aesthetic absorption in painting practice provided me with the essential understanding to recognise the differences in the positions of painter-beholder to painting-beholder, thus allowing me to construct the painting-beholder.

Such understanding exposes the painter as a particular type of beholder, inhabiting many positions and sometimes even synchronously: painter-beholder and painting-beholder. I suggest the painter-beholder is also an expert-beholder, because they understand the difference in these positions, and how to strategically work the distinctions between them.

As a result, for myself, and the majority of the collaborators, the studio has become the key site where aesthetic absorption is addressed and an essential part of this hierarchy of absorption. However, the collaborators highlight their concerns as to considering absorption as a 'state of making'. They see this as 'fetishizing the act of making' (SE INT: 41.00), and 'fraught with the potential for self-delusion' (AB INT: 49.03), which also influences how they act in relation to Fried's theories, because they see this as a risk to authenticity in practice, which we have seen is a prime concern for them all.

### **An Alternative Theory/Practice Relationship**

This research, through following how the collaborators have negotiated Fried's theories in practice, has demonstrated where this theory/practice relationship is failing. We have seen how the collaborators struggle with Fried's terms on absorption, how his theory of proleptic mirroring raises issues about the role of trust, whilst not adequately communicating the process it attempts to describe.

Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring comes down to putting your trust in the painting-beholder to mirror your experience of practice, which I have described as a non-strategic consideration of aesthetic absorption. Whereas a strategic approach addresses the painting-beholder through a directed programme of work, aimed at a shift or altered register of experience. Without understanding the difference in these approaches it becomes apparent how hard it is to negotiate Fried's theories, which is the position the collaborators have found themselves in.

Throughout this research we found descriptions of banal absorption in painting process, but they seemed irrelevant to aesthetic absorption. I suggest this is because banal experiences of painting process are positioned between the non-strategically absorbed painter-beholder and the strategically absorbed painting-beholder, and on the margins of our understanding of its relevance in these relationships.

Looking to my own practice for understanding, and looking at the painting once it is finished, I find I can recall what I was listening to, what I was thinking, and what I was experiencing during its painting. I realized the work had become a 'chart of thinking' (KP INT: 47.45). Joselit also makes this association: 'in painting, marking time and storing affect leads to SCORING experience' (2016: 15), and he suggests Pollock's paintings illustrate this point because they 'opened an aesthetic threshold between disorganized sensation and organized form' (ibid.).

I have expanded Joselit's description of the aesthetic threshold by describing it as the working through of banal absorption within aesthetic absorption, where the banal/disorganized is fed through to an aesthetic/organized programmed approach. Therefore, this threshold marks the progression from a non-strategic approach to absorption, to a strategic one. As such this knowledge opens up our understanding of the operation and capacity of aesthetic absorption in painting practice.

Based on the dialogues with the collaborators it seems to me that Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring fails because it doesn't confront what the facts of practice are. However, Fried theorizes about immersive and specular moments that are made evident in Caravaggio's paintings (2010), which I suggest can be aligned with Joselit's aesthetic threshold between disorganized sensation and organized form, and with the confluence of banal absorption with aesthetic absorption.

This expanded version of Joselit's and Fried's concepts: immersive/banal/disorganized (T) specular/aesthetic/organized, which I refer to as the expanded thresholds model, provides us with a framework to better understand what is occurring in painting practice, to both recognize and understand strategic programmed approaches, whilst furnishing us with the knowledge required to put these thresholds to work.

This research has shown conclusively that the artist collaborators are more comfortable being absorbed in the work of others than being absorbed in their own, and hesitant about what they can hope for their own work. That they want to be free and clear of that confusion of making with being aesthetically absorbed. This is what is demonstrated by this expanded thresholds model. It helps us, as artists, to see how Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring in painting practice is inoperative, and can be succeeded by describing making in terms of thresholds.

This key understanding allows us to negotiate the experience of the painter-beholder, and the different positions of beholdership within this relationship of theory and practice. It makes it possible for artists to use clearer distinctions between banal and aesthetic absorption. To understand how strategic programmes for aesthetic absorption can be considered through a particularly objective approach to painting practice, in order to prevent mistaking banal immersion in making with aesthetic absorption. That is working through it through the work.

Without these understandings we have seen how the collaborators employ other approaches with which to avoid self-delusion, which suggest several modes of working within the studio. How they overlap in their shared pursuit for addressing aesthetic absorption, but differ in their set of responsibilities to the painting-beholder. This is the conventional studio position I refer to as Studio 1.0, reflecting the Diderotian tradition of moral seriousness, carried over as a seriousness of intent through the programme of the painter, and as recognized by the painting-beholder. Here the artist's strategy is to consider the position of painting-beholder by tactically not considering the painting-beholder other than in depicting signs of the closed mind.

Alternatively there is the position that considers a more open approach to practice, which I describe as Studio 2.0, as informed through this research, where the way agency functions can be shifted. This might be because the painting-beholder is present during the making of the work, party to its development in the studio via some remote connection such as an online presence or dialogue, or because of the way the work was installed and encountered in its exhibited state.

This approach of Studio 2.0 I have suggested enables a rethinking of the possibilities of painting beyond its traditional territory. It has the potential to disrupt its inherited frameworks by giving us a relationship between painting-beholder and painter-

beholder of co-production and shared responsibility. It de-privileges, shares a seriousness of intent and authenticity with the potential to establish painting as a shared zone of freedom. Consequently, this approach would be less about a programme of making, and more about relationships developing through jointly encountering and negotiating thresholds. And as we see, it is not only a physical space of democratic process, but also the space for re-imagining the tableau.

This research would not have been possible without the collaboration of the six artists. This is because, allowing for acknowledged differences in age and gender, or contrasting outlooks or approaches to making art, their shared overriding interest in painting practice brought them closer, helping form them into a cohesive group.

It is because of their generosity in giving their time and sharing their thoughts and concerns on what they encounter through the practice of painting, that this research has been able to propose a contribution to knowledge on the topic of absorption in painting practice. In particular it is this approach that has enabled the research to develop an understanding of what Fried could only hypothesize on, namely what occurs during painting practice from the position of the painter, for the painter-beholder.

These findings could provide the painter with greater understanding of how to work in relation to aesthetic absorption in painting practice, and how they vocalize that position. It upholds the artist's intention as fundamental to the painting-beholder relationship, where constructing themselves as painter-beholder builds in an integral understanding of the painting-beholder position.

Here we have seen demonstrated how the studio as apparatus is crucial to the dynamic of aesthetic absorption and the painter to painting relationship, as place where the painting-beholder is constructed. Consequently it is indicated as central to the hierarchy of absorption in practice, and as such emerges as an aesthetics of the studio.

This chapter is followed by the final conclusion that looks at the research as a whole, its contribution to knowledge, and the future potential of this research and its ongoing dialogue.

## **4.0 Final Conclusion**

### **Summary of the research and its contribution**

This practice led research has engaged with the legacy of debates on the theory of aesthetic absorption and the painter-painting relationship. Its aim has been to uncover the reality behind Diderot and Fried's hypothesis of aesthetic absorption in painting practice, on what is happening from the position of the painter through the studio as site of analysis.

Fried perhaps would argue that the concerns he writes about are historically conditioned, that they are tied to a particular moment in history. I argue that commonalities which are peculiar to painting, such as applying paint onto a surface, remain largely fundamental, whether art historic or contemporary. This indicates that issues of painting process, which Fried describes, can be traced across this temporal divide, and therefore opened up to address through current painting practice. Consequently this research considered that new understandings could be found on these theories and how they are negotiated, by going directly to the artist.

I achieved this by collaborating with six practicing abstract painters to collect results through multiple inputs. To begin with, this select group of painters were individually interviewed in their respective studios. This allowed for particular works to be referred to and examined, discussion of technique and process, and a deeper scrutiny of the studio environment. Then the collaborators were gathered together for two round table events to discuss what is the case for absorption in painting practice. Finally these dialogues were reflected upon through an address to and from practice in conjunction with the writing of this thesis. Using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather data has established a more accurate representation of what is actually taking place in painting practice for the painter-beholder, and to some extent the painting-beholder.

Gathering these artists together and opening a dialogue on the practicalities behind art historical theories has allowed the mapping of their experiences as encountered through painting practice. This includes my own position as artist-researcher and co-collaborator using close readings of my own paintings. It highlights the concerns and hesitations of a specific group of artists, as to how these painters negotiate the painter-beholder and painting-beholder positions. Namely the position of conflict that the artist collaborators find themselves in, that they are confident of being an

absorbed painting-beholder in the work of other artists, yet hesitant about what they feel they can claim for the painting-beholder of their own. As such, the contribution to knowledge of this research lies in how it creates new understandings of these existing theories, in examining how these art historic propositions connect back through the studio, and through reflection, what they mean for aesthetic absorption in painting practice today.

### **What the results of this research mean for theory and practice**

This research has traced through history the idea of changing the way we see, through the possibilities that art can present us. From ancient Greece, where Parrhasius fooled Zeuxis through his painting of a curtain, and as a result changed the way Zeuxis looked at painting, changed his way of seeing. It took centuries for this ideal to navigate from the dominant concern of mimesis, as championed by Pliny the Elder, and through a historical shift to ascend to its own dominance in the form of Modernism. These Modernist ideals rejected the historical traditions of depiction or aping nature in favour of experimental and unconventional techniques that promoted innovation and progress, and questioned the function of art. Consequently, this research is dealing with that legacy today, to interrupt our worldview, to change our way of seeing.

This thesis has highlighted how the studio, as site of making paintings, represents and supports a particular position or zone of freedom for the artist, as highlighted through the art historical position of Courbet, a zone that he claimed for himself. The collaborators demonstrate how that principle is continued, where the studio as apparatus has been established as to be crucial for how it both physically and psychically enables the dynamic of aesthetic absorption to unfold. This is the site where the drama of absorption is played out, the place where the painting-beholder is imagined or constructed, and as such emerges as this aesthetics of the studio. It is from here that these art historic theories are negotiated, and from where this zone can be re-claimed.

Through this research I have traced how Fried dedicatedly pursues his theories across art history, and how his scrutiny on the roles of 'beholdership' has given us great initial insight into those positions and their relationships. However, as the collaborators have described, this approach can be seen as universalizing, which to some is a reach too far, which they feel works to restrict the license and freedoms of practice.

We have found that Fried, in using the term of absorption from both positions: to describe the relationship between a beholder and the painting they are standing in front of, and using engrossment/absorption to describe experiences of painting practice for the painter, suggests it is the same experience. I have maintained that whilst they share similarities they are not the same, and conflating the terms in this way works to diminish both. This leaves the collaborators feeling uncertain with the terms, and which has given rise to questions over the continued relevance of these theories in relation to painting practice.

Through its dialogical approach this research discovered that the collaborators encountered the experience of aesthetic absorption in painting practice as a type of learning experience, which some described working as a type of gauge, informing the artist as to the progress of their painting. Consequently the dialogues initially seem to validate Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring. However, the research highlighted specific problematic issues. The collaborators sometimes hold suspicions towards absorption when described as a state of making, because it holds romantic connotations that fetishize the act of making which they see as fake, and a threat to authenticity in practice. We also find that Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring raises issues about the role of trust, because as we come to realize, we cannot actually 'trust' the beholder to be absorbed in the same way as the painter-beholder, as Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring suggests.

The conclusion was implicit; to avoid this confusion proleptic mirroring and the role of absorption in painting practice should be approached in a different way. Therefore, this research suggests that relying on trust for the painting-beholder to mirror the artist's experience of practice should be described as a non-strategic approach to aesthetic absorption. In contrast is the strategic approach, where the painting-beholder is addressed through a directed programme of work aimed specifically at creating a shift in the register of experience.

This research also identified that aesthetic absorption in painting practice is different to everyday or banal absorption, because of what artists are trying to achieve, that is, the artist's programme of trying to achieve a shift in our register of experience, and change the way we see. And it is in understanding where banal absorption fits in painting process, that we can understand where aesthetic absorption fits. That is because banal experiences of painting process are positioned between the non-strategically absorbed painter-beholder to the strategically

absorbed painting-beholder, and as such on the margin of our understanding of its place in these relationships. Joselit uses Pollock's paintings to describe this meeting because they 'opened an aesthetic threshold between disorganized sensation and organized form' (2016: 15).

I expanded Joselit's description of the aesthetic threshold by describing it as the working through of banal absorption within aesthetic absorption, where the banal/disorganized is fed through to an aesthetic/organized programmed approach. This threshold marks the progression from a non-strategic to a strategic one.

But Fried also skirts this threshold where he theorizes about immersive and specular moments that are made evident in the paintings of Caravaggio (2010). These moments I suggest can be aligned with Joselit's aesthetic threshold between disorganized sensation and organized form, and with the confluence of banal with aesthetic absorption to create this expanded combined version of Joselit's and Fried's concepts, which I refer to as the expanded thresholds model:

immersive/banal/disorganized (T) specular/aesthetic/organized

It provides us with a framework to better understand what is occurring in painting practice, to recognize and understand strategic approaches, whilst furnishing us with the knowledge required to put these thresholds to work.

This research has shown conclusively that the artist collaborators are more comfortable feeling absorbed in the work of others than feeling absorbed in their own, and hesitant about what they can hope or claim for their own work. That they want to be free and clear of that confusion of making with being aesthetically absorbed. This is what is demonstrated by this expanded threshold model. It helps us, as artists, to see what the issue is or what is not working with prolepsis, and how that reflects back into our own process. As such, we find Fried undermines his own theory of prolepsis, but as I've shown, introducing Joselit helps us to make that distinction.

This key understanding allows us to negotiate the experience of the painter-beholder, and the different positions of beholdership within this relationship of theory and practice. It makes it possible for artists to use clearer distinctions between banal and aesthetic absorption, and to understand how strategic

programmes for aesthetic absorption can be considered through painting practice. Having the experience of aesthetic absorption in painting practice doesn't make proleptic mirroring operative, but what it can do is enable the painter-beholder to construct or imagine the painting-beholder. Without understanding the difference in these approaches and positions, developed out of the dialogues with the collaborators, it is apparent how hard it is to negotiate Fried's theory of proleptic mirroring.

This research considers that in order to find new ways to negotiate absorption, and define new terms and functions, we should pay more attention to this banal/aesthetic distinction by using the expanded thresholds model. We can open up the concept of absorption on new terms, beyond Fried's notion of absorption versus theatricality, that is if we consider how to cultivate the aesthetic threshold, and extend our understanding through this new theory/practice relationship. As such, this research could be described as a theoretical and practical examination of thresholds, whilst also constructing a model of one.

Throughout these discourses it has been indicated that there are several different modes at work within the studio. What I have named Studio 1.0 is described by the Diderotian tradition of moral seriousness, where the artist bears no responsibility towards the painting-beholder other than in depicting signs of the closed mind for them to perceive. Alternatively, Studio 2.0 provides new conditions of de-privileging the artist position in a relationship between the painting-beholder and the painter-beholder as co-producers or collaborators. Whether that takes the form of a visitor to the studio, another artist collaborating during installation, or interaction in the studio via social media. As such, this new understanding of the studio and agency in painting practice addresses the crisis in absorption where the refusal of theatricality transforms into the refusal of intentionality for the artist Michaels (2011).

Here the artist has a responsibility towards the painting-beholder in a way that they didn't have previously, and in which the beholder has a responsibility toward the artist, both recognizing the existence of a programme for changing the register of experience and each other's part in it. This mode emancipates the painting-beholder and painter-beholder, establishing for them painting as a shared zone of freedom. Thus the approach of Studio 2.0 allows for a more outwardly open approach to aesthetic absorption. It is a mode of working that considers how we approach the painting-beholder through the use of absorptive strategies. In opening up the

studio, it declares the intentionality of both painter-beholder and painting-beholder. It is often the case that theory can stop before the doors of the studio, and therefore the studio is not the place where a new relationship of theory and practice is usually built. This research has brought both theory and practice together in order to underpin future considerations of aesthetic absorption in painting practice. Both the new theory/practice relationship I suggest in the expanded thresholds model, and the pragmatic way of working that I have described as Studio 2.0 are grounded because of this work. That is because these understandings allow the theories like proleptic mirroring to be approached in a new way by using this set of conceptual tools.

In the introduction I discuss how Mulhall (2001) suggests there is a moment of privilege in painting practice, as it is only the painter who beholds the process of producing a painting. But as I have highlighted, through the concept of Studio 2.0, that moment of making a painting can be a far more 'open' process, where the threshold between the banal and the aesthetic can be negotiated by the painter-beholder and painting-beholder, and less reserved for sole observation or making. Because of the way this work is produced it could also be described as something that is not finished, but formed or forming, and therefore Studio 2.0 becomes not only a physical space of democratic process, but could also be described as a space for re-imagining the tableau.

These understandings have the potential to afford a painter with more confidence in how they vocalize their position. When considering the agency of the artist in painting practice, that is, the painter's programme of work, the open approach of Studio 2.0 works to negate theatricality, and as such promotes integrity and authenticity through explicitness and transparency, whilst retaining the notion of moral seriousness.

This research has found that what is at stake with absorption is a certain way of describing freedoms. It's about the freedom of the painter to construct or imagine the painting-beholder. It's about the freedom of the painting-beholder to acknowledge the artist and their programme. It's about the freedom of the painter-beholder to take a position and stake claims about their practice in its address to the painting-beholder. And lastly, this research advances that it is about the freedom of the artist to practice in a way that, as SE puts it, could allow us to invest something new in these art historical theories

### **The research limitations**

As discussed in the introduction, the limits of this research derive from restrictions to time and financial constraints. For example it was decided to keep the number of collaborators to six, because of the time needed to transcribe and then assimilate the data collected.

It would also have been interesting if new terms had arisen through the dialogues, such as terms to differentiate aesthetic absorption in painting practice of painter-beholder compared to the painting-beholder position. It is hoped that this will evolve out of future debates and papers.

### **What this PhD contributes that an artist might read back into practice**

There is the potential, through dissemination of this research, for the alternative theory/practice relationship of the expanded threshold model to aid how we discuss the role of aesthetic absorption in practice. And it is through this model we can recognize the threshold between the banal and aesthetic, and the difference in these categories that this research has evolved. We can then go back to practice with this new understanding of how to use these positions in an informed way.

It is hoped that this research will promote future debates to and from the studio and painting practice. This is especially pertinent at this precarious time, when the studio faces many threats such as gentrification, and cuts to funding and artists' incomes. The concept of Studio 2.0 could also be useful to painters when considering how to achieve greater audience attendance numbers when making funding applications.

### **Links to existing literature**

We can see how these eighteenth century concerns relate to twenty-first century practice by how much they are still discussed in contemporary dialogue. This is just a small selection of events that connect with the issues of this research, demonstrating the ongoing debate:

These issues have been debated at the: 'Tableau: Painting Photo Object' symposia, (2011) at Tate Modern, 'The International Conference on the Image' (2013) in Chicago, 'Painting Beyond Itself' (2013) at Harvard University, 'Developing the Substrate' Symposium (2014) at Chelsea College of Arts, 'Painting as a Document' (2014) at Tate Britain, 'The International Conference on Visual & Performing Arts' (2015) in Athens, 'Painting in Time' (2015) at The Tetley, 'The International

Conference on the Image' (2016) in Liverpool, 'Generation Painting: Abstraction and British Art 1955–65' (2016) at Downing College Cambridge University, 'Colour, Emotion, Non-Figuration: John Hoyland Revisited' (2016) at Chelsea College of Arts, 'Abstract Expressionism and its Legacy for a New Generation' (2016) at the Royal Academy, and in *The Journal of Visual Culture*, '50 Years of 'Art and Objecthood': Traces, Impact, Critique' (April, 2017).

Not forgetting Fried's publishing project in which he continues to pursue these theories, the most recent being *Another Light: Jacques-Louis David to Thomas Demand* (2014), and *After Caravaggio* (2016).

And as also seen in exhibitions including: *Painting/Tableau/Stage* (2013) at The Urban Art Space, Ohio (With Moyra Derby, Stuart Elliot, Mick Finch and Beth Harland), *As painting: Division and Displacement* (2001) at the Wexner Centre for the Arts, Ohio (Co-curated by Professor Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville), *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* (1986) at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (Co-curated by David Joselit), *Utopia Post Utopia: Configurations of nature and Culture in recent Sculpture and Photography* (1988) at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (Co-curated by David Joselit), and *American Art of the Late 1980's* (1988) at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (Co-curated by David Joselit).

### **Potential for future research**

From this body of research there is the potential for further study of the expanded threshold model, looking at its greater application and dissemination.

There is also the potential for further work to be carried out on the concept of Studio 2.0, which includes the study of collaborative partnerships such as Biggs and Collings as discussed in the introduction. These approaches of multi or alternative modes of authorship, and how or even if aesthetic absorption is encountered and negotiated within them, suggest significant lines of enquiry worthy of future stages of this research.

Studio 2.0 could also be developed further in digital arenas, or it could be pursued in a more practical and public way through experimental programmes in gallery-run project spaces.

### **Ongoing projects**

This research and its findings (post PhD), will be disseminated through a two-phase project. Phase 1 of this project will follow a 12-month programme of painting practice, and curatorial research and development project that will draw on and test this PhD research, as funded by The Arts Council England under Grants for the Arts. The second phase is a group exhibition of the collaborators' work examining the issues raised through the research. It will tour to three separate venues in different regions to promote and continue the dialogue between the theory, practice, presentation and studio, and to connect with the practitioners based in and around the venues. The exhibition tour will start at APT Gallery, Deptford, London, in Summer 2018. The other venues are in the process of being confirmed. Alongside the exhibition there will be a program of events to include: artist talks, a tour of the exhibition by myself as researcher/curator/painter, and a panel discussion run by groups such as Paint Club, or The Undead Painters.

This project, which started in November 2016, will run till late 2018, and whilst it continues the aim is to connect with any interested parties through the exhibition, and through a strong online and social media presence. This will include building connections with: galleries, museums, traditional educational establishments, and non-traditional educational groups. The intention is to build a relationship with anyone interested in practice from all perspectives: student, educator, enthusiast, professional artist, art groups, studios, art organizations etc. It is hoped that they will, in some form, make this dialogue their own, and through their group understanding promote and enhance existing knowledge. As such this research has become the foundation of a larger ongoing project for this subject and this artist/researcher/co-collaborator/curator.

This research has followed an unconventional approach, perhaps even a unique one. Reading art historical theories back through practice in collaboration with practicing artists has proven a challenging, but rewarding project. As a result of the collaborators' generous contributions this research has been able to highlight the concerns and hesitations of a specific group of artists and what their experience and reflections might mean for aesthetic absorption in painting practice today.



## Bibliography

*Abstract Expressionism and its Legacy for a New Generation* (2016)

[Panel Discussion]. Chaired by Ben Street with Gabriel Hartley, Lisa Denyer and Selma Parlour. Royal Academy, London. 16 September 2016.

Agin, S. (2007) 'The Development of Diderot's "Salons" and the Shifting Boundary of Representational Language', *Diderot Studies* 30, (ed.) by Thierry Belleguic, pp. 11–31.

Alpers, S. (1976-77) 'Describe or narrate? A Problem in Realistic Representation', *New Literary History*, vol. 8, 1976-77, pp. 5–41.

Alpers, S. (2012 [1988]) *The Studio A Master in the Studio* (Rembrandt's Enterprise: The Studio and the Market, in: *The Studio Documents of Contemporary Art*, (ed.) by Jens Hoffmann, London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press.

*American Art of the Late 1980's* (1988) [Exhibition]. The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. 23 September–27 November 1988.

Arlander, A. (2010) 'Characteristics of Visual and Performing Arts', in: *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, (ed.) by Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson, London and New York: Routledge.

Armstrong, P., Lisbon, L., and Melville, S. (2001) *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press.

*As Painting: Division and Displacement* (2001) [Exhibition]. The Wexner Centre for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio. 12 May–12 August 2001.

Ascott, R. (1960) *Change Painting* [Cellulose on Perspex panels in wooden frame]. Collection of the Artist.

Atkinson, T. (1990) 'Phantoms of the Studio', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 49–62.

Baker, E. (2007) *Greuze and the Painting of Sentiment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baldwin, T. (2011) 'Ekphrasis and related issues in Diderot's Salons', in: *New Essays on Diderot*, (ed.) by James Fowler, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 234–247.

Barrell, J. (1981) 'Beholders', *London Book Review*, vol. 3, no.6, 2 April 1981, pp. 18–19.

Bath Spa University, 'Andrea Medjesi-Jones'. Available at: <<https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/our-people/andrea-medjesi-jones>> [Accessed 28/06/2017], (non-paginated).

Baudelaire, C. (2010 [1863]) *The Painter of Modern Life*, London: Penguin Books.

Bedford Creative Arts, Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (2017). Available at: <<http://bedfordcreativearts.org.uk>> [Accessed 22/07/2017].

Beech, D. (2015) *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics*, Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Beech, D. (2016) 'On Critique', *Art Monthly*, Issue 393, pp. 5–8

Berger, J. and Christie, J. (1999) *I Send You This Cadmium Red*, Barcelona: Actar.

Bick, A. (2013-2015) *OGVDS-GW #2 v3* [Acrylic, oil paint, marker pen and wax on CNC machined Perspex]. Private collection.

Bick, A. (2016) *OGVDS-GW #7* [Acrylic, pencil, oil paint, watercolour and wax on linen on wood]. Collection of the Artist.

Biggs, M. and Karlsson, H. (eds.) (2010) *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, London and New York: Routledge.

Birkett, R. (2015) 'R. H. Quaytman: Paratexts and Palimpsests', in: *Afterall A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 38, pp. 88–101.

- Bishop, C. (2012) *Artificial Hells*, London and Brooklyn: Verso.
- Bloom, P. (2017) *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*, London: The Bodley Head.
- Bois, Y-A. and Shepley, J. (1984) 'A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara', *October*, vol. 29, pp. 32–36.
- Börsch-Supan, H. (1974) *Caspar David Friedrich*, (trans.) by Sarah Twohig, New York: George Braziller.
- Boucher, F. (c.1763) *Dreaming Shepherdess* [Oil on canvas]. Residenzgalerie, Salzburg.
- Bowness, A. (1972) *Courbet's 'Atelier du Peintre' (50th Charlton Lecture on Art, Newcastle upon Tyne)*, England, Westerham: Westerham Press.
- Braider, C. (2013) 'Groping in the dark: aesthetics and ontology', in: *Diderot and Kant, Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 105–127.
- Brookner, A. (1972) *Greuze: The rise and fall of an eighteenth-century phenomenon*, London: Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London.
- Brownstone, A. (2016) 'Better than watching paint dry?'. Available at: <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-37452596>> [Accessed 18/10/2016], (non-paginated).
- Bukdahl, M. (1980) *Diderot critique d'art*, Copenhagen: Rosenkilde et Bagger, vol. 1, pp. 27–8.
- Buren, D. (2012 [1971]) 'The Function of the Studio', in: *The Studio Documents of Contemporary Art*, (ed.) by Jens Hoffmann, London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press.

Buren, D. (2012 [2007]) 'The Function of the Studio Revisited', in: *The Studio Documents of Contemporary Art*, (ed.) by Jens Hoffmann, London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press.

Bussolini, J. (2010) What is a Dispositive? *Foucault Studies*, No. 10, November 2010, pp. 85–107.

Callery, S. (2014) *Horizontal Black Pit Painting* [Distemper, canvas, wood, and aluminium]. Collection of the Artist.

Callery, S. (2015) *Flat Painting Bodfari 14/15 Cadmium Red Deep* [Canvas, distemper, thread, pencil, wood, and aluminium]. Collection of the Artist.

Caravaggio, M. M. (c.1594-5) *Boy bitten by a Lizard* [Oil on canvas]. National Gallery, London.

Cavell, S. (1979) 'Natural and Conventional', in: *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 86–125.

Chardin, J-B-S. (c.1733-34) *Soap Bubbles* [Oil on canvas]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Chevrier, F. (2011) 'Inside the view: Tableau form and document', in: *Tableau: Painting Photo Object symposia*. Tate Modern, London, 28–29 October.

Clark, T. J. (2006) *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*, London: Yale University Press.

*Colour, Emotion, Non-Figuration: John Hoyland Revisited* (2016) [Symposium]. Chelsea College of Arts, London. 10 March 2016.

Corfield, C. (2013) *The Role of Technology in a 21st Century Pedagogy*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Teesside University.

Courbet, G. (1854-55) *The Painter's Studio: A real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic and moral life* [Oil on canvas]. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Crary, J. (1999) *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press.

Crow, T. (1985) *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Crow, T. (1995) 'Diderot's Salons: Public Art and the Mind of the Private Critic', in: *Diderot on Art 1 – Salon of 1705 & 1765*, (ed.) by John Goodman, London: Yale University Press, pp. ix–xx.

Darlow, M. (2011) 'Diderot's Voice(s): music and reform', in: *New Essays on Diderot*, (ed.) by James Fowler, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 203-219.

De Duve, T. (1996) *Kant after Duchamp*, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

*Developing the Substrate* (2014) [Symposium]. Chelsea College of Arts, London. 6 March 2014.

Diderot, D. (1995a) *Diderot on Art 1 – Salon of 1705 & 1765*, (trans.) by John Goodman, London: Yale University Press.

Diderot, D. (1995b) *Diderot on Art II – Salon of 1767*, (trans.) by John Goodman, London: Yale University Press.

Diderot, D. The ARTFL Project. Available at: <<http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu>> [Accessed 21/03/17], (non-paginated).

Diderot, D. The ARTFL Project, 'Composition'. Available at: <<http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.2:1718:7.encyclopedie0513>> [Accessed 21/03/17], (non-paginated).

Dimitriadi, N. (2009) *The Emergence Of Practice: Motivation And Decision Making Among Contemporary Visual Artists*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Brighton.

Eco, U. (1989) *The Open Work*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Elliot, S. (2010) *Untitled [41]* [Acrylic paint, unprimed canvas, wood].  
Collection of the Artist.

Elliot, S. (2010) *Untitled [42]* [Acrylic paint, unprimed canvas, wood].  
Collection of the Artist.

*Enantiodromia: Simon Callery, Lawrence Carroll, Angela de la Cruz, Onya MacCausland* (2014) [Exhibition]. FOLD Gallery, London. 15 March–10 May 2014.

*Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* (1986)  
[Exhibition]. The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. 25 September–30 November  
1986.

Ferris, S. and Wilder, H. (2006) 'Uses and Potentials of Wikis in the Classroom',  
*Innovate*, vol. 2, no. 5. Available at:  
<<http://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1129&context=innovate>>  
[Accessed 29/07/16], (non-paginated).

Finch, M. (1998) 'Theatre/Spectacle - Absorption/Lived Time', in: *Painting and Time*  
[Conference]. Hull School of Art and Design, Hull. 17–18 April. Available at:  
<<http://www.mickfinch.com/texts/theatre.html>> [Accessed 05/08/2013],  
(non-paginated).

Finch, M. (2010) 'Introduction to the Symposium 1'. Available at:  
<<http://tableauproject.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/transcript-of-mick-finchs-introduction.html>> [Accessed 05/08/2013], (non-paginated).

*Flat Paintings: Simon Callery* (2015) [Exhibition]. FOLD Gallery, London.  
9 October–14 November 2015.

Fried, M. (1975) 'Absorption: A Master Theme in Eighteenth-Century French Painting  
and Criticism', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp.139–177.

Fried, M. (1980) *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age  
of Diderot*, Berkeley and London: University of California.

Fried, M. (1990) *Courbet's Realism*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Fried, M. (1996) *Manet's Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Fried, M. (1998 [1966]) 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons', in: *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 77–99.

Fried, M. (1998 [1967]) 'Art and Objecthood', in: *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 148–172.

Fried, M. (1998) *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Fried, M. (2008) *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Princeton and Oxford: The Princeton University Press.

Fried, M. (2010) *The Moment of Caravaggio*, Princeton and Oxford: The Princeton University Press.

Fried, M. (2011) 'About the Tableau', in: *Tableau: Painting Photo Object symposia*. Tate Modern, London, 28–29 October.

Fried, M. (2011) *Four Honest Outlaws*, Princeton and Oxford: The Princeton University Press.

Friedrich, C. D. (1832) *The Large Enclosure, near Dresden* [Oil on canvas]. Old Masters Picture Gallery, Dresden.

Gamboni, D. (2002) *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art*, New Haven: Reaktion Books.

*Generation Painting: Abstraction and British Art 1955–65* (2016) [Symposium]. Downing College Cambridge University, Cambridge. 5 March 2016.

Goldenberg, D. and Reed, P. (2008) 'What is a Participatory Practice?' *Fillip Review*, Fall (2008). Available at: <<http://www.aestheticmanagement.com/what-is-a-participatory-practice>> [Accessed 20/11/16], (non-paginated).

Goodyear, A. (2013) *Move Me 1* [Oil on seven wood panels]. Collection of the Artist.

Goodyear, A. (2013) *Move Me 2* [Oil on seven wood panels]. Collection of the Artist.

Goodyear, A. (2015) *Blue Depths* [Acrylic, ink and oil paint on silk, canvas and wooden shelf]. Collection of the Artist.

Goodyear, A. (2016) *Tiger Tiger* [Acrylic, ink and oil paint on silk, canvas and wooden shelf]. Collection of the Artist.

Goulbourne, R. (2011) 'Diderot and the Ancients', in: *New Essays on Diderot*, (ed.) by James Fowler, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.13-30.

Grassie, A. (2005) *Tate New Hang 8* [Tempera on paper]. Tate Collection, London.

Grassie, A. (2005) *The Hanging of New Hang* [Tempera on paper]. Tate Collection, London.

Gray, C. and Malins, J. (2004) *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.

Green, A. (2017) 'A Supreme Fiction': Michael Fried and Art Criticism', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 89–102.

Greenberg, C. (1968) 'Avant Garde Attitudes'. Available at: <<http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/avantgarde.html>> [Accessed 05/10/15], (non-paginated).

Greenberg, C. (1988 [1939]) 'Avant-garde and Kitsch', in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1: Perception and Judgments, 1939-1944*, (ed.) by John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 5–22.

Greenberg, C. (1988 [1940]) 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1: Perception and Judgments, 1939-1944*, (ed.) by John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 23–27.

Greenberg, C. (1995 [1955]) 'American Type Painting', in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 3: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, (ed.) by John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 217–235.

Greenberg, C. (1995 [1960]) 'Modernist Painting', in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, (ed.) by John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 85–93.

Greenberg, C. (1995 [1962]) 'After Abstract Expressionism', in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, (ed.) by John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 121–133.

Greenberg, C. (1995 [1967]) 'Recentness of Sculpture', in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, (ed.) by John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 250-256.

Greuze, J-B. (c.1763) *La Piété Filiale* [Oil on canvas]. The Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Greuze, J-B (c.1765) *A Girl with a Dead Canary* [Oil on canvas]. Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh.

Gruze, J-B. (1769) *Septime Sévère et Caracalla* [Oil on canvas]. Louvre, Paris.

Hales Gallery (2012) 'Andrew Bick: School Studies'. Available at: [http://www.halesgallery.com/exhibitions/50/installation\\_shots](http://www.halesgallery.com/exhibitions/50/installation_shots) [Accessed 14/07/17], (non-paginated).

Harland, B. et al., (2014) 'Modes of Address in Pictorial Art: An Eye Movement Study of Manet's Bar at the Folies Bergère', *Leonardo*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 241–248.

Harris, J. (2005) *Writing Back to Modern Art after Greenberg, Fried and Clark*, London and New York: Routledge.

Harrison, C. (1991) *Essays on Art and Language*, Cambridge and London: MIT Press.

Harrison, C. (2001) *Conceptual Art and Painting*, Cambridge and London: MIT Press.

Hawkins, K. (2013) *Sites Of Action. An Investigation Of Performative Painting And Spectatorship*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton.

Heffernan, J. (2008) 'Staging Absorption and Transmuting the Everyday: A Response to Michael Fried', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 34, no. 4, pp. 818–834.

Heilmann, M. 'Mary Heilmann'. Available at:  
<<https://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/12/mary-heilmann/images-clips>>  
[Accessed 11/07/17], (non-paginated).

Hénin, E. (2011) 'Parrhasius and the Stage Curtain', in: *Theatricality in Early Modern Art and Architecture*, (ed.) by Caroline van Eck and Stijn Bussels, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Herding, K. (1991) *Courbet: To Venture Independence*, Rhode Island: Yale University Press.

Hitchens, I. (1950) *Yellow Depths* [Oil on canvas]. Private Collection. Available at:  
<[http://www.artnet.com/artists/ivon-hitchens/yellow-depths-7o\\_VpC\\_7KI\\_pw0FnelM\\_LA2](http://www.artnet.com/artists/ivon-hitchens/yellow-depths-7o_VpC_7KI_pw0FnelM_LA2)> [Accessed 22/07/17].

Irlen UK. Available at: <<http://irlen.com/reading-problems-dyslexia-learning-difficulties-the-irlen-method>> [Accessed 29/12/16], (non-paginated).

Jones, C, A. (1996) *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Jones, C. (2012 [2010]) 'The Function of the Studio (When the Studio is a Laptop)', in: *The Studio Documents of Contemporary Art*, (ed.) by Jens Hoffmann, London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press.

Joselit, D. (2009) 'Painting Beside Itself', *October*, vol. 130, Fall 2009, pp. 125–134.

Joselit, D. (2016) 'Marking, Scoring, Storing and Speculating (On Time)', in: *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, (ed.) by Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, Berlin: Sternberg Press, pp.11–20.

Judd, D. (2005 [1965]) *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975*, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design.

Kandinsky, W. (1982) *Kandinsky Complete Writings on Art*, Boston: Da Capo Press.

Kant, E. (2008 [1790]), *Critique of Judgment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kant, E. (1974 [1798]) *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, The Hague: Martinus Hijhoff.

Kaprow, A. (1967) 'Letter to the Editor', *Artforum*, 6, no.1, September 1967, p. 4.

Kelly, M. (2013) 'Foucault on Critical Agency in Painting and the Aesthetics of Existence', in: *A Companion to Foucault*, (ed.) by Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary and Jana Sawicki, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Kidd, N. 'Natasha Kidd'. Available at: <<http://www.natashakidd.com/work>> [Accessed 5/10/15], (non-paginated).

Kier, I. (2008) *Endless House: Models of thought for Dwelling*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal College of Art, London.

Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Krauss, R. (1972) 'A View of Modernism', *Artforum*, September 1972, pp. 48–51.

Krauss, R. (1977) *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Krauss, R. (1990) 'Using Language to Do Business as Usual', in: *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, (ed.) by Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, London: Polity Press, pp.77–94.

Krauss, R. (1999) *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London: Thames & Hudson.

Lessing, G. (1766) 'Laocoon: An essay upon the limits of painting and poetry. With remarks illustrative of various points in the history of ancient art'. Available at: <<https://archive.org/details/laocoonesayupon00lessrich>> [Accessed 05/10/15].

Lisson Gallery, 'Art & Language'. Available at: <<http://www.lissongallery.com/artists/art-language>> [Accessed 5/10/15], (non-paginated).

Maclagan, D. (2001) *Psychological Aesthetics: Painting, Feeling and Making Sense*, London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Madden, N. (2003) 'Katie Pratt'. Available at: <[http://www.an.co.uk/artists\\_talking/artists\\_stories/single/83276](http://www.an.co.uk/artists_talking/artists_stories/single/83276)> [Accessed 25/05/2014], (non-paginated).

Manet, E. (1882-83) *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* [Oil on canvas]. The Courtauld Gallery, London.

Marioni, J. (2004) *Green painting* [Acrylic and linen on stretcher]. Private Collection.

Marioni, J. (2012) *Red painting* [Acrylic and linen on stretcher]. Private Collection.

Mayer, J. (2012) 'The Writing of "Art and Objecthood"', in: *Refracting Vision, essays on the writings of Michael Fried*, (ed.) by Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts and Toni Roass, Sydney: Power Publications.

Medjesi-Jones, A. (2011) 'A Shock to Thought – conditions of the emerging image' at the: *Tableau Project Research Symposium*. Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London, 21 May, and in: *Tableau: Painting Photo Object* symposia. Tate Modern, London, 28–29 October 2011.

Medjesi-Jones, A. (2016) *Paintings as tools* [Wood, canvas strips, canvas fringing, pigment and spray paint, canvas tape]. Collection of the Artist.

Medjesi-Jones, A. (2017) *Pink Flag (small)* [Acrylic and pigment on canvas].  
Collection of the Artist.

Michaels, W. B. (2011) 'Neoliberal Aesthetics: Fried, Rancière and the form of the Photograph'. Available at:

<<http://nonsite.org/article/neoliberal-aesthetics-fried-ranciere-and-the-form-of-the-photograph>> [Accessed 17/2/16], (non-paginated).

Michelson, A. (1970) *Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression*, Washington: Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Morgan, D. (1993) *Successful Focus Groups: Advancing the State of the Art*, London and California: Sage Publications.

Mulhall, S. (2001) 'Crimes and Deeds of Glory: Michael Fried's Modernism', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 41, issue 1, January 2001.

Mullin, J. (2010) 'Rhetoric: Writing, Reading and Producing the Visual', in: *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, (eds.) by Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson, London and New York: Routledge.

Osborne, P. (2013) *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London and Brooklyn: Verso Books.

*Painting as a Document* (2014) [Panel Discussion]. Co-chaired by Alison Goodyear and Donal Moloney with Barry Schwabsky and Clare Woods. Clore Auditorium, Tate Britain, London. 25 April 2014.

*Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition* (2013) [Conference]. Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 12–13 April 2013.

*Painting in Time* (2015) [Exhibition]. The Tetley, Leeds. 3 April–5 July 2015.

*Painting, Tableau, Stage* (2013) [Exhibition]. The Urban Arts Space, Ohio State University, Ohio. 24 September–4 November 2013.

Pliny (the Elder) (77-79 AD) *Naturalis Historia*, book 35. Available at: <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:phi,0978,001:35:36>> [Accessed 14/07/2017], (non-paginated).

Pratt, K. (2015) *Bluixcity* [Oil and canvas]. Galerie Peter Zimmermann, Mannheim.

Pratt, K. (2017) *Siscicily* [Oil, encaustic and canvas]. Collection of the Artist.

Rahtz, D. (2001) *The Rhetoric of Literalism: Readings in American Minimal Art 1959-1966*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Wimbledon College of Art.

*Recalculating* (2013) [Exhibition]. Triangle Space, Chelsea College of Arts, London. 24–27 April 2013.

Reed, D. 'David Reed'. Available at: <<http://www.davidreedstudio.com>> [Accessed 10/10/15], (non-paginated).

Reed, D. (2009) *Rock, Paper, Scissors*, Cologne: Snoeck Verlagsgesellschaft mbH.

Reed, P. (2008) 'What is a participatory practice?'. Available at: <<http://www.aestheticmanagement.com/what-is-a-participatory-practice>> [Accessed 20/11/16], (non-paginated).

Relyea, L. (2012 [2010]) Studio Unbound, in: *The Studio Documents of Contemporary Art*, (ed.) by Jens Hoffmann, London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press.

Richter, G. (1988) *Betty* [Oil on canvas]. Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis.

Rosenberg, P. (2000) *Chardin*, London: Royal Academy of Arts.

Rousseau, H. (1891) *Tiger in a Tropical Storm or Surprised!* [Oil on canvas]. National Gallery, London.

Rubinstein, D. (2017) 'Failure to Engage: Art Criticism in the Age of Simulacrum', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 16, issue 1, pp. 43–55.

Scott, D. (1988) *Pictorialist Poetics: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shaftesbury, (Ashley-Cooper, A.) (1790 [1710]) 'Soliloquy: or, Advice to an Author', in: *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times with a Collection of Letters: Volume 1*, Basil: J.J. Tourneisen.

Available at: <[https://books.google.co.uk/books?redir\\_esc=y&id=VA8AAAcAAJ&q=pliny#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?redir_esc=y&id=VA8AAAcAAJ&q=pliny#v=onepage&q&f=false)> [Accessed 05/10/14], (paginated).

Shaftesbury, (Ashley-Cooper, A.) (2014 [1713]) 'Of Hercules', in: *Second Characters or the Language of Forms*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shelley, J. (2013) 'The concept of Aesthetic', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 Edition), (ed.) by Edward N. Zalta. Available at: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/aesthetic-concept>> [Accessed 07/11/14], (non-paginated).

Smithson, R. (1967) 'Letter to the Editor', *Artforum*, 6, No.1, October 1967, p. 4.

Starobinski, J., Delon, M., and Cohen, A. (2007) *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thoughts*, (ed.) by Jean Seznec, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London and New York: Springer.

Stendhal (1955) *The Private Diaries of Stendhal*, (ed.) and (trans.) by Robert Sage, London: Victor Gollancz.

Stendhal (2010 [1817]) *Rome, Naples and Florence*, (trans) by Richard N. Coe, London: Calder Publications.

*Tableau: Painting Photo Object* (2011) [Symposia]. Tate Modern, London. 28–29 October 2011.

*The 5th International Conference on the Image* (2013) [Conference]. University Centre, Chicago. 18–19 September 2013.

*The 5th International Conference on Visual & Performing Arts* (2014) [Conference].  
*The Athens Institute for Education and Research*, Athens. 2–5 June 2014.

*The 7th International Conference on the Image* (2016) [Conference]. John Moores  
University, Liverpool. 1–2 September 2016.

*Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella* (1965)  
[Exhibition]. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.  
21 April–30 May 1965.

*The Great Beauty* (2013) Co-written and directed by Paolo Sorrentino [Film].  
Rome: Indigo Film.

Thompson, J. (1989) 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Bulletin*, Winter 1989/90, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

*Towards A Common Language* (1973) [Exhibition]. The Blackie at the Walker Art  
Gallery, Liverpool. 22–28 October 1973. Available at: <<http://archive.theblackie.co.uk/archive/category/participation/content/towards-a-common-language-22nd-28th-october-1973>> [Accessed 23/09/2016], (non-paginated).

Tunstall, K. (2006) 'Text, Image, Intertext: Diderot, Chardon, Pliny', *SVEC*, vol.12,  
pp. 345-357.

*Two by Two: Mary Heilmann and David Reed* (2015) [Exhibition]. Hamburger  
Bahnhof Gallery, Berlin. 6 March–11 October 2015. Available at:  
<<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2015/10/mary-heilmann-david-reed-at-hamburger-bahnhof>> [Accessed 10/10/15], (non-paginated).

*Undead Painters FLASH SALON* (2016) [Exhibition]. Bondhouse Gallery, London,  
22 July 2016.

*Utopia Post Utopia: Configurations of Nature and Culture in Recent Sculpture  
and Photography* (1988) [Exhibition]. The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.  
29 January–27 March 1988.

Veith, J, P. (1832) *The Large Enclosure, near Dresden after Friedrich* [Copper engraving on paper]. Private Collection.

Vigo Gallery, 'Biggs and Collings'. Available at: <<http://www.vigogallery.com/?artists,biggsandcollings,works>> [Accessed 5/10/15], (non-paginated).

*Visual Symposium* (2013) [Symposium and Exhibition]. Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall (BGV), London. 26 April 2013.

Wallace, I. (2012) 'Corner of the Studio and El Taller: A Reflection on Two Works from 1993 and 2005', in: *The Studio Documents of Contemporary Art*, (ed.) by Jens Hoffmann, London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press.

Watson, S. (2012 [1964]) *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties*, in: *The Studio Documents of Contemporary Art*, (ed.) by Jens Hoffmann, London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press.

Whitley, J. (2001) *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

*Wild Things, Alison Goodyear R&D Project* (2014) [Exhibition]. Animal Gallery, Bedford. 5 September–9 October 2014.

Wollheim, R. (1968) *Art and Its Objects*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wollheim, R. (1987) *Painting as an Art*, London: Thames and Hudson.

Wragg, G. 'Gary Wragg'. Available at: <<http://www.garywraggstudio.co.uk>> [Accessed 11/10/15], (non-paginated).

Wragg, G. (2005) *Eddie's Café* [Oil on canvas]. Collection of the Artist.

Wragg, G. (2012-13) *Orange, Red Staggered Circuit* [Acrylic and charcoal on cotton duck canvas]. Collection of the Artist.

Wrigley, R. (1993) *The Origins of French Art Criticism: From the Ancien Régime to the Restoration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Appendices

<b>1. History of Engagement of Aesthetic Absorption Document</b> ....	187
<b>2. A Lexicon of Aesthetic Absorption</b> .....	197
<b>3. Questionnaire</b> .....	201
<b>4. Transcriptions</b>	
Andrew Bick .....	203
Simon Callery .....	219
Stuart Elliot .....	235
Andrea Medjesi-Jones .....	269
Katie Pratt .....	286
Gary Wragg .....	306
Interview Summaries .....	327
Round Table Discussion 1 .....	360
Round Table Discussion 2 .....	425



## 1. History of Engagement of Aesthetic Absorption Document

This document is a gathering together in short form, descriptions of the history of engagement with the concept of aesthetic absorption. Here are mentioned specific artists, works, art critics, events and exhibitions, (listed chronologically for ease of reference) that each, in their different ways, played a role in the development and understanding of the concept of aesthetic absorption in relation to painting practice. There will be many other sources that show absorptive traits or concerns not included here. The exclusion of these sources is not meant to deny their influence, but retains a focus on key moments in order to keep this document succinct and easy to use. It is accompanied by a separate document, the Lexicon of absorptive terms. The aims of these documents are to offer a point of departure or a resource for the collaborators of this research and the dialogical approach of the research that will follow. It is understood that over the period of this research these documents will be developed and expanded upon as the dialogue unfolds.

### I

#### Pliny the Elder (AD 23 - 79)

One of the earliest examples where the art of painting and theatre were intimately linked can be seen in Pliny's description of the 'Parrhasius and curtain' anecdote. In book 35 of his *Naturalis Historia* (77-79 AD), Pliny wrote on the story of the painting competition that took place in Greece in early fifth century BC to decide who was the better artist, Zeuxis or Parrhasius. When the paintings were presented, Zeuxis was the first to unveil his painting of grapes and it is said that on seeing it birds flew down to peck at the grapes. When it came to the turn of Parrhasius, Zeuxis encouraged him to remove the curtain from his painting, only to find that the curtain was the painting. The success of fooling the birds seemed a triumph, but the stroke of genius was in fooling a fellow artist. Zeuxis admitted, 'I have deceived the birds, but Parrhasius has deceived Zeuxis' (Whitley 2001: 286).

### II

#### Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713)

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) initially considered the relationship between author and reader and its theatrical qualities in his 'Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author' (1710). Later in 'Of Hercules', Shaftesbury wrote 'The good painter must come a little nearer to truth, and take care that this action be not theatrical, or at second hand; but original and drawn from Nature herself' (2014 [1713]: 45). This statement reveals how strongly Shaftesbury was influenced by Pliny, championing the mimesis of nature over the 'theatrical', an adverse effect in relation with the unreal and unnatural, and the antithesis to nature and truth.

### III

#### Denis Diderot (1713-1784)

As a writer, philosopher, encyclopedist, art critic, dramatist, scientist, and philosopher, Denis Diderot accomplished a great deal in the many roles he fulfilled throughout his lifetime, and not least of these was his impact on the thought and culture of The Enlightenment. We know Diderot knew of Shaftesbury's work as he translated and annotated his essay '*An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*' (1745). Similarly to Shaftesbury, Diderot was greatly inspired by the Ancients and the impact of reading Pliny on Art can be seen throughout his writing, upholding the notion of painting as perfect imitation or illusion.

Diderot was commissioned by his friend Friedrich Melchior Grimm, a German philologist, to write on the Salons of 18th century France in his bi-monthly 'Correspondance Littéraire' a confidential hand-written letter that covered the developments of Parisian society that managed to circumvent the French censors. Initially uncensored these writings were freely shared amongst the masses, but once the censors began to realize their influence and potential for inflammatory discourse they began to restrict these freedoms. As a result,

Grimm's correspondence was only available to a select audience of subscribers, the majority of whom were from royalty or wealthy backgrounds outside of France.

As a result of his Salon writing Diderot is seen as one of the first major art critics. He gave a level of profundity previously lacking amongst the customary satires and polemics, helping to establish a legitimate and critical vocabulary new to art criticism. Within these critiques, Diderot made explicit theories on painting and outlined the first absorptive strategy in French painting, the principal concern of the new relationship between painting and drama. The central thesis that Michael Fried put forward was regarding how internal absorption of the subjects within a painting encourages external absorption of the beholder. This thesis was to be combined with Diderot's paradoxical notion that painting should be constructed so as to ignore what Fried calls the 'primordial convention' (1980: 93) that all paintings are made to be beheld. Otherwise this would risk the danger of a mannered or theatrical approach where a painting addresses or faces the beholder and as a result impedes absorption by reminding the beholder of their position, that of standing in front of a painting. In these paintings, the subjects are depicted as undergoing the experience of absorption, and this experience is represented aesthetically. In turn, it is hoped that this encourages absorption in the beholder, resulting in the aestheticization of absorption otherwise described as aesthetic absorption.

Fried writes Diderot 'called for the development of a new stage dramaturgy that would find in painting ... the inspiration for a more convincing representation of action than any provided by the theater of his time' (1980: 77), and to 'seek what he called *tableaux* ... which if properly managed he believed were capable of moving an audience to the depths of its collective being' (ibid.: 78).

#### IV

##### **Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1699 - 1779)**

Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin was of the select few artists that Diderot held in high regard, and whose work is pivotal in relation to development of aesthetic absorption. He was a driven and ambitious painter as demonstrated through his desire to be accepted as history painter, but struggled to produce work of this type. Chardin's unsuccessful attempts at depicting action and movement required of history painting forced him to re-evaluate his position, consequently he embraced his strengths, rejected narrative, and transformed his practice. His originality lie in his painting only the inanimate, scenes without action including still-life and genre paintings that were uninterrupted by movement, and only that which he could arrange in front of his easel; a style unique to artists of this century (Fried 1980: 32).

Of this style Michael Fried writes that Chardin 'made painting after painting in which engrossment, reflection, reverie, obliviousness, and related states are represented with a persuasiveness equal to that achieved by the greatest masters of the past, and by so doing perpetuated as much of what I shall call the absorptive tradition as it was in one man's power to keep alive' (1980: 44). See *Soap Bubbles* (c.1733-35) (Figure 1). This leads Fried to speculate that Chardin found in his process 'a natural correlative for his own engrossment in the act of painting and a proleptic mirroring of what he trusted would be the absorption of the beholder before the finished work' (1980: 51).

#### V

##### **Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725 - 1805)**

One other pivotal artist that Diderot praised was Jean-Baptiste Greuze. As Fried writes Greuze was 'unquestionably the chief continuator in his generation of the absorptive essence of Chardin's art ... the sentimentalism, emotionalism, moralism, exploitation of sexuality, and invention of narrative-dramatic structures characteristic of Greuze's treatment of absorption contrast sharply with the concentration and "purity" of Chardin's rendering of absorptive motifs' (1980: 61).

One example of this absorptive tradition can be seen in Greuze's painting *La Piété Filiale* (c.1763) (Figure 2). The subjects of the painting, in this case a family gathered around their

dying father, are totally engaged and focused on him, all the figures look inward, not one of them looks directly out at the beholder, as even demonstrated by the dogs who are inwardly focused on their own pursuits. The desired outcome of such a depiction of absorption, internal to the painting, was the external absorption of the beholder, who was thoroughly transfixed, held in place and totally unconscious of this fact, described by Fried as 'self abandonment nearly to the point of extinction of consciousness' (1975: 172). As testament to these absorptive qualities, when exhibited at the 1763 Salon it was reported to have 'literally moved beholders to tears' (1980: 55).

Of the paintings' subjects Diderot wrote 'it happened that, on that particular day, it was his son-in-law who brought the old man some food, and the latter, moved, showed his gratitude in such an animated and earnest way that it interrupted the occupations and attracted the attention of the whole family' (Fried 1975: 235). Fried argues that here Diderot's statement is the 'most forthright assertion of the primacy of considerations of absorption', describing how Greuze managed to almost 'orchestrate an entire sequence of ostensibly chance events in order to arrive in the end at the sort of emotionally charged, highly moralized, and dramatically unified situation that alone was capable of embodying with sufficient perspicuousness the absorptive states of suspension of activity and fixing of attention that painter and critic alike regarded as paramount' (1980: 56). How Greuze's achieved this approach through painting process Diderot wrote 'When he works, he is completely absorbed by his picture; it affects him profoundly, he carries around with him the personality of the figure he is portraying in his studio, sad or gay, foolish or serious, flamboyant or reserved, according to whatever has occupied his brush and his imagination that morning' (Thompson 1989: 5).

## VI

### **Gustave Courbet (1819 - 1877)**

Gustave Courbet's painting process is the second absorptive strategy in French painting as discussed by Fried. Courbet's approach to beholding was not what could be considered one of classically Diderotian absorptive closure, but as suggested by Fried as an attempt at a quasi-corporeal merger in the act of painting (1996: 262). Fried interprets Courbet's paintings as 'representing, indirectly or metaphorically, the painter-beholder's physical and psychological engagement in the activity of painting and, ultimately, his desire to transport himself as if bodily into the work taking shape before him' (ibid.: 152). So rather than 'looking in' the painter-beholder was actually 'incorporated or disseminated' within the painting (ibid.: 262) through various methods such as using figures viewed from the back echoing the stance of the painter, or where female surrogates become the painter-beholder through a metaphor of sexual possession (ibid.: 221). Consequently, Courbet's inventive configurations were seen only as 'morceau' because his works didn't display conventional compositional unity as was expected of 'tableau' (ibid.: 268).

## VII

### **Édouard Manet (1832 - 1883)**

Manet's painting process is the third stage of an absorptive strategy within French painting that Fried examines between the relationships of a painting to its beholders.

By bringing together allusions to past art from major national painting schools combined with major pictorial genres, Manet worked towards manifesting the 'universality of his painting' (Fried 1996: 403). Employing this historic paradigm allowed him to not only identify with great art of the past, but to challenge it. Fried states that he saw Manet's works as the 'climactic stage of long historical development ... of the relation of a painting to its beholders' (ibid.: 4)

The anti-theatrical tradition of the middle of the 18th century had reached a crisis point with Courbet's attempts at corporeal merging. Manet's more extreme and radical approach avoided or subverted absorptive motifs by dramatizing the convention that all paintings are made to be beheld (ibid.: 405). In contrast to the Diderotian tradition on beholding, Manet's modernism displays doubleness, paradoxically both theatrical and antitheatrical at once. He

did this by employing methods highlighted by Fried such as: unintelligibility of the subject matter, internal disparity of the mise-en-scene, refusing absorptive closure by lack of 'finishing', thematizing the painter/model relationship through direct facingness, strikingness through appropriation, and radically simplifying his art. As a result of all of Manet's innovation, Fried identifies his work with the birth of pictorial modernism.

## VIII Michael Fried (1941 - )

Michael Fried has dedicated his life to writing on art, initially as an art critic, and later as an art historian. He first came into contact with the critically engaged discussion surrounding modernist painting through the writings of the art critic Clement Greenberg. This early connection grew into a mentor-like relationship, and although eventually Fried's thinking moved in a different direction to Greenberg's, he ascribes their connection as one that has inspired and defined his lifetime of writing.

Throughout, Fried's writing has followed a modernist trajectory, including his investigation on the anti-theatrical tradition that emerged in French painting during the eighteenth century, in what he considers as pre-modernist ideals brought to the fore through the Diderotian concern with beholding. His continued enquiry into absorptive strategies is represented here in this document with his work on specific artists including Chardin, Greuze, Courbet, and Manet. As well writing on painting and sculpture, in more recent times he has written more widely on photography and film. But the moment when Fried's engagement with absorptive strategies commenced was when 'Art and Objecthood' was first published in 1967.

## IV Art & Objecthood (1967)

Michael Fried initially engaged with absorption and theatricality in the context of modernism in his seminal paper 'Art and Objecthood' (1998 [1967]). Fried wrote about his own experience of art, leading him to criticize minimalist art, or what he called literalist art, for its innate theatricality. Fried believed that 'theatre is *now* the negation of art' (1998 [1967]: 153) a quality he was convinced prevented a genuine aesthetic experience. He differentiated art objects from other objects through their internal coherence, where objects can either be art or objecthood, and as minimalist art recognized its position as object, consequently for him it became the antithesis of art. He stated that the survival of art lies in 'its ability to defeat theatre' for 'Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre' (ibid.: 163). For Fried minimalist art has *presence*, which he connected with theatricality, as the work only exists through the viewer's experience, corrupting our sensibilities, whereas modernist work has *presentness*, because it is present instantaneously allowing a genuine aesthetic experience. Fried concluded this paper with 'presentness is grace' (ibid.: 168), a contentious statement that was to fuel much heated debate, and as a result this paper was to prove critical in the discussion on modernist and minimalist art.

Fried's theory in 'Art and Objecthood' (1998 [1967]) is clearly influenced by Greenberg's 'non-art' in 'After Abstract Expressionism' (1995 [1962]): 'Minimal works are readable art, as almost anything is today—including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper ... Yet it would seem that a kind of art nearer the condition of non-art could not be envisaged or ideated at this moment' (1995 [1967]: 152). This is reflected in Judd's statement, 'A work needs only to be interesting' (2005 [1965]: 181), challenging the idea of art as a transcendent experience. If all that was required was work to be 'interesting', minimalism was fundamentally redefining what was needed for something to be called art. For Judd, Fried's position was conservative, and wasn't a true reading of minimalism; he believed his vision of minimalism was far broader than Fried recognized. Fried thought his standpoint on modernist art was a way of deepening Greenberg's position, opening it to dialogue. Ironically, so did Judd, who saw minimalism about questioning and reacting to modernist painting in order to progress its purpose.

Fried eventually withdrew from his writing as an art critic to focus his attention on writing as an art historian. After over 30 years had passed since 'Art and Objecthood' Fried reflected on his stance 'I was a Diderotian critic without knowing it' (1998: 2).

## X

### **Absorption and Theatricality in the Age of Diderot (1980)**

In 1975, Fried went on to highlight absorption from an art historical position in his paper 'Absorption: A Master Theme in Eighteenth-Century French Painting and Criticism' drawing on the writings of one of the first major art critics, Denis Diderot. He pursued this in greater depth in his book *Absorption and Theatricality in the Age of Diderot* (1980). This was to become Fried's first of many further studies into absorptive strategies. Using the axis of absorption and beholding demonstrated in the work of Chardin and Greuze (as discussed in this document), the central thesis Fried put forward, a concern particular to painting of this period, was regarding how internal absorption of the subjects within a painting encourages external absorption of the beholder. This was combined with Diderot's paradoxical notion that painting should be constructed so as to ignore what Fried calls the 'primordial convention' (1980: 93) that all paintings are made to be beheld. Otherwise this risked the danger of a mannered or theatrical approach, where a painting addresses or faces the beholder and as a result impedes absorption by reminding the beholder of their position, that of standing in front of a painting.

## XI

### **Richard Wollheim (1923 - 2003)**

In *Art and Its Objects* (1968) and later in *Painting as an Art* (1987) Richard Wollheim theorized that some paintings contain an 'internal spectator', a position suggesting a viewpoint that is a central imagining of the protagonist. This spectator within the picture allows the spectator of the picture a 'distinctive access to the content' (1987: 129). By imagining the painting from inside (so to speak) as the internal spectator, the external spectator responds to the painting from the internal spectator's viewpoint. This imagined position provides the external spectator with all the insight and experience without the physical participation, thus giving the external spectator an 'enriched' understanding of the picture before him.

To illustrate this Wollheim uses the work of Caspar David Friedrich. In *The Large Enclosure, near Dresden* (1832) (Figure 3) Friedrich uses a high viewpoint showing the curvature of the earth, which seemingly makes the spectator hover above the immediate foreground that runs underneath. Wollheim believed that Friedrich structured his paintings to convey the viewpoint of the artist and their 'spiritual vision'. This effectively introduced them as the internal spectator, projecting 'what he sees inwardly on to what he sees outwardly ... his perception of nature becomes his subject matter' (ibid.: 138).

Wollheim analyses how he achieves this by reconstructing the repertoire of the internal spectator in the painting using represented elements to produce emotions and feelings of that spectator. This knowledge of the outside then equips us and allows us to reconstruct the internal spectator's 'visual experience' (1987: 139), resulting in the depth of response from spectator *in* to spectator *of* the picture. Wollheim argues that Friedrich paints in such a way to 'convert the spectator' (ibid.: 140) suggesting Friedrich is positioning the spectator in a godly capacity, looking down from the skies above, to arouse the divine experience.

## XII

### **As Painting Exhibition and Catalogue 2001**

Debates on the tableau, absorption and theatricality in contemporary practice were the central theme of the exhibition *As Painting: Division and Displacement* (2001), held at the Wexner Centre for the Arts, Ohio, USA. This exhibition featured 110 works by 26 artists from the United States, France, and Germany dating from the 1960's to 2001. Its intention was to be an exhibition of, as Stephen Melville simply puts 'what counts as painting' (2001: 1). The exhibition addressed debates around the issues of medium, language, and materiality in painting, exploring how these techniques modified or blurred the boundaries, allowing for a transformation or a redefinition of painting. This relationship between paint and other media and what is interpreted as painting was demonstrated through the variety of the exhibits,

which included: photography, sculpture, and installation, alongside more traditional paintings on canvas. The exhibition was organised and curated by Professor Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville of Ohio State University, and amongst the established and emerging artists that were included were Polly Apfelbaum, Christian Bonnefoi, Agnes Martin, Gerhard Richter, and Donald Judd.

The exhibition covered developments in more recent art history and theory, giving new perspectives on the evolution of painting since minimalism, with particular attention on developments in French painting since the 1960's as seen in the work of André Cadere, Daniel Dezeuze, Simon Hantaï, Michel Parmentier, and François Rouan. The catalogue, alongside texts by Melville, Armstrong and Lisbon, introduced French texts that hadn't been translated into English before, and included essays by some of the exhibiting artists, allowing for this further interplay between text and painting practice, its limits and opportunities. Melville writes how the exhibition 'explores the terms of visual practice in a field for which language is an ineradicable given; in doing so, it aims at a visibility not so much supplanted by language as possessed of an articulation or thinking internal to it. This would be what it means to speak in terms of a "theoretical practice" or a "theoretical object." "Theory" here would be less something a critic or historian brings to the work (perhaps to decode it, perhaps to justify it) than something to be traced in it, and writing would belong to such work as a part of its unfolding, a continuation of its appearing.' (Armstrong et al. 2001: 19).

### XIII

#### **Tableau: Painting Photo Object symposia 2011**

The focus of the 'Tableau: Painting Photo Object' symposia held at the Tate Modern in September 2011 was to ask questions such as 'Why do so many contemporary artists, working across all media (paintings, photographs, objects, installations, live art), build on pictorial traditions of image construction to set the scene for new narratives?' listing the related traditions of tableau, dispositif and apparatus and their increasing use in critical visual art practices as its subjects. The keynote presenters were **Philip Armstrong, Fulvia Carnevale, Jean-François Chevrier, Michael Fried, Michael Newman** and research papers by **Moyra Derby, Adi Efal, Francis Gaube, Atsuhide Ito, Cédric Loire and Andrea Medjesi Jones**.

This example of the tableau being discussed in 2011 at such a considerable and full to capacity event is testimony to the relevance of the concerns of absorptive and the anti-theatrical strategies in relation to contemporary practice in the twenty-first century. This is echoed by Fried, who in his conference presentation 'About the Tableau' concludes 'the artistic regime or episteme that began in the mid 1750's in France and received its initial theorization in the scintillating, profound writings of the great Diderot is still in force ... the continued relevance of the concept tableau is one indication that this is so' (2011).

### XIV

#### **Art and Language**

The practice of Art & Language, a changing group of collaborating conceptual artists, attempts to question or challenge theoretical or historically held conventions. Throughout their on-going collaborative address Art & Language explore the nature of painting as a social activity (Harrison 2001: 173), and question the position, process and relation of painting and beholder.

In their early days during the late 1960's addressed the beholder's discourse by producing 'an art which was not to be beheld, which was not visible – or even conceivable – in any mode' (Harrison 1991: 50) in dialogue with the way that Fried perceived minimalist objecthood to negate transcendent experience. Art & Language addressed the beholder as audience or receiver, looking not for emotive response, but the response of activity, engaging through being 'criticized, elaborated, extended or otherwise worked on' (Harrison 1991: 51). Later, where actual works were produced, Art & Language saw them not as 'sops to the

beholder's imaginative facilities' but as 'defeasible materials' (1991: 54) and as a part of an on-going discursive process. Eventually Art & Language, through dialogue decided it seemed possible to 'address the culture of painting by painting' (ibid.: 156) making painting feasible to use as an indexical element, whilst continuing to explore ways of confronting, displacing, frustrating or subverting the beholder's attention.

## XV

### Gerhard Richter (1932 - )

Gerhard Richter painted one of his most famous portraits *Betty* (1988) (Figure 4), from a photograph of his daughter. This particular work plays with absorptive strategies on many levels. In the painting Betty is turning away from the viewer, she seems highly conscious of being beheld, only showing her back, a posture of refusal perhaps aimed at her father, but at the same time facing towards one of his Grey paintings seen in the background. This painting is glazed so she could be looking at her own reflection. Betty, by turning away, frustrates our ability to behold her face to fully understand her, whilst she in turn beholds the Grey painting. By employing the Rückenfigur trope as used by Friedrich, Richter is all at once knowingly denying us whilst drawing us in. As Mick Finch suggests 'The shifts in such work of states of consciousness constitute the need for the viewer to be questioning and vigilant as to the workings of the painting' (Finch 1998).

## Paintings



Figure 1. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles* (c.1733–34)  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 63.2cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)



Figure 2. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La Piété Filiale* (c.1763)  
Oil on canvas, 115 x 146cm (The Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg)

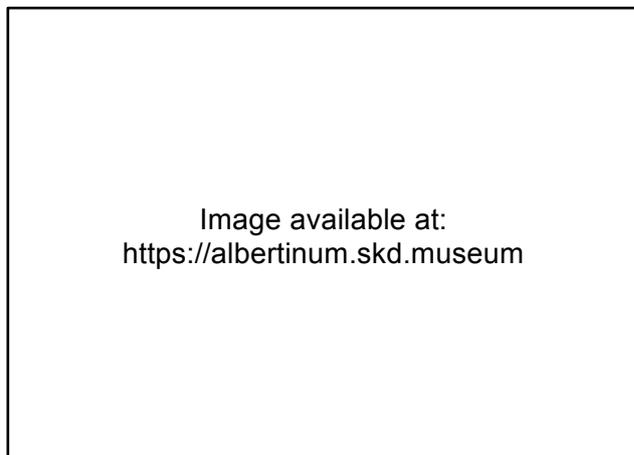


Figure 3. Caspar David Friedrich, *The Large Enclosure, near Dresden* (1832)  
Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 184cm (Old Masters Picture Gallery, Dresden)



Figure 4. Gerhard Richter *Betty* (1988)  
Oil on canvas, 102 x 72cm (Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis.)

## Bibliography

- Armstrong, P., Lisbon, L., and Melville, S. (2001) *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press.
- Chardin, J-B-S. (c.1733–34) *Soap Bubbles* [Oil on canvas]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- Finch, M. (1998) 'Theatre/Spectacle - Absorption/Lived Time', in: *Painting and Time* [Conference]. Hull School of Art and Design, Hull. 17–18 April. Available at: <<http://www.mickfinch.com/texts/theatre.html>> [accessed 05/08/2013], (non-paginated).
- Fried, M. (1975) 'Absorption: A Master Theme in Eighteenth-Century French Painting and Criticism', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp.139–177.
- Fried, M. (1980) *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Berkeley and London: University of California.
- Fried, M. (1996) *Manet's Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fried, M. (1998 [1967]) 'Art and Objecthood', in: *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 148–172.
- Fried, M. (1998) *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fried, M. (2011) 'About the Tableau', in: *Tableau: Painting Photo Object* symposia. Tate Modern, London, 28–29 October.
- Friedrich, C. D. (1832) *The Large Enclosure, near Dresden* [Oil on canvas]. Old Masters Picture Gallery, Dresden.
- Greenberg, C. (1995 [1962]) 'After Abstract Expressionism', in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, (ed.) by John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 121–133.
- Greuze, J-B. (c.1763) *La Piété Filiale* [Oil on canvas]. The Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.
- Harrison, C. (1991) *Essays on Art and Language*, Cambridge and London: MIT Press.
- Harrison, C. (2001) *Conceptual Art and Painting*, Cambridge and London: MIT Press.
- Judd, D. (2005 [1965]) *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975*, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design.
- Mulhall, S. (2001) 'Crimes and Deeds of Glory: Michael Fried's Modernism', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 41, issue 1, January 2001.
- Richter, G. (1988) *Betty* [Oil on canvas]. Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis.
- Rosenberg, P. (2000) *Chardin*, London: Royal Academy of Arts.
- Tableau: Painting Photo Object* (2011) [Symposia]. Tate Modern, London, 28–29 October.
- Shaftesbury, (Ashley-Cooper, A.) (1790 [1710]) 'Soliloquy: or, Advice to an Author', in: *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times with a Collection of Letters: Volume 1*, Basil: J.J. Tourneisen.
- Available at: <[https://books.google.co.uk/books?redir\\_esc=y&id=VA8AAAACAAJ&q=pliny#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?redir_esc=y&id=VA8AAAACAAJ&q=pliny#v=onepage&q&f=false)> [Accessed 05/10/14], (paginated).
- Shaftesbury, (Ashley-Cooper, A.) (2014 [1713]) 'Of Hercules', in: *Second Characters or the Language of Forms*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thompson, J. (1989) 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Winter 1989/90, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Whitley, J. (2001) *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wollheim, R. (1968) *Art and Its Objects*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wollheim, R. (1987) *Painting as an Art*, London: Thames and Hudson.

## **2. A Lexicon of Aesthetic Absorption**

This document is a collection of terms that relate to this research and its focus of aesthetic absorption in painting practice. It is supplied as a resource to the collaborators of this research and will be expanded upon through this dialogue and reflection on painting practice. The terms here are not listed alphabetically, but instead in groupings meant to add/aid in their meaning.

### **Aesthetics**

Aesthetics is the critical reflection of art, or the study of sensory or sensori-emotional values, sometimes called judgments of sentiment and taste.

### **Aesthetic experience**

The nature of aesthetic experience has been debated over since its inception. Today there are two prevalent concepts: externalist and empiricist. Externalism finds the attributes that determine aesthetic character in the object whereas the empiricists find the attributes that determine aesthetic value in the experience. Collectively, we are describing aesthetic experience as the manifestation of the intimate connection between the aesthetic character of an artwork and the value of the experience that the artwork provides (Shelley 2013).

### **Absorption**

Absorption is used to describe the process of being mentally engaged, preoccupied or captivated in a particular pursuit such as reading, and not the physical process of soaking up, or absorbing something like a liquid. Can be shortened or described as 'being absorbed'.

### **Aesthetic Absorption**

Aesthetic Absorption is an aesthetic experience, the process of being mentally engaged, preoccupied or captivated through an experience of aesthetics.

### **Aestheticization of absorption**

The aestheticization of absorption is the process of depicting in an aesthetically considered way, scenes portraying subjects that are absorbed in their pursuits.

### **Absorptive**

Something is considered absorptive if it encourages the process of absorption in the beholder.

### **Absorptive strategy**

An absorptive strategy is a method or plan that is designed to encourage absorption of the beholder.

### **Absorptive tradition**

Absorptive tradition is the pursuit of absorptive strategies that can be traced through art history.

### **Absorptive motifs**

Absorptive motifs are visual tropes or devices used to encourage absorption in the beholder.

### **Theatrical**

Something that is theatrical, as originally defined by Diderot, is an artwork that addresses its beholder in a mannered and confrontational way such as the subject of a painting looking directly at the beholder. For Diderot the theatrical or theatricality was considered the antithesis of absorption as it prevented a proper absorptive

experience because it reminded the beholder of their position, that of standing in front of a painting.

### **Anti-theatrical**

Something that is anti-theatrical is a strategy aimed at defeating a theatrical or mannered approach in order to encourage absorption of the beholder.

### **The fourth wall**

The fourth wall is a notion discussed by Diderot on theatre in relation to ways of defeating theatricality 'Whether you compose or act, think no more of the beholder than if he did not exist. Imagine, at the edge of the stage a high wall that separates you from the orchestra. Act as if the curtain never rose' (1980: 95).

### **Beholder**

The beholder is a term used to describe the viewer of an artwork. Where others have used the terms spectator or audience Fried has coined beholder as it works towards describing the action of being held in place by absorptive artworks.

### **First beholder**

The first beholder is a notion of the first person to behold the artwork, the position uniquely afforded to that of the painter.

### **Painter-beholder**

The painter-beholder is the position taken up by the painter during the process of painting the painting.

### **Painting-beholder**

The painting-beholder is the beholder of a painting.

### **Painter to painting relationship**

The painter to painting relationship is a term that identifies the connection of painter to the artwork they are painting.

### **Painting practice**

Whilst the term painting describes both the act and the result of the action, painting practice refers to repetitive practical work of painting over a sustained period of time.

### **Proleptic mirroring**

Fried speculates that the artist Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin possibly found in his process 'a natural correlative for his own engrossment in the act of painting and a proleptic mirroring of what he trusted would be the absorption of the beholder before the finished work' (1980: 51) which seems to indicate that Fried is proposing that Chardin himself had a corresponding reaction to aestheticized absorption during his painting of it.

### **Quasi-corporeal merger**

In 'Courbet's Realism' (1990), Fried suggests Courbet attempts at his own quasi-corporeal merger with his paintings, meaning that Fried interprets Courbet's paintings as 'representing, indirectly or metaphorically, the painter-beholder's physical and psychical engagement in the activity of painting and, ultimately, his desire to transport himself as if bodily into the work taking shape before him' (1990: 152).

**Tableau**

Tableau has become a term used to describe a series of discourses that address questions of artistic practice, the status of the art object and questions of spectatorship as defined and discussed through the 'Tableau: Painting Photo Object' symposium held at Tate Modern in 2011.

**Dispositif**

The term dispositif does not translate directly into English, and in the past it has been replaced with the term apparatus, but is now understood as a distinct concept. Dispositif, as used by Foucault, signifies a positioning of 'elements and forces, practices and discourses, power and knowledge, that is both strategic and technical' (Bussolini 2010). It is increasingly used in dialogue regarding tableau and the painting and photography relationship.

**Apparatus**

Previously the term apparatus has been used in conjunction or in place of dispositif, apparatus differs from dispositif in that it could be described as a sub category of dispositif, as in it is 'specifically state-centered and instrumental' (Bussolini 2010). It too appears in discussions in relation to tableau.

**Morceau**

Morceau is the term used to describe a painting that is considered to not have achieved the complete state of unity that is tableau.

**Pictorial unity**

Pictorial unity is used a term used in conjunction with tableau. The pursuit for pictorial unity is the pursuit for tableau (1996: 269), and not meaning just technical finish (Manet's works were never seen to have reached tableau, one reason because he never painted the finger nails on the hands of his subjects) (ibid.).

**Primordial convention**

For Fried the 'primordial convention' (1980: 93) that all paintings are made to be beheld.

**Rückenfigur**

The term rückenfigur or 'back figure' is often associated with German romantic painters such as Caspar David Friedrich. It is use to describe figures depicted from behind, looking into the landscape, inviting the viewer to take up the same position.

**Presence**

Fried uses the term 'presence' to describe the temporal experience of minimalist art and its theatrical qualities in reminding the beholder their place of standing in front of it.

**Presentness**

Fried uses the term 'presentness' to describe the opposite experience of minimalist art, where modernist painting and sculpture defeat theatre because it is all at once and instantaneously revealed to us. In his seminal paper 'Art and Objecthood' (1998 [1967]) Fried concludes with 'presentness is grace'.

**Objecthood**

Objecthood is the term Fried brought to the fore in his paper 'Art and Objecthood' (1998 [1967]), a term he identifies with theatricality, which he saw as 'at war' with art.

He attributes Minimalist art with seeking to discover and declare its objecthood, describing it as 'the condition of non-art'. Whereas Modernist painting, in seeking to defeat, suspend or deny objecthood also aims to defeat theatricality.

### **Effrontée**

Fried points out that effrontée means shameless in French, suggesting a play on the notion of facing in relation to Manet's bold addressing of the beholder (1996: 284).

### **Ébauches or Esquisses**

The terms ébauches or esquisses, often interchanged are used to describe a painting or drawing that is sketch-like and not quite one or the other. The work of Manet faced this criticism (Fried 1996: 303).

### **Mise-en-scene**

Mise-en-scene is a French term and originates from theatre, meaning 'put in the scene' and is often used to describe the theme or arrangement of everything within a painting.

### **Facingness**

Fried uses the term 'facingness' to describe Manet's brazen addressing of the beholder, a breaking of the Diderotian tradition.

### **Strikingness**

Similar to facingness, Fried uses strikingness to describe the confrontational nature of the beholder by Manet's portrait painting, later interchanging it with instantaneousness.

### **Instantaneousness**

Fried uses instantaneousness in relation to Manet's paintings to describe instant perception of a painting, similar to Greenberg's at-onceness where the whole picture taken in at one glance, and akin to strikingness.

### **Penetratingness**

Fried uses penetratingness in relation to painting to describe a perceived slower process than instantaneousness, equating it with tableau (1996: 302).

## **References**

Bussolini, J. (2010) What is a Dispositive? *Foucault Studies*, No. 10, November 2010, pp.85–107.

Fried, M. (1998 [1967]) 'Art and Objecthood', in: *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 148–172.

Fried, M. (1980) *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Berkeley and London: University of California.

Fried, M. (1990) *Courbet's Realism*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Fried, M. (1996) *Manet's Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

*Tableau: Painting Photo Object* (2011) [Symposia]. Tate Modern, London, 28–29 October.

Shelley, J. (2013) 'The concept of Aesthetic' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 Edition), (ed.) by Edward N. Zalta. Available at:

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/aesthetic-concept>>

[Accessed 07/11/14], (non-paginated).

### **3. Questionnaire**

#### **Absorption As Artist In The Making Of A Painting**

1. Could you describe your painting process, including things such as mapping, planning, thinking, making etc.?
2. Would you describe how you feel during what could be called the genesis of a painting, perhaps recalling a painting you considered successful?
3. Could you talk about how much of your process is planned, how you may use a system, or how much is arbitrary?
4. Does this process respond to how you feel the painting is developing?
5. How has this process developed, especially in relation to your past experience of painting what you considered successful paintings?
6. How do you know how well a painting is developing? Is it the case that you are aware to everything you are thinking, or does this 'understanding' come more from a subconscious level?
7. How does this differ from when you feel a painting is turning out successfully, to a painting that is floundering?
8. Have there been instances where you have been pre-occupied by an on-going painting away from the studio/workspace? If so, please describe.
9. In the course of making a painting, have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment?
10. At any point in your painting practice do you act as the 'beholder' of your own artwork and is this beholder 'absorbed' in the sense that Fried describes?
11. Have you encountered an embodied experience as a result of your painting process, or any other type of manifestation, and if so could you describe it?

#### **Absorption As Beholder/Spectator In The Painting That Is Made**

12. If you were to reflect on the act of painting with reference to a specific painting, could you describe what the painting process gave you or perhaps still gives you, the painter?
13. After the course of making a painting, have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment from the finished painting? If so, please describe.
14. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of your finished painting away from it? If so, please describe.

15. Have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment from another artists painting? Or any other work of art? If so, please describe.
16. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of another artists painting away from it? If so, please describe.

### **Constructing The Painting-Beholder/Spectator**

17. If you have experienced 'absorption' or self-abandonment in painting practice as discussed earlier (q.8) and if you have experienced yourself as an 'absorbed' spectator of your own work, does this affect how you consider the reactions of another spectator of your artwork?
18. Conversely would you fight any feeling of self-abandonment, and if so why?
19. Have you or do you ever construct or position the spectator/beholder in your painting practice?
20. If so, do you or have you found yourself working in a particular way in order to consider the beholder, to construct this relationship or anticipate it?
21. Considering this address to the beholder do you consider 'pictorial unity' or other particular modes of address to the beholder as part of your painting process, if so please describe?

### **Constructing The Painter-Beholder/Spectator**

22. Would you consider or describe yourself as a privileged beholder at any time: before, during, or after your painting process?
23. Would you describe the experience of painting each painting as a unique occurrence?
24. Do you or have you found yourself trying to replicate specific experiences encountered from previous painting sessions in new paintings, and if this is the case please describe?
25. Claims on primacy could suggest that part of the desire or need to produce artworks for the painter is to be the first beholder, perhaps not to create the artist, but to create the beholder. Do you find an affinity with this statement, have you worked in a particular way to encourage becoming the 'absorbed' beholder, or does it develop differently for you?

We have covered a lot of ground here in relation to painting practice, but do you have anything more you wish to add?

#### **4. Individual Interviews**

##### **Andrew Bick Interview**

**2nd February 2015**

Alison: To set the context you might say, the first question I am asking everybody could you describe your painting process including such things as mapping, planning, thinking, making, etc.

Andrew: Okay, so I would say that my painting process is about creating a platform for various things to happen. I would also say that, I have always been self-analytical. In terms of aiming to produce works that interrogates their own making as they develop. Since 2008, I have been using a grid consistently, repeated from one work to the next but in using it I have found that it not only queries the tropes of grids within Modernist abstraction, but also generates variation, spontaneity, hesitation, and the forms of ambivalence associated with art since Post Modernism, the grid no longer being the taboo it was in the immediate Post Modern era. The idea that any methodology that one sets up is inherently made more interesting if it has the capacity to be interrupted is central to this practice. So the processes I use mirror and parallel aspects of Modernist abstraction while enjoying the freedom that comes from the outcomes and kind of direction the work takes being completely different, even diverse.

Alison: Thank you. So that brings me to the next question. Would you describe how you feel during what could be called the Genesis of the painting? Perhaps recalling a painting you considered successful. Genesis as in it taking form, or realization that it is taking place? 8.03

Andrew: It is very complex to try and pin down how works cohere to exactly the same feeling every time. And one of the things I should also say (as a pre-answer to that question) is that one of the principles of this way of making paintings for me is that it up for constant renegotiation. Therefore as long as a work of mine is not in a collection (and therefore contractually withdrawn from my ability to rework it), a painting coming back to the studio means that it can then can be reworked... So there's a very insistent idea of uncertainty, if you like, a commitment to uncertainty, as opposed to a commitment to claiming decisiveness, or claiming that I have a formula, (as an artist) which always works.

Alison: So is there like a key feeling that you might engage with in the painting where

you except it or...?

Andrew: There's an instinct, there are physical conditions which are important; light, and the slow changing of light over time is a necessary part of the process of finding out whether a painting is complete or not.

Alison: So is that the light within the painting, or how light interacts with it?

Andrew: That's the initially brought about through light conditions that I have in the studio. So I happen to have particularly amazing natural light and it's actually very important to my working processes. Obviously I accept that once paintings are out in the world and exhibited they will often be shown in entirely artificial light, but it helps me to understand if a painting might be complete and notice how contingencies of light conditions work within it if I have more time to look at it in differing light conditions. One of the things that forms an important stimulus to me is the fading of natural light at the end of the afternoon or evening, depending on the time of year. But the short answer to your question that it is a decision I try to never make, the decision to when work is complete.

Alison: So it's a constant open? 10.49

Andrew: It is always up for renegotiation. So my own absorption in a piece of work involves a lot of contingency. 10.55

Alison: That brings me to next question. How much of your process is planned. How much you might use a system, how much is arbitrary thinking back to your grades and your tropes? 11.18

Andrew: A lot of it is carefully planned in the following ways; firstly, as I mentioned before, with the use of the grid and the use of repetition, secondly with the use of very specific and wide range of materials.

Alison: Could you list some of those?

Andrew: Absolutely, for the sake of clarity: hot wax, encaustic, oil paint, acrylic paint, watercolour, pencil, cold wax, oil paint medium, they form the basic, deliberately wide range of materials deployed. But then I add pencil, marker pen, and use of Perspex in some works, and there is also a lot of work on paper. So the pre-knowledge, based on years of practice, of how these materials interact with each other would also constitute a form of pre-planning; but then what I'm doing with those components is setting up the conditions in which a combination of what might be

logical material syntax and the kind of purely aleatory idea of doing something because I don't know what else to do, become part of what makes this work arrive at a form of balance. There has to be a component of it that I would describe as disruptive, something that stops me falling into habitual ways of knowing how a painting might work its way to possible resolution. 13.20

Alison: So you're always seeking that unknown? You have almost answered my next question which is: how has this process developed especially in relation to your past experience of painting what you would have considered possibly a successful painting? So if a particular piece in your mind is successful have you tried to go about the same not necessarily exactly the same process, but have you tried to recreate that experience? 14.00

Andrew: I make a conscious effort, normally, to go in the opposite direction when that happens. Inevitably works fall into series, so there is an identifiable number of current works, for example, which might have a large area of their ground that is bare linen. There are also an identifiable body of works where the whole surface is built up of successive layers of hot wax ironed to a smooth surface, but within that, variation or variety is the consistent imperative, that something should always aim not to be like something else. 15.00

Alison: How do you know how well a painting is developing? Is it the case that you are aware to everything you are thinking or does this understanding come more from a subconscious level? 15.26

Andrew: I think I rely on not knowing, I think I rely on not knowing in the sense that a philosophical belief in un-knowing things that goes back a long way in my own thinking. 16.01

Alison: So as soon as you become too understanding of where you're going to you try to divert?

Andrew: I'm suspicious. So for that reason I often work very slowly, so work can get suspended on a painting, sometimes for months, or years even, and in a way it will be external forces that trigger more decisive episodes, such as being under pressure to complete work for an exhibition, having to build a larger body of work, or simply reaching a point of impatience with a certain work so I do something completely out of character, (or so it would seem to be at the time), which I then come back to and review, often realizing it is probably what I actually needed to have been doing for

quite a while, A sort of sideways approach to it. 18.12

Alison: Like fooling yourself?

Andrew: Well I'm very fond of a quote I can roughly paraphrase by Roger Hilton, of all people, who somewhere in his journals says something like 'sometimes my paintings are completed when my back is turned' and I think what that tells you is that the dynamic relationships of a studio practice are actually very particular and something that probably needs thinking about and documenting now, because there is a tendency to make the assumption, as real estate gets so expensive, that maybe we could do without studios. This is obviously an imperative that is also driven through in art schools, because there too space is getting audited and priced as part of course planning. So the studio what is its use value in this social and political moment, how can we really accurately measure its productivity and how does useless time become useful in a way? That has to be part of the ongoing discussion because effective use of a studio does not correlate to normal models of efficient production. 18.57

Alison: One thing you said earlier is that you were suspicious if you are going down a trusted route. What would you be suspicious of, if you could clarify?

Andrew: I'd be suspicious of the painting becoming formulaic or becoming a recipe that could be used again and again. A number of painters of my generation, who are UK based, produce work defined by process, and I always felt that process in those terms could become an alibi for a lack of attentiveness if not handled with a degree of scepticism. 20.03

Alison: So it's that point where the painter is engaging rather than just an automated kind of unfolding something that is once decided forever?

Andrew: Well it's the painter always asking herself or himself where that engagement occurs, and why, asking where the editorial process occurs in working on a painting, because that is different aspect from the process of process. The implication of process is that once the process is over there could be no postproduction, there could be no re-edit, and I am actually very interested in postproduction.

Alison: That brings me to the next question. Initially we were talking about how do you feel a painting is developing and how does this differ from when a painting is turning out successfully to when a painting is floundering, and that is this point that you engage with, you embrace this unknowing? 21.00

Andrew: Yeah, so I would say all this; that all the time I'm floundering but things are also going well both at once. It has to be the uncertainty that animates everything in the studio so it becomes quite important that there a lot of works on the go rather than just one. 21.22

Alison: Have their instances when you have been preoccupied by an on going painting away from the studio/workspace as such? 21. 31

Andrew: If I've understood the question right do you mean thinking about what's going on in a painting in the studio when I am elsewhere doing other things?

Alison: Yes.

Andrew: All the time. Not endlessly but inevitably at certain points things crop up. I think in terms of how this connects to the overall ideas that you're discussing inevitably during those times when I am able to go and look at art and not just painting, at art including architecture, space, light ideas can sometimes become recognizable in things I am seeing, contemporary or very historic, and those things can then be reabsorbed and can be readdressed in what I am doing in the studio at a later stage. 22.05

Alison: In the course of making a painting have you ever experienced a sense of absorption or self-abandonment?

Andrew: I think it is why I come to the studio. So I would say... perhaps when it doesn't occur is when the kind of professional distractions: email, telephone calls, listening to current affairs on the radio, become pressing in some way. Or when, like anyone else I'm having any bad day, it's then not possible to connect in the same way with what I'm trying to do. But in so far as my practice is a studio practice, the studio is very much designed to do everything it possibly can to create the scenario where I am critically absorbed in my work while I'm here. 23.17

Alison: At any point in your painting practice do you act as the beholder of your own artwork, and is this beholder absorbed in the sense that Fried describes? So rather than painter-beholder you become painting-beholder, so you're considering your artwork from the position of the beholder?

Andrew: I think it's an interesting distinction, and I think Michael Fried has a point in drawing our attention to the absorption of the beholder, which in broad terms I am very sympathetic to. My process of looking, in real time, from the point of view of

what I am attempting to do is as important as making time; possibly more important. Even then, a lot of the painting processes that I use can be quite quick to execute.

For example hot wax sets as soon as it cools, which is almost immediate, so you can add layers with encaustic almost instantaneously, the moment it has cooled down you can put the next layer on. However some of the other processes I use are the opposite of this, they are deliberately slow... cold wax medium with oil paint takes up to 3 months to dry... but in playing with the tension between those different physical properties, what I am not doing is coming up with a recipe to say to the beholder 'okay guys these are complicated, you have to look hard because these are elaborately made as there are all these different components, which are very tricky to put together'. Rather than that I am using these different processes to distract myself so that I am consistently put in a position where the attentiveness that I pay to the playing out of work-making is as important as the time that I necessarily have to spend in the making process itself. It then becomes a dynamic of taking responsibility for looking at something in order not to rely on becoming some sort of technical virtuoso. It also becomes a process where I'm willingly aware that there is no guarantee that anyone else will want to do the same thing. And that's very important to me in that I think I have to be disarmed from all kind of ideas of my status, or of grandeur, or of any kind of pomposity that might come from making claims that all the attention I've given my work in the studio means that other people should also give it a commensurate amount of time. I think it's quite important in terms of things I have heard other artists say. In my position I would argue that it's a fallacy to make claims on people's attention: there is no guarantee that the level of attentiveness that I put into things as maker creates a reciprocal dynamic of demand for anyone else. 27.46

Alison: Have you encountered an embodied experience as a result of your painting process, or any other type of manifestation, and if so could you describe it?

Andrew: Can you give me a bit more?

Alison: Sure. For example when I was a graphic designer I used to work a lot on the computer and I would spend 10 to 12 hours a day immersed in Photoshop. And I would come away from the studio and it was almost as if I was in Photoshop land, I would, for instance use control Z for un-doing something, so in real life, not digital life if something went wrong I would automatically try to un-do it, mentally, but not realizing, well kind of realizing, that I wasn't in that virtual space anymore, but the same ideas were applying. So you are so in tune with your practice it carries on into

your other life, especially if you've been so engrossed in a particular painting. 29.30

Andrew: I am really thinking about that question because it is almost like I don't know how to answer it. Partly this would be because I work with a set of principles that apply equally to everything else that I do, - in other words, the work in academia, writing, lecturing, PhD supervision, teaching, is all part of the same practice... So in a sense I would like to see attentiveness as something one ideally applies to everything. I can't honestly say that I'm 100% successful, or even 60% successful at doing that, inevitably some parts of life are humdrum, but there is a sense in certain moments of knowing that the model of thought (that I can use with a modicum of precision in my work here in the studio), is being used in the same way in other contexts. So without wanting to sound like I'm a total rationalist, I would say that at certain points in giving a lecture, for example, things become clear in a way that they first became manifest as a thinking process in my practice. 31.35

Alison: So it sounds more like a cerebral approach rather than a physical kind of response? 31. 49

Andrew: I wouldn't make a division between those two. I'm kind of against there being too much of a dialectic of the cerebral versus the physical, and I think that, for example, the physical side of heating wax and making a precise form with it, is not million miles away from cooking. At the same time, drawing quickly, but precisely, for example, is not a million miles away from playing a musical instrument. The idea that those things can be attended to in the same way is about an aesthetic, but it's about the idea that an aesthetic is also socially and politically important. 32.55

Alison: If you were to reflect on the act of painting with reference to a specific painting perhaps, could you describe what painting process gave you, or still gives you? So is there a particular painting that you can recall almost the whole experience of that particular work, was it a realization of something, or is every painting an event as such? 33.40

Andrew: There are certain pieces that definitely have been key works in my world of painting. I would say that these particular works have been a trigger to what has come afterwards, and I can't necessarily give a timeline which says that these 'trigger works' will occur roughly every two years or three years or something, but I can think back to certain moments when a particular work changed everything that came after it, and a number of those works I still have that active force. Some of them are in collections, and it could be a very interesting exercise maybe late in my

life to work out how many there have been and where they are, but I would definitely say that what those paintings have done is transpose one way of working into something else, opening up all sorts of new possibilities and creating new questions, new forms of interrogation. 34.54

Alison: Could they be sort of like signposts on a roadmap in a way, and that roadmap is your practice, and these points show you another position, another way to go? Is that maybe how you would describe it? 35. 28

Andrew: Possibly, but because I would also say that it is a practice which is entirely based in abstract painting, but it is polyphonic or it's polysemic. They might be roundabouts because there might be points where you have a number of different directions you can go off in from, even though you only arrive in on one road, so if we have to use an analogy that would have to be it. 36.03

Alison: I like that description. So linking to that. After the course of making a painting have you ever experienced a sense of absorption or self-abandonment from the finished painting? 36.22

Andrew: Yes. Yes. (Laughter) 36.15

Alison: I like that, a simple answer. (Laughter) That's good. So have they been instances where you continue to think of your finished painting away from it? So perhaps even older paintings like you were describing? 36.35

Andrew: Yes, yes, I mean when I was talking about older key paintings I could think of a particular one, there's little point in describing it orally, because it's not here so we can't see it, I can think of a particular one, but if I went away I might pick four or five. 37.25

Alison: If you would pick just one, what is it you remember about it? Is it the process of its creation, how you felt at the time, the actual physical work, what is it you recall?

Andrew: I think one of the things that those key transitional paintings have in common, is of me being almost completely unaware at the time of their making that they were clearly driving things in a new direction. Quite often it has been somebody else coming in to the studio who has spotted that one painting amongst all the other things that I am working on, who has pointed out to me that there is something there which is marking out a difference. It is quite often hard to differentiate when you are absorbed in everything, so if you have four or five works on the go at once you won't

necessarily realize that there is one that is headed off somewhere else. I can think of a number of situations where it has really been another person who has pointed that out, and I would also say that this external prompting is a very important aspect of my approach. 39.33

Alison: Would there be one person or several people? 39.40

Andrew: It could be anyone, it really could be anyone; they don't have to be an expert. It is not about a form of self-aggrandizement, such as an important art critic walking into my studio... I won't name a name, but let's just say an important art critic, and they said 'This one', and I said 'Ah, yes this one', because that is also kind of going back to the sort of downside of the Greenberg/Fried approach, that somehow there is somehow an annunciation, in the biblical sense of the word, at which point everybody realizes that something is particularly blessed. (laughter)

Alison: I like that. (laughter)

Andrew: Sorry sarcasm in my voice (laughter), it doesn't come across enough, but it is an important analogy because so much of painting out of the Western tradition comes out of religious imagery and of course we have enough time and enough art historical research to know that the difference between what the painter believed as they were making those paintings and what the kind of prescribed belief system the paintings represents is huge.

Alison: Absolutely. So the next question. Have you ever experienced a sense of absorption or self-abandonment from other artists painting, or any other work of art? If so please describe.

Andrew: I think it's what I am always looking for when I go and look in a collection, or a museum, or even in art fairs, which are incredibly pressured kind of competitive commercial contexts. I am looking for artworks with which somehow contain something, which demand, from me, a particular form of attentiveness; so this is the measure of everything really finding works which do that, in art fairs as well, becomes a very important means of understanding how works of art contain and stimulate forms of attention. 39.00

Alison: Have there been instances where you have continued to think about another artists painting away from it? 39.45

Andrew: All the time. 39.53

Alison: All the time. Any particular painters?

Andrew: I could give you the most recent examples just because I was in Madrid two days ago in the Thyssen Bornemisza collection and they have one of the late Mondrian's of which famously there are a whole group in the Museum of modern Art in New York. So they are the late paintings found in Mondrian's studio when he died, which are speculative, he was using painted masking tape, charcoal, and you can see that they were never meant to be looked at as finished art works. But somehow they become all the more powerful, certainly to the contemporary eye, because there is so much contingency frozen, fixed into them. Knowing that Mondrian would have finished or completed them in another way, the decisions as to where the charcoal is brushed back, to where the lines of colour painted onto masking tape sit, become very vibrant, and very acute, and its that physical sensation of vibration that you get as you look at that one painting in particular, which kind of stays with me. It's a reminder that Mondrian is an incredibly intuitive artist, and the intuition exists in the physical qualities of the work more successfully than it does in his own kind of statements about his practice. 43.41

Alison: Obviously that intuition links straight back to how your practice unfolds?  
43.56

Andrew: Yes, yes, unfolding in the tension between intuition and measurement, or logic.

Alison: So thinking about the beholder/spectator now. If you have experienced absorption or self-abandonment in painting practice as discussed earlier, and if you've experienced yourself as an absorbed spectator of your own work does this affect how you consider the reactions of another spectator of the artwork? You did kind of hint about this earlier. 44.29

Andrew: I think it is absolutely essential to be very detached on that point. I think it is important to listen very carefully to what other people say about your work, and to learn from it. It's important to let other people make decisions about your work, but it's also important to sort of not care too much on one level without that being a form of arrogance. What I would describe it as is a form of detachment where you are fundamentally disconnected from the work of art once it is out in the world, so you have to let it get on with its own existence. 45.38

Alison: So considering the actions of another spectator of your artwork it's kind of

once it leaves the studio you expect that engagement?

Andrew: I desire it. I think expect is the wrong word.

Alison: Yes, expect is the wrong word.

Andrew: In a sense I am sounding may be a bit strict about that, but I actually don't believe that we have the right to expect anything as artists. We have to make work which in its own way earns attention. There is a wonderful strand of contrarian post Protestantism of that idea, which comes from looking at the way someone like Ad Reinhardt as dissenter, with the whole mixture of his Jewish background and his Marxism, and a set of ART as ART declarations which read almost like Martin Luther's Articles of Faith, as a way of reforming visual art against the indulgent and lazy minded. Maybe reformist is a better word than Protestant, religion is not a useful analogy here, but there is a need to reinforce the idea that somehow the way we look at the world and use art as part of this process, needs reform. And I am a subscriber to that position.

Alison: So in a way that's how you would consider the reaction of another spectator, hoping for that reform in a way? 47. 42

Andrew: I'm not sure hope is the right word but it will do.

Alison: We can search out another word at another point, that's something we can work on. So conversely would you fight in the feeling of self-abandonment, and if so why? Obviously that doesn't really apply because you've already talked about how you engage with those feelings?

Andrew: Yes. I think the unknowing is itself a certain measure of detachment, a certain sense of calm wonderment, if you like, in looking at art is important. The idea of existential abandonment, which in certain artistic positions privileges certain kinds of behaviour, such as spontaneity, and gesture, is fraught with the potential for self-delusion. It's my personal position that this way of approaching art-making doesn't interest me at all, because I think it very quickly becomes fake. 49.03

Alison: So it is a very fine line between understanding your own absorption in a work, and how you might think a spectator might engage with the work, and the point where you disrupt or you might fight that kind of... 49.30

Andrew: It is like trying to balance everything on the head of a pin, you know, accepting that most the time it won't work.

Alison: Right, I can understand that. I think we've already discussed this next one. Do you ever construct the position the spectator/beholder in your own practice? Have there been any key pieces where you've created to build a set reaction, what you might hope for? 50.07

Andrew: No, is the short answer, but on the other hand I've always been incredibly interested in architecture, and how architecture has all sorts of very subtle ways of governing our behaviour. As a result of which, installing work in a space is very, very important for me. There are small adjustments that could be made to a grid within a space, which work is hung to, that could make all sorts of subtle differences which no one ever need be consciously aware of.

Alison: Such as? 51. 01

Andrew: Well the most obvious way to hang a group of paintings in a an exhibition is to find a plumb line, a kind of median line, and hang everything on that line evenly spaced to the wall lengths. That sort of thing I wouldn't ever do. I would find midpoints on walls, find median lines and hang things just below or just above... hang things displaced from the median point on the wall... always to a discrete system that becomes, in terms of what I mentioned earlier, a way of creating an optical dynamic, which is somehow apparent even though you can't quite pin it down from the point of view of being in the exhibition. So it might look like a classical installation of paintings, but it isn't...

Alison: It's hidden.

Andrew: Yes.

Alison: So again, this answers this question. Have you, or do you ever construct or position the spectator/beholder in the painting practice? Well it sounds to me like you discuss that in a hang?

Andrew: But not beforehand...

Alison: No?

Andrew: No, not really... I think it's sort of... obviously I quite often have studio visits, that's a different matter, as a personal invitation to one to one engagement with works in a way that is nothing like an exhibition. But the exhibition is a clear and finished state. It's like an essay, or a conference paper, or some equivalent. It is a form of rounding up, of presenting a set of propositions at a given point in time. It's

also very different to what happens to a single work as in a group exhibition, or in a public collection, because those sorts of mechanisms can't then be part of what's going on from the artists' point of view, because your work is obviously sharing the space and its dynamics with all sorts of other work by other people.

Alison: So you haven't found yourself working in a particular way in order to consider the beholder to construct the relationship or anticipate it, unless there is this dialogue in the space that it is shown, in the way that it's hung?

Andrew: Yes.

Alison: So considering this address to the beholder do you consider pictorial unity or other particular mode of address as part of your painting process? So although you don't construct the beholder are certain things you do like this displacement or unknowing in order to address the beholder in a certain way? You're not constructing them but you might be... 54.53

Andrew: I suppose, because it's a strong desire to disrupt any idea of a kind of unified, regulated, approach there's a belief for me in there being a contradictory aspect to how my works operate; they are meant to contradict themselves at times, they are meant to put together propositions which aren't supposed to fit. So the constant interplay between gestural improvisation, hesitation, dithering, on the one hand, and grids, logic, measured, consistent processes on the other, is completely porous, it is riddled with contradictory elements in which the grid can be that gestural component, the gesture can be the deliberate measured staged aspect, and the way those things weave in and out of each other is the one consistent aspect. 56.43

Alison: And that is how you would, I suppose, approach this idea of pictorial unity...

Andrew: Yes.

Alison: It is almost disunity? That your kind of...

Andrew: Yeah, pictorial disruptiveness... I think I mentioned to you before I am very interested by Michael Baxandall's writing on Piero della Francesca. For example where he argues that what had traditionally been viewed as mistakes in perspective or human proportions in della Francesca's work are actually deliberately there in order to somehow unsettle the viewer and create the conditions where they might become more attentive. Particularly in an essay about the famous risen Christ in Sansepolcro, Baxandall discusses this in some detail with regard to the flag, which

the figures are holding, the sleeping soldiers. And obviously what the painting represents is a very rare image of a triumphant Christ. Normally arts much better at portraying suffering, or the man of sorrow when it relates to the very kind of human kind of idea that is easy to listen to in the way it easier to write sad songs then it is to write happy songs. But what is interesting in Baxandall's analysis is that it's somehow the physical and optical mechanisms, which are visual contradictions built into the painting, which hold our attention rather than the symbolism of a triumphant Christ figure, which people may or may not identify with... and that interests me a great deal. 58.57

Alison: This kind of links with the whole absorptive tradition.

Andrew. Yes.

Alison: So now I'm talking about constructing the painter beholder. Would you consider yourself as a privilege beholder at any time, before, during, or after your painting process? 59.39

Andrew: Well, the studio activity itself is a privilege. It is something that, like every artist, I have to fight for, to work very hard to sustain... I don't think, as I said before, that gives me any entitlement to transpose that into my expectations of other people. I don't know if that answers your question?

Alison: It does, because privilege can work on different levels.

Andrew: On a philosophical level of being there in the first instance, a priori, a view of the work that I make as its progenitor, I tried to make that sense of being the absorbed creator as low key as I possibly can. I try to make that notion of creativity something which someone else could disrupt, that someone else can show me something in the making of the painting I might not have spotted myself. 1.01.48

Alison: So although you're privileged, you are quite happy to open up?

Andrew: Totally.

Alison: Would you describe the experience of painting each painting as a unique occurrence?

Andrew: No, I would describe it as continuous. I would describe it as an endless activity. I don't think I can make a distinction between endlessly painting the same painting, and continuously trying to arrive at a painting that exists somewhere

unreachable in my head. But I would say that there is a continuous process. However much it might evolve, and change over many years of experiencing it, there is in the process something that keeps on rolling. 1.02.09

Alison: Like an unfinished conversation?

Andrew: Yes.

Alison: Do you or have you found yourself trying to replicate specific experiences encountered from previous painting sessions in new paintings? If so please describe. 1.02.33

Andrew: No.

Alison: No you won't describe?

Andrew: No (laughter) I don't try and replicate, so I would consciously not try to replicate. 1.02.49

Alison: So claims on primacy could suggest that part of the desire or need to produce artworks for the painter is to be the first beholder, perhaps not to create the artist, but to create the beholder. Do you find any affinity with this statement? Have you worked in particular ways to encourage becoming an absorbed beholder, or does it develop differently for you? In some respects you have answered some of that, so do you work to become the beholder? 1.03.39

Andrew: I'm going to have to think about that... I think there's a huge difference between tradition and conservatism, and it's a big difficulty for painting, in that in essence painting is a traditional activity, and quite often it seems like a very conservative activity as well. I am very anti-conservative, but I think that it is tradition, in terms of humanness/what it means to be human, which makes us engage with things, not just as pleasure, but also in paying attention to objects in museums and galleries for more abstract and internal purposes. That's actually something incredibly important. We are never going to come up with a completely new way of doing this, but we do have a complete responsibility to think about what that attentive process is and to try and work out how we might have a part in developing and renewing that process; and I would say that is what I'm trying to do... So this work is subject to a lot of renegotiation, subject to a lot of doubt, it is subject to a great deal of engagement with the work of other artists, some well-known some not at all well known, (though that something doesn't obviously form part of this questionnaire) this

engagement with other artists is then a very, very central aspect of my approach to practice. In a way, I am interested in being absorbed by the work, and thought of some of the artists who I research, as much as I am in creating conditions within my own work for that idea of absorption to happen. What is incredibly interesting to me is that when those artists are from a very specific school within modernism, their belief systems and their approach almost inevitably completely clashes with my own, and the argument that comes out of that, the tension, is for me a very key aspect of trying to answer your specific question here. 1.07.02

Alison: A fuel to your fire?

Andrew: Rather than a fuel to the fire it's firing up my commitment to exchange with both people whose work exist within a perhaps close paradigm of modernism, and with generations such as students I'm teaching now; people who might be interested in that historic work as well, but who won't necessarily have any affinities with what drives or drove those artists. I don't know if I've gone off on a complete tangent or whether I am...

Alison: It doesn't matter... it is all very interesting... No, I think you have answered my question. I mean I was asking you if you had an affinity to it so you have answered that. We have covered quite a bit of ground here today but it's there anything more you might wish to add at this moment because obviously we will have to be larger dialogue later on.

Andrew: Yeah, I think at this moment there isn't Alison, there will be more, obviously when we look at a transcript, or there may be other things that occur that by haven't quite managed to drag in to my brain at this point.

Alison: At this cold point.

Andrew: At this cold point, yeah.

Alison: In which case thank you for your time Andrew.

## **Simon Callery Interview**

**11th February 2015**

Alison: So could you describe your painting process, including such things as mapping, planning, thinking, making, etc? The reason I ask this question is to set a context, so I am asking everybody about their practice. 1.01

Simon: Mapping, planning?

Alison: Yes, because not everybody would suggest that their process happens in the studio, and people have different ways of getting to the final points of work. 1.16

Simon: Well, something I have spoken about quite a lot in the past is the significance of the moment that you feel you're starting the work. So, being a painter, the accepted convention is that you are starting your work when you make your first mark on the canvas. I started thinking about that a lot, and wanted to challenge it because it seems to be so bound up in the image based way of making paintings. I didn't really want to be making images so it made me consider that that there must be other moments when the work can start. This thinking led me to realize that for me the work begins when I first start collecting material, physical material. This could be when I'm in a wood yard, or when I'm ordering canvas and beginning to relate to material. That's the first tangible aspect of making work, so it's nothing to do with making the first mark on the primed canvas, it's to do with what kind of canvas, what kind of wood, what kind of materials are the painting going to be made with. That for me is tangible part of it.

Alison: So the next questions start to ask about process. 3.30

Simon: Process?

Alison: Process/practice. Would you describe how you feel during what could be called the genesis of a painting, perhaps recalling a painting you considered successful? 3.45

Simon: How do I feel? Well, I know that a work has to go through a process of becoming bad before it can become good. I've always been suspicious - in terms of my own work - I have always been suspicious of works that come easily. Somehow the struggle to make something helps me to consider more the possibilities of the material and what I want to do with it. This is a very important part of the process. Sometimes a work can go badly wrong and at the very last moment, when you want

to kick the whole thing in, something happens. It's a very slippery situation and it is only really when you have absolutely had it that something happens. I think it's really only when you face the fact that it might not work that it has a chance of working. It has some authenticity about it, it's not just another product and you just can't fake it. You haven't just made something in comfort and relying on the way that you already know and can go home for lunch. It's more involving. So, in terms of how you feel, I think it's a sense of being really involved, and there's an emotional aspect to it because you get desperate about it and you can feel you're wasting your time and there is a lot at stake. Mucking up a work does actually matter and making work that is good really matters as well. In fact those two halves are intimately connected in a good finished work. 5.48

Alison: Could you talk about how much of your process is planned, how you may use a system, or how much is arbitrary? 6.05

Simon: This is something I've been thinking about recently. Sometimes, when I have shows coming up, I like to put myself in a situation where there is a pressure to make something new or different. It might be to make a large scale work; or develop a new work, or take on a new context for the work in terms of where it might be placed. So often I set out thinking, right, I want to make a particular kind of work and I'm very clear and focused in my mind. I know it means having certain sorts of materials, certain sorts of tools, that kind of space, this kind of light. You start with those conditions and again, inevitably, something unexpected happens and trips you up. Something new emerges and you grab it and you go with it because it's much more exciting. So the process is always one of having certain things that you know you can work with to bring you to create a situation that you're not familiar with. That's really exciting. That's when you wake up and you're really working. 7.39

Alison: Well you've practically answered this next question. Does this process respond to how you feel the painting is developing? 7.51

Simon: Well, once a work is in progress I think I follow a hunch. I think being good at identifying clues is at the heart of it. When I am making a painting the way it looks is not as important as how it makes me feels. So, a work can actually feel right bodily and what it actually looks like is not as significant for the developing working process, it's not of primary importance. 8.41

Alison: How has this process developed, especially in relation to your past experience of painting what you considered successful paintings? 8.55

Simon: How has it developed? Are you talking about in terms of the way that I respond to the unfolding painting process?

Alison: Well yes I've kept it open, but yes it could be in relation to your understanding of your own practice. 9.14

Simon: Well, what I've have done more and more - this is what really interests me - is to rely less on the way a work looks and to rely more on the way it makes me feel. So what guides me more is to recognize and be attentive and sensitive to a bodily response to the work rather than purely a visual one. This says an awful lot about what I'm trying to do with painting, because I'm trying to shift the emphasis currently placed on the visual and trying to put it in equilibrium with the other senses. 10.01

Alison: Like such? Please describe. 10.04

Simon: Well you know, the idea that a painting can be experienced bodily as much as it can visually. My cultural background casts painting as image based and being British, an image with a narrative; with a story attached to it and then everyone is happy. That is a convention. My understanding of painting is that it can be progressive and can push forward and challenge conventions. It has a sharp edge and I like to push forward with that and seek new areas. So, the idea that painting can communicate as a physical work is very important.

Alison: I think that is very evident. 11.014

Simon: Well, if that's evident, that's good. It means it's working.

Alison: Yes, that is a good thing. This relates back to an earlier question. How do you know how well a painting is developing? Is it the case that you are aware to everything you are thinking, or does this 'understanding' come more from a subconscious level? 11.36

Simon: How do I know if a painting will be successful while it is being made? You never know. You set standards and they change throughout the process. Each painting gives birth to the next painting. It's how my painting process works. Half way through making a painting I find what I want for the next one, so I start on that one as well. Then you have a couple of works on the go and that new one produces the next and you have a family, a small group of work.

The idea of judging a work successful on my own terms - I would know it not by standing and scrutinizing but by experiencing the painting more obliquely. If I stood

near to it without scrutinizing, just sensing, I would know whether it works or not. How that perception operates is a really complex to describe in words. We probably don't have a sufficient developed language to describe experience. We can talk about what something looks like, but we can't talk about what something feels like quite so well. I guess that's why I make the work I make, because we don't have the language for it, so I'm interested to develop the language we need as painting. What makes this really interesting for me is that painting has been the medium that has been absolutely central in terms of the development of picturing and image making. Now we have had 150 years of the camera and photography as well as other tools to make images so painting can now be something that can be used to critique the way we use images and significantly move beyond images. My new works are not abstract paintings. That's a term which does not fit. I think paintings which have characteristics that are as physical as they are visual need a term for themselves. I call my paintings 'physical paintings'. It's just straightforward, generic term. Within the art world people are growing sympathetic to this new work but as soon as you are outside it and you try to describe it, it is very difficult. If you're not painting a pony or a hut you're in trouble. (Laughter) 14.22

Alison: You make me laugh, because I used to paint ponies. (Laughter) 14.41

Simon: You know what I mean then. (Laughter)

Alison: I'll edit that bit! (Laughter) 14.48

Simon: That stays in! (Laughter)

Alison: Oh no! Right the next question. How does this differ from when you feel a painting is turning out successfully, to when a painting is floundering? 15.05

Simon: It's horrible. It's a horrible feeling. The reason why a painting would flounder, or not work is because you've lost your focus, you don't know why you're doing it, you might be doing something mechanically, you're not engaged with it, you don't know what the function of it is anymore, you've lost the idea of who your audience is, somehow it becomes pointless, and that's a terrible feeling. When you make a painting you have a few ideas in mind. They might be elusive, but you're chasing them and you're engaged - so that's successful. As for the finished result itself perhaps is not really for the artist to say if it's successful or not. The painting has to go out in the world and be robust enough to survive and gather meaning. You can achieve all that you want in the studio and it can reflect your ambition entirely but at

the same time it's actually got to find a place in the world. That is much more difficult.

Alison: Continuing on process. Have there been instances where you have been pre-occupied by an on-going painting away from the studio/workspace? 16.42

Simon: I am all the time. They follow you around in your head. (Laughter) 16.48

Alison: In the course of making a painting, have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment? 17.02

Simon: Self-abandonment. What, kind of running around? (Laughter)

Alison: No. No that's not what I mean. (Laughter) 17.13

Simon: I have actually.

Alison: No, that's abandonment, not self-abandonment. I meant as in lack of awareness of self. So you're 'no longer in the studio', you've kind of 'left it'. 17.20

Simon: Well, I've read Guston saying that the characters and influences that you take with you into the studio gradually leave one by one leaving you alone in there - lots of artists have said that - it's metaphorical.

Alison: Yes, of course it is. 17.28

Simon: What you do is you start to act, to take action. You're gradually able to act less self-consciously and you're absorbed in the process. You're confident that every action that you take works, you're not so self-critical. There are moments when you feel confident that you can make a gesture, you can add something to a work, and you've built up enough confidence in the way you're working that you know it will work and you don't need to criticize it while you're working. There are no words only actions. You don't need to be critical. 17.56

Alison: That still sounds on quite a conscious level. I suppose I am talking about the moment when you that is slipping. 18.12

Simon: I don't know what you mean? Slipping out of consciousness?

Alison: Awareness. 1.29

Simon: You're not aware of your self trying to do something, you are just doing it, so you're still totally aware, in fact you are more aware of yourself I would say, and you're aware of a better part of yourself where you are at your most confident. 18.43

Alison: Another way of looking at it is would you be less aware of everything else, and more aware of what you're focused on, as in time disappears. 18.55

Simon: Well you're absorbed in it, it's like being immersed in a book. If something is really gripping you then other things don't impinge on you. When you're focused - art making requires that focus – this is the moment when you overcome your doubt or your self criticality about how to do something and you can just do it. It's not instinct, but you can just do it with all the knowledge that you have and carry it out in a confident way. It works and you know anything you pick up and add to the work at that point will work. I work to reach those moments because that's when the good things happen. I'm that kind of artist. It's not about producing a beautiful object that is shiny, I'm not technique bound in that way, it's a different thing, it's about finding something with each work which that involves a being sensitive to different demands. It is very involving. It is not kind of hands off. You don't do it over the phone.  
(Laughter)

Alison: Or via email. (Laughter) 20.12

Simon: Or whatever. It's hand made.

Alison: Yes. At any point in your painting practice do you act as the 'beholder' of your own artwork, and is this beholder 'absorbed' in the sense that Fried describes? 20.26

Simon: I use myself as an example of a person, so it's generally to do with scale. It's to do with standing up against something, measuring something in terms of my own height, or understanding a spatial dimension, physically using myself as an example of a human being. So I stop being the artist for a second, I say right, here I am, I am a human being stood up in front of this, how does it relate bodily? So it's not really a being a 'beholder', it's much more as an example. I am a physical example of a human standing next to a physical object: a painting. The Fried 'beholder' you would have to describe to me. 20.50

Alison: Yes, his sense of the painter-beholder, so the point where you're disassociated from, you were talking about the process, and being confident... 21.27

Simon: It is all part of the process.

Alison: Yes, it is. 21.30

Simon: The process of making the work and the process of experiencing the work are interrelated immensely. The machinations of this process do not end when the

making process is completed. The painter's experience of how to make a painting relates to the experience of the person that stands in front of it. It's one of the things that allow the work can operate in the present tense as lived experience. I would say an exhibition does not mark the end of the work; it's another part of the work, and the person standing in front of your work is another part of the work. 21.05

Alison: Also about process. Have you encountered an embodied experience as a result of your painting process, or any other type of manifestation, and if so could you describe it? 22.53

Simon: I don't know what you mean, an embodied experience? All experiences are embodied.

Alison: Yes. 22.56

Simon: Even so called spiritual ones.

Alison: I mean of your painting, so for instance how I've explained it as linking it back to when I was a graphic designer. I used to spend many hours in front of the screen working in Photoshop. Then I'd come away from away from the studio, and my reality I would be thinking about it through Photoshop eyes, so I'd be looking to undo something in real life that I couldn't, because it wasn't a digital environment, it was a real environment. So the question is asking if there is something you do in your practice that you become so much a part of that you almost continue to do it, or try to do it outside of the studio, outside of making the work? 23.44

Simon: Well, I would say what good art does is it helps you look at the world in another way. It's not so much my own work rather the work of other artists that has helped me look at the world in a different way. It might sound ridiculous – an example is Cezanne - I remember looking at Cezanne paintings really carefully and seeing the way that he will create a tension by painting his trees at strange angles. I didn't even realize that trees grew at strange angles before I saw a Cezanne painting. Then I found them in the world everywhere around me! So one of the things I love about art is that it does make me look at the world really carefully and it's rewarding. It would be nice to imagine I could do the same. 24 49

Alison: So starting to think about absorption as beholder/spectator in the painting that is made. If you were to reflect on the act of painting with reference to a specific painting, could you describe what the painting process gave you or perhaps still gives you, the painter? For instance is there a particular painting you remember that

brings back certain feelings, memories? 26.01

Simon: I try not to do that actually because I try not to attach personal detail to the work. I try to be quite objective. In terms of process having real meaning in the experience of the finished work I remember making my white paintings. I would make marks, draw a line, alter it, re-work over the surface, try to build a specific kind of luminous surface with line in it. I remember certain paintings where I could stand back to decide where to make the next mark and the approach the painting knowing where I was going to make a mark only to doubt and forget where and why. So, I would go back and re-look to where exactly I wanted to make the mark, go back to the surface, make the mark, step back. I was always in this kind of movement to and from the painting, trying to understand where I needed to make the mark, where I needed to work over the mark, and gradually build this very complex surface. So my kind of process was one of knowing what I wanted, not knowing what I wanted, re-knowing what I wanted, and in a way what I wanted to do was involve a viewer in a process where maybe they would understand the painting, lose that sense of knowing, and then have to look at the work again, and go back again, so it would involve this to and fro, because I wanted the work to have a long kind of life, or to stretch it open that let become very slow. The experience of it was slowed down. These were paintings from about ten years ago. So my process of working, to some degree, I wanted the process I went through to be reflected by the experience of the viewer in front of the finished painting. 28.27

Alison: See that to me would be very much about putting yourself in place of the beholder. 28.41

Simon: Yes, or recognizing that it's reflected somehow. The painter's process and actions have meaning in terms of the viewer's process of understanding and actions in front of the work.

Alison: You've kind of answered this as well. After the course of making a painting, have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment from the finished painting? If so, please describe. 29.13

Simon: Well some works... I don't really have a lot of my own work around me much, only in the studio and then it's always in the mess of being made and surrounded by millions of other things. Every now and again I have taken work home, and have it in my little office or elsewhere at home. There is an enjoyment actually, not in sitting and staring at it, but just being in the presence of the work. It could be a spatial

quality, or colour, or luminosity, or the way a work might absorb light, or the way we relate to them physically because of their physical proportions or the way they work in relation to the wall, or what they do to the room, or what they do to the context. So it's not a thing of abandonment necessarily, it's more like understanding the character of the presence of the work. If I go and see a really great work, I am in the presence of it, and I enjoy that because there is nothing else like it. It's unlike everything else. 30.32

Alison: That brings me to the next question. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of your finished painting away from it? 30.52

Simon: Of course, especially if there is something wrong with it. (Laughter)

Alison: (Laughter) If you considered it finished would you still? 31.01

Simon: I remember writing ages ago about how I could recognize when a painting was finished. I used to make the large scale white paintings and I would often be asked 'When do you know it's finished?' So I thought about that and I began to realize that when I was making one of those paintings I was entirely focused on what was wrong with it. So for me, with those earlier paintings, I would just scrutinize them, work on them and concentrating on all the marks and areas that weren't working. When those faults were all dealt with and had evaporated one by one I couldn't see the painting because I was only looking for faults. At that moment the painting became invisible to me and I knew I had finished it. The new work is slightly different, but at that point with those white paintings I knew they were finished when I couldn't see them any more.

Alison: Have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment from another artists painting, or any other work of art? 32.24

Simon: Of course. Of course, because that's what it's all about. I mean I don't know about this self-abandonment. That sounds a bit wild, what is that? (Laughter) 32.51

Alison: (Laughter) It's just another way of describing absorption, being engrossed in a particular work where nothing else is getting through to you.

Simon: I'll give you an example. Recently there was a show at the Barbican, maybe about a year and a half ago with Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Cage and Duchamp. There was one work by Johns, which was two parallel vertical panels with cut cans, and letters that stuck out. It was extraordinary work. It is quite rare but I do

remember walking away from it and thinking that spending time with it was a very special art experience that I miss it already. I remember looking back at the work and knowing I can't have that moment again. That is something I find special about art.

33.49

Alison: So this continues to this. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of another artists painting away from it? 34.00

Simon: Of course, you never stop doing that. In fact sometimes it can be too much, you can't stop. You have to stop or you'd be awake all night. 34.14

Alison: I understand that. So this is about constructing the painting-beholder/spectator. If you have experience 'absorption' or self-abandonment in painting practice as we discussed earlier, and if you have experienced yourself as an 'absorbed' spectator of your own work, does this affect how you consider the reactions of another spectator of your work? 34.49

Simon: Sounds very complicated. Let me try and unpick it a little bit or say it in my own way.

Alison: Well one of the quotes might help is Fried talks about Chardin and he talks about his 'proleptic mirroring' where he suggests does Chardin uses his own absorption as a tool? He hopes his spectators, his audience will feel what he feels. So is he using that as a tool? So this question is aimed at that. 35.28

Simon: That's what would drive him to make the painting. Of course, if you understand painting as communication then you find ways of communicating that state. Although you can't unequivocally communicate clearly for everyone in exactly the way that you want - there must be a bit of give in it - there has to be for individual interpretation and individual misinterpretation. 36.14

Alison: So conversely would you fight any feeling of self-abandonment, and if so why? 36.23

Simon: I'm trying to think of examples. I think you can be antagonistic to certain work that has very emotive hook. It's like being in the cinema, and if you know the cinema a bit, you know that they will use tricks to manipulate your emotions, when I feel that happening I resist it. I don't like to be coerced. I don't like to be told how to react emotionally. I think the best art makes you feel like you've made your own choice, actually you're being manipulated, but you feel like you've made you're own choice.

Crap art tries to manipulate you really directly, it's very blunt. I don't find it very interesting actually. 37.19

Alison: You prefer it to be more subtle? 37.23

Simon: Well, I think things can work in another way. When something engages you more fully it's more complex, then your response to it is more interesting.

Alison: That kind of links to what Diderot was saying about absorption and theatricality, like what was authentic and false, and as soon as it was false or theatrical it lost the audience as such. 37.47

Simon: Brigit Riley, for instance, makes paintings that has that have an immensely powerful optical effect. That's the strength and also the weakness at the same time. They are really well made paintings – and they can rely on opticality - which is simultaneously the success and failure of it.

Alison: Have you or do you ever construct, or position the spectator/holder in your painting practice? You were talking about using yourself. 38.26

Simon: I do all the time. I think about the viewer now more than I ever did. I think constantly about how the work will impact or engage, or attract someone who's in the gallery, or looking at the work. I think about how someone would encounter the work a lot and that actually helps me to understand what the work needs to be and do. 38.51

Alison: Is that part of the two way dialogue between the work and the practice unfolding? 39.00

Simon: It's to do with what I want. With the kind of experience I am trying to create for the viewer. It's not that I'm just trying to give them something to look at. I want to move people around. I want them to be in motion, to go from one side to another. So if I make a painting that is physically open, I can make one side open and then one side a little bit less open. Hopefully, this will encourage a viewer to move from one side to another to understand that. This is a way to get someone to move around the work and when we move we respond in a different way to when we statically absorb information from an image. That's a different type of absorption. There is one where you are passive and absorb like a sponge. The one that interests me is active and you are absorbing in an active way and in motion. 39.48

Alison: So that was talking about constructing or positioning the spectator and I think

you've covered this. So do you or have you found yourself working in a particular way in order to consider the beholder, to construct this relationship or anticipate it?  
40.15

Simon: Just said it.

Alison: Yes. 40.20

Simon: I will think about the viewer and how they would relate physically to the work. Then I start to shape the work with certain ideas about the viewer in mind.

Alison: What I meant is when you physically make the work you were standing in front of it, would there be any other process you do. You talk about walking around, do you sketch is there anything else you do as part of that process to think about that?

Simon: Well, I go and see shows. I try to be aware of how artworks affect me and how that is something that I can use.

Alison: A mental note sort of thing. 41.19

Simon: Well no, actually taking notice of the experience and asking myself why it happens. I'm interested as an artist and I want to know how it works. Mostly I go because I want to know how things work. I know enough to know how things work up to a point but I want to know more. There's only certain things that reduce me to audience and stop me examining the mechanics of the experience. An example would be renaissance altar pieces – works that are so mind blowing on the visual level that you're just in awe of the visual spectacle. They are not my favourite things but that's how they work.

Alison: Considering this address to the beholder do you consider 'pictorial unity' or other particular modes of address to the beholder as part of your painting process?  
42.43

Simon: Pictorial is to do with making pictures, so I'm out of that. (Laughter) 42.42

Alison: Well, you link it to composition, which could be linked to placing forms. 42.53

Simon: Of course I do, I was just saying if I make a work that has the interior of the painting exposed then I am trying to find a way of engaging the viewer in a work that needs to be navigated and looked at in different ways. It's not like a screen based image experience and it's not like a conventional painting in terms of picturing or

representing an image. It's something different. That didn't answer the question did it? (Laughter) 43.31

Alison: (Laughter) So in other words I think maybe you're saying that pictorial unity isn't ... 43.40

Simon: Well pictorial unity doesn't refer to what I do. That term is to do with picture making.

Alison: So if I said compositional address, I don't know I'm trying to think of another term perhaps. 43.50

Simon: Well you need another term. My paintings aren't pictures. You need to find another term. I think that's where we actually have lots of problems, not me and you, but discussions and issues around contemporary painting. I've heard people stand in front of paintings when they're teaching young children say things like 'What does it say to you?' and I think 'What the heck are you talking about; paintings don't talk, it's not saying anything, it's actually a different type of experience'. The language of painting I'm developing does consider the elements of traditional painting and I try and find a physical manifestation for them. The old language or terms like abstraction, don't relate, they just get in the way. 44.37

Alison: It's very interesting the barrier that language is creating. 44.49

Simon: We need new terms to discuss contemporary painting. That's why I come up with terms like 'physical painting', which is really blunt but is designed to avoid 'abstraction'. Since Barnett Newman the term 'abstract' and 'abstraction' should be specific only for earlier 20th century work. For Newman and later work it should be thrown out of the window. 45.28

Alison: Would you consider, or describe yourself as a privileged beholder at any time: before, during, or after your painting process? 45.35

Simon: I don't like the word privileged really. 46.38

Alison: Well privileged I suppose, it can be looked at in a couple of ways, you could say as in you're very lucky to be doing something, or privileged as in... 46.50

Simon: Elite?

Alison: No I was not thinking elite. As in you're the first beholder, privileged in that respect? 45.57

Simon: I don't think of it like that. A word like privileged could be used to give describe the experience of the work for the viewer, making it clear perhaps that the experience should be uppermost, rather than, for example, the number of people who see a work or visit an exhibition.

Alison: So what you were talking about will probably enter here. Would you describe the experience of painting each painting as a unique occurrence? 46.43

Simon: No, because I don't divide it up, it's a much more broader activity where individual paintings form a part of my art making activity as a whole. 46.49

Alison: And on-going? 46.56

Simon: Yes, and I think I've been doing it too long for each painting to be considered by me as a unique occurrence. When I was younger certainly I would go out and party every time I finished a painting because it felt like such of an achievement. The way I work now is broader. There are a number of paintings – and types of paintings - being developed all at the same kind. To me finished works contribute to my environment of making where the significance of the work accumulates as a whole.

Alison: Do you or have you found yourself trying to replicate specific experiences encountered from previous painting sessions in works? 47.33

Simon: No. If I did I would get really worried. The idea of replicating specific experience is very relevant for me in a different way. I would, for instance try to find a way of remembering certain kinds of experience of moving through landscape and how it's possible to stimulate an experience of similar character through an encounter with a painting. So maybe for instance I could be in a landscape and have an understanding of the materiality of that landscape and myself in it. This would be a really good model for what I want a painting to do. I would try to be aware of that specific experience as a model for the way I want someone to respond to the painting. 48.29

Alison: Claims on primacy could suggest that part of the desire or need to produce artworks for the painter is to be the first beholder, perhaps not to create the artist, but to create the beholder. Do you find an affinity with this statement, have you worked in a particular way to encourage becoming the 'absorbed' beholder, or does it develop differently for you? 49.03

Simon: There's always a big question about who the paintings belong to or who they

are made for? Certainly, you make paintings for yourself at the beginning because you are trying to find something out, and then gradually you make them for different reasons. I make paintings, because previous paintings suggest what I need to make next. This is the route that defines what I can produce and it just has to be followed. So there is always a bit of tension. I wouldn't really say I make them for myself, I make them because they need to be made, and once they are made I hope they will go somewhere. 48.55

Alison: They were made for your questions? 50.01

Simon: They need to be made because I do have questions that come from making as much as they come from making sense of the world in a way that makes sense to me. There's an urge to follow an idea to see and feel what happens. That's a clue to why I would come to the studio. Then of course being part of the art world you get invited to be in shows, so you start making things for shows. I don't really make things for collectors, specifically, so it's not product based in that way. I suppose I make them because I want to be a part of the art world and I want the opportunity to make work, and to see what these works can do and where it will lead.

Alison: So Simon we have covered a lot of ground here in relation to painting practice, but do you have anything more you wish to add? Obviously this is a start of a dialogue and there may be something else that comes to mind. 51.10

Simon: I think there's one thing worth mentioning in terms of your questions. I don't understand them all fully. I just wondered whether the way that we talk about art obscures understanding as a result of terminology used. Perhaps it is only possible to be totally clear when you know much more about what it is you're interested in which, of course, is the nature of research. It will be interesting to consider how you would ask your questions or what would be the nature of your questions at the end of your research project and compare it to how you these questions from the beginning of it. Between the two you will have a record of all your knowledge.

Alison: As to what we have or haven't found out essentially? 52.06

Simon: Well yes, what the important question are. And maybe, I've said it to you before how we can actually find new ways to describe new kinds of work, rather than relying on the old terms, which basically get in the way.

Alison; I think that's a good aim to have for this whole dialogue is to find those terms. 52.33

Simon: Those terms do exist but at the moment they exist as artworks.

Alison: So it's the art and language discussion again. 53.05

Simon: Partly.

Alison: Thank you for your time Simon. 53.10

## **Stuart Elliot Interview**

**30th March 2015**

Alison: To set the context I am asking everybody about their practice. So Stuart, could you describe your painting process including such things as mapping, planning, thinking, making, etc. 13.02

Stuart: I don't think of the way I work in that way quite, that's to say as primarily a painting process. I kind of think of it as a group of quite disparate activities out of which painting is produced. I guess an idea of process implies a focus on physical, or physical procedural stuff of painting, and that that is somehow where the centre of the work lies, and it's not for me. It is the point of intensity, but my mind might not always be on that, my attention might be somewhere else, and so I kind of think of writing, and teaching, and conversations like this, and other things as being just as instrumental. And I guess that comes out of having very unproductive periods, where I've been trying to resolve a problem by hacking away at a canvas, and battling with materials and getting nowhere, and others were I found that away from the studio, I could cut back in at an oblique angle, and travel a greater distance much, much easier. Having said that there are ways of talking about the work in terms of physical process, because there are several different types of paintings that I make at the moment, and new ones crop up every so often. So these three here: we've got the one on the left with just this kind of outline which is the shape of an MDF fragment I found in the street, and was placed on the canvas and painted around. The one in the middle is this furry zebra pattern, which is kind of like stubble, if you look closely it looks like stubble growing out of the surface of the painting, and this was made by gluing some fabric to the surface, and when it was dry just tearing it off. There is also a kind of wave-like 'Op Art' pattern built into structure of the fabric that is revealed by doing this. So there are two things that are both to do with contact, and indexical trace, and the painting on the right has that too, with the brush mark, and the stretcher bars. There is this thing about removal as well, because these are brush marks that have been removed, and they leave a trace, which happens to be an optical negative.

So in terms of process, I would say that there are things that are salient, rather than 'this is my process'.

I think the reality of it is much more complicated than I am putting it here, and is only really clear to me in the making of the work. I have a sense that each element I'm talking about has lots of identities really and that each component of the work has to

be at least doubled in this way in order to produce a functioning painting.

Alison: Would you describe how you feel during what could be called the genesis of a painting, perhaps recalling a painting you considered successful? 17.46

Stuart: This has more about how I feel about genesis in general, about how things start. In a piece of writing I've just done about Simon Hantaï, one of the things in the text was this anecdote of an exchange between Nixon and the Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-Lai, and Nixon asks Chou En-Lai 'What do you think the most important effects of the French Revolution were?' and Chou En-Lai says 'It's too soon to say', and that's a famous historical 'bon mot' that for years was floated around as a bit of wisdom, and also a bit of cultural stereotyping where the Chinese are said to take the long view of history. It was recently debunked, because it was in fact a misunderstanding. It was 1972 and Chou En-Lai thought Nixon was asking about '68, so he was just saying quite literally that it's too soon to say.

What interested me about that is that this statement does have weight, it is profound, and it's also a platitude, it's got all those things, but it doesn't have an origin as such, it doesn't have a clear kind of basis, and I feel as if that feeling is something closer to what I am looking for in a painting. This is difficult for me to answer really, because we're talking about a painting in the singular, and I don't think of my work singularly.

Alison: In series? 20.12

Stuart: Not a series, but they need each other. They're not quite fully autonomous and they're not meant to be. They're somehow missing something, but in a group they might articulate each other in some way. How this manifests itself in a working process is that I'm trying to do one thing, and I find that something else has happened that's more interesting, and I've learnt to be aware of that. So this one is an example: you know how you have an idea as an artist, and you make a work, and at one point think it's ok, it kind of functions, but you don't really pull it off. But a few years later you try to give it another go. So I made these paintings in about 2008, 2009 that were based on something I think about a lot, I think a lot about 19th century French academic painting, and especially one of the first stages of that sort of painting, the *ébauche* layer, which is the brown scrubby layer. It's really just a practical thing to cover the white of the canvas, but if you look at say, Thomas Couture, or David, or someone like that, there's interest in how that practical task is so shot through with style, a neoclassical rhythm, its flamboyance. One of the simple thoughts I've had that's come from this, is to do with work, and labor and time. For

example, how whitewashing a wall would be a very different thing today than it would have been three hundred years ago, because our ideas about utility, and practicality, and time are very different. The tools and materials are different - though ostensibly the same task, it's also very different. That appeals to me, because it's an argument for the historicity of making, of materials. So there's this idea of a very basic thing that is shot through with a very particular structure or tone. The other thing to say about that is TJ Clark's essay about David's 'Death of Marat' painting, where he talks about the top right hand corner, he talks about this kind of void. I can't remember (there's a lot of misremembering in my thinking), if I read the TJ Clark essay first, or if I just thought the same things as him. I read it quite recently, but when I read it I thought that I'd been thinking exactly this. So that void that he says isn't a void, what is apparently the ground of the painting, of the image, is a seething mass of semiotic potential. It's the opposite of nothing: if anything it's almost too much. It's one of the reasons he nominates the painting as the inaugural painting of modernism. So that whole idea that was interesting to me, and I tried to make paintings of that stage, and as I say, they kind of functioned, but I tried to make one again recently, because I thought there's something about that idea, a proposition that really interested me, and maybe now I could pull it off. So I tried to work on one this size, and I did it and it was ok, but I wasn't sure so I went for a coffee for half an hour, because I thought if I stay away from it I'll come back fresh. I came back and I just had to admit that it didn't really work. So I scraped it down and was left with this negative of the brush mark, the medium having bitten into the primer in some way. But that an example of trying to do one thing, then taking a last minute digression, is very common for me. And that's why the works need to have a technical lightness. I can't really afford to get involved in complicated processes too much because this approach doesn't allow you to do that, and I need to veer off course quite drastically at the last minute, and that's how they come about. It's an element of improvisation, so getting back to the question of genesis, it's a bit like musical improvisation in that if you imagine someone playing on stage and they play like a jazz musician and they strike a note, and it's awful, totally wrong, but then what they play after that retroactively makes it right. So something weird temporally is going on that kind of disrupts a teleological 'this, then this.' The other interesting thing to me though is the thing they do about retroactively making that right, might in itself become a well-known move, and may enter culture as another standard thing. 27.20

Alison: Isn't that something we don't do, we don't show the thing that went wrong, but that led to something else going right?

Stuart: No, I don't agree. I think we do. I think maybe it's not like that if we restrict the work to its privileged reading, the artists ideas for what it should be, but I think the works are full of all sorts of other things that we didn't put there, I think it's actually full of that.

Alison: What I meant was that I know a lot of artists who bin lots of canvases, but aren't they are all part of that dialogue?

Stuart: There's an important difference I think there. It's a good point, because there's a notion of a mistake that's sort of... the other thing about working in technically a light way, it's important to be able to make a painting impulsively, and I quite often do that, I'll quite often be in the studio for a day, and not do anything, and be on the computer or something, and then about seven at night think 'I know, I'll do this', and just get a canvas and do it, and half an hour later you can see that there's not much there. There are others that were binned, but they don't have a different status in terms of what happened, but there's a decision made about what works or not. I don't think it renders those mistakes... the ones we keep are the ones that make something available as an object of attention, make it thinkable in some way. So I guess it's not the same thing as saying that showing the 'b-sides' would do that job, because it wouldn't, it'd be something about those things that isn't available actually to an audience, because the work breaks down: the paintings need to work. And that's what used to be called quality or whatever, but it turns out to be much more complicated than that. So I get what you're saying.

Alison: It was just the jazz analogy.

Stuart: There are other questions, the thing of that analogy is how things play out over an artist's career, may be how practice is intelligible to an audience over time. Especially any responsiveness.

Alison: I'm going to ask the question again, because we focused on genesis. Would you describe how you feel during what could be called the genesis of a painting, perhaps recalling a painting you considered successful? 29.14

Stuart: The feeling, so what do you mean by feeling I suppose? Do you mean emotion, a bodily affect?

Alison: Well everybody has different ways of describing it I suppose. Some people are totally engaged, or oblivious to what else is going on, or they're obsessed, or restrained. You kind of talked about this very short, sometimes it can be a last

minute, bout. What is it, is it the energy? 29.43

Stuart: Ok. I know exactly what it is you mean. So if I'm doing it right it should be just like buttering toast, very quotidian. 29.53

Alison: Right. That's a very good way of putting it.

Stuart: Everyday there's nothing special about it, there's nothing kind of 'other statey' about it, it's really straight forward.

Alison: You've kind of answered this already, but I'll ask it anyway. Could you talk about how much of your process is planned? How you may use a system or how much is arbitrary. 30.23

Stuart: Well the way the work normally comes about is through difference, there's this one, and this one, and this one, but sometimes there is another one I will develop sideways as it were. So then there's the question of what would planning look like, what would it be like for me? I suppose there's a kind of romantic idea that if it's too planned, it won't be as interesting, which I don't believe actually, and I don't mean here, but there is something about, and I think this is quite personal, quite related to my temperament, is that if I plan too much (laughter) I have trouble. So I think with this object in the studio (the one on the left MDF outline), the object that I used to paint around had to be in the studio for quite a long time before I could use it. It had to become like a stretcher frame. It had to be around. In a way that's crazy, because somebody else could do that, but I can't. So there's nothing like a categorical imperative about that, that one couldn't just bring something and do it, and that's something I question. When you think about the next big development in the work, well maybe I should stop operating like that, because there's a certain point where things are serviceable in the practice, and they are there for a reason, but then they might harden, become a taboo. So the point where you think 'Oh well I never do that', well, maybe you should do that. It's where the zebra print came from years ago, because it was a kind of way of stopping a minimal tastefulness that kept the discussion too much around modernism. I got this fabric. I don't know what to do with it. It was in the studio for a long time, but that was a technique. Put that into the studio and see if it can digest that, and sometimes that takes some time, but that is the principle, working against something that needed to shift. So that might be a thing that needs to shift just occurs to me now saying it. 33.40

Alison: That's really interesting, that idea of having to live with something to

understand it's language, and how you can use that language. 33.57

Stuart: Well that sounds more sophisticated. (laughter) What I mean is more basic, really that I could just pick it up one day without having too many ideas about it basically, rather than understanding it's language or anything. It's kind of just there like a part of the furniture. Rather than like me thinking of an image, what I want the painting to look like. So there's still room for something to happen.

Alison: So you've kind of answered this. Does this process respond to you feel the painting is developing? You spoke about this one, trying to create a previous way of working? 35.12

Stuart: Yeah, there's not much of that. There wouldn't have been any more revisions after that. So there's a bit of room for response, but more likely the response would be to make another painting. So I think there's a little bit of, maybe how people conventionally would work on a painting of many layers and revisions, and changes and so on. I do do that, but it's across many canvases. It's like the layers in Photoshop, they're just 10 jpeg's rather than 10 layers. So I'm adjusting between the works, and the collection of works is the wider unit attention as well as the localized attention of the individual painting. And they're usually hung like this, this distance (3 in a row, approx 50cm gaps). So you have to see them together. 36.22

Alison: One of the things you talked about was that sometimes there is an offshoot you might pursue. How does that work? 36.39

Stuart: Something I'd like to see. I'd like to see another one, but then I usually don't do it. To be honest, that's purely practical, that I haven't got enough stretchers to 10 of those, 10 of those, 10 of those, which I'd love to do, but I have to keep moving this way, it's more productive for my resources. It's better for me, so like I've been meaning to do something else with this, but there's still only one.

Alison: It's the one.

Stuart: But I don't want it to be 'the one', it's a problem, I need to make another one!

Alison: It's interesting that you have these ideas piling up, and one day you have money, space, time, whatever it might be and you think right I'm going to do my zebra series, or whatever it is. 37.28

Stuart: It would be great to have a lorry turn up on Monday with 20 canvases stretched and I'd love that just to go for it, because I wonder what would happen.

You know, what would happen if you took all of these and worked them back? Like more of the, I don't know, would they then cross breed, I don't know? But we've all got things about our work that we can't find out yet, and I'm also mindful of the fact that that can happen over a really long period of time, you know, in the future as well. There's no rush on that. Maybe I'll do that when it makes sense to spend a year on one type. Maybe there will be a time when it feels like the right thing to do that, at the moment it's not a priority. It's totally part of the work and why the work has evolved the way it has, technically as well as to do with what sort of time I've got, and that's been an interesting thing, in terms of what's different about what the work needs, and what I want, and they're not always the same thing, well usually not. Again, someone else might feel like there's a wonderful harmony with that, but for me it's always been a little bit divergent. But yeah, how can I work big, and make many paintings? Then one thing has to change, like you can't work like a photorealist or something, because you just couldn't cover all that. 38.47

Alison: You have answered this. How has this process developed, especially in relation to your past experience of painting what you considered successful paintings? So you have just answered that. 39.01

Stuart: Yes.

Alison: And in a way you've answered a bit of this. How do you know how well a painting is developing? Is it the case that you are aware to everything you are thinking or does this understanding come more from a sub-conscious level? 39.42

Stuart: I can't help but respond to that question in terms of ideas about subjectivity, and intention and making. I guess asking whether something is a sort of frontal awareness or whether its sub-conscious does presume a centeredness. If I'm making a work I'm quite divided, whether that's between my simultaneous roles as an interpreter of painting, or sometimes I'm more mundane, being almost like a fabricator, and the other things in-between.

This has to do with what lens you are looking at the work through historically, or which bits of the language one feels are yours, or explicitly borrowed, or un-locatable. The work can highlight those things in you, as much as you guiding the work. I feel very much rewritten by the work as often I do that I am making it. But in short I don't know, very often. I'm just being honest, and looking at the times when I thought I knew that something is really working, I've been wrong too often, and that's why I guess I'm wary of fetishizing the act of making too much, as if that's where

things happen. Because too often for me its not, something's been made and cast aside, and it's only been later, this retroactive thing of actually seeing something there. There's a freedom in that though, that means that it's not such a high wire act. The less I know the better to be honest, and I'm saying that, it's hard for me to get to that because I have a tendency to try to force or will things to happen. Again, I'm wary in that I don't want to construct some kind of purist state, I don't think it's that, but it's a kind of agency, and it's quite deliberate because it's art, but it's not a unified authorial agency, and that's part of the project, part of the work: can you make like that, can I make like that, in this slightly fragmented way? Without snapping back into something I feel is not open in that way, and is maybe an off the shelf way of thinking about making work. So that's why I feel the paintings are important (to me), but there's a particular way of looking and thinking about objects that would miss out all this other stuff, and I want to resist that in some way. It's a slightly contrary ambition, to want to avoid certain sorts of coherence, but to have that avoidance somehow staged as painting. 41.00

Alison: This relates. How does this differ from when you feel a painting is turning out successfully to when a painting is floundering? It sounds like you have a mistrust of those feelings? 43.39

Stuart: It's not an automatic mistrust; it's a kind of awareness, that just historically if you could correlate that somehow, you'd probably be wrong as often as not. The other thing to say about all this is because the making in a way is so perfunctory, and quite quick, there's not a lot of time, there's not the days of making and marinating in something that would maybe play better a host to those kind of ideas. It's all over quite quickly, so there's not much room for that, and in a way that's deliberate too. 44.46

Alison: Have there been instances where you have been pre-occupied by an on-going painting away from the studio/workspace? Do you have 'on-going' paintings? 45.02

Stuart: I think about them all the time. We've established I guess that the time of the making doesn't really extend past a day, or 3 hours, so there's not really time to think about that 'one. I might think about the surface, or the ground, or the paint being analogous to a set of microphones all configured differently. They all receive the same sound, but what you are going to get is quite different. So sometimes I think that that didn't work, 'is it something to do with the way those two things interfaced?', and 'Can I change one of the conditions, and try it again', so how those two things

mutually entail each other in the painting is somehow more vivid. And they're often quite technical things like identifying variables in the work, and saying can I push this one up, and that one down, and that kind of calculation all the time, and after a while you can get through certain possibilities conceptually like that. I had physically test absolutely everything in the beginning, but now I've had a bit more experience of materials, and making paintings, it's a little like how a composer writes music, and that's changed after painting for 15 years or something, to feel able to actually go through ideas a little bit. Nothing really substitutes for the act of painting but on the other hand you can anticipate certain things. So yeah, I think about not one painting over a stretch of time, but I do think about what maybe the current two or three things that I'm about to do, and I'm flipping all these possibilities around. 46.20

Alison: Again, you've somewhat answered this. In the course of making a painting have you ever experienced a sense of absorption or self-abandonment? 47.34

Stuart: So absorption then: such a term.

Alison: Yes, I would suggest in this case something like you're so engrossed in painting perhaps you're not aware of other things going on around you. So time might seem to act differently perhaps. 48.03

Stuart: So, this isn't 'Michael Fried's' absorption?

Alison: Well it is. He talks about the way Diderot is describing audiences in front of a Greuze painting or something. So there is an element where obviously there's no family crowded round a dying father in a painting, but there's something in the process or the way you're creating or thinking of working that has you 'carried away'. 48.37

Stuart: Obviously that happens, but then how much to invest in that fact is another question, because there are lots of the times when it doesn't, and then there are times when it happens checking Facebook, or cooking. So whether or not that is an index of anything important, or how much that could be connected to what Fried has been saying, I'm not sure. I'd question that because there's a temptation there, with that idea that I am cautious of. I think that temptation would be to try to re-coup a particular value for making or value for painting in particular that is kind of contrary to all those things that went against Fried's schema since 1967, so that's to say theatricality. I don't have his sensibility at all. I think he asked an important question and he identified, at that moment, quite clearly, a set of ideas, a set of things that

were happening, but I think he was totally wrong on what that meant, or what was good or bad about that. So that would be the temptation that I would want to avoid with this idea of absorption, of with carrying it over into some state of making, which sounds like something people call 'flow' or whatever. 48.40

Alison: Oh, Csikszentmihalyi, yeah, but Fried and Diderot hypothesize on this as I mention in the 'Engagement' document. Diderot hypothesizes about Greuze acting out his painting, becoming the personality of the figure he is portraying. And Fried hypothesizes that Chardin uses his own absorption as a tool, a 'proleptic mirroring', so if this engages me, will it engage an audience? So I am asking the question is that true? Is there an element where if it doesn't work for you, if it doesn't engage you do you think it would be successful anyway? 52.35

Stuart: Well I suppose what I'm not happy about is the idea of engagement being clear. What that is. What Fried is saying would presume that we know what engagement is, and we know what it means, you've got it, or you've not got it. Add to that what I was saying before about maybe a danger of, and I think painting is so vulnerable to this, to be honest, particularly in this country. It's that there's a romanticization of painting, wanting to try and pull away from the world in some way, and I think the attractiveness of some of those ideas is really, really, owed to that. I personally really try to shake that off, because again I think it excludes too much. So the idea of engagement, there's 24 questions right there, as to what that is. I guess it's whether one accepts those terms in the first place. 54.23

Alison: Exactly, and that's kind of where I'm starting to un-pick. He suggests this, well do we agree with that, is that true. 53.42

Stuart: For him there's that question of presence, and time, and also his binary that he sets up between absorption and theatricality. So there's just two terms. He's an interesting thinker in that I read his 'Art and Objecthood' with students, and I think it's a really good one to show students because it's kind of unusual to find a historically, really, really important essay that no one agrees with, or hardly anyone agrees with, and even Fried himself says that. And I think it's a really good lesson for students, to show you can be somebody who poses really important questions, and their process of thought and their analysis can be very perspicacious in a lot of ways, but their value judgments are another thing at the end of it. And then there's his later work of projecting this problematic right back through previous centuries. So it's hard not to look at the aesthetic, and philosophical underpinning of that, in broader terms, as to what is at stake in him doing that, and it is a particular idea about art's relationship to

the world, and aesthetic experience being this different order. I think this is deeply problematic, and in a way the unruliness, and motley character of critical thought in art since then is testament to that. And Fried might see that, I don't know what he thinks now, but in '67 he saw it as a kind of degeneration, or a dissolution. Like Art somehow sprung a leak and needed shoring up. But actually you could say that the un-picking you're talking about, since then, has been about precisely that. And it becomes not a set of terms that precede the practice, but a something that happens in practice. That's the different thing. It's the irony that Harrison & Wood pointed out about Greenberg, that in Greenberg's coming into the studio of artists, and saying 'that one rather than that one' he brings criticism, theory into practice in a way that is directly presages conceptual art's blurring of the role of the artist with the critic, theorist, curator. And they said the fact that he didn't embrace minimalism and conceptual art, is almost like a failure of nerve in the face of the logic of his own position, because he brings those two things together so forcefully in high modernist painting, and so it's quite logical that they would carry on. So there's that kind of adversity to Fried too, that he's placing so much on the notion of experience, but at the same time a version of experience that is so sort of bureaucratically managed. There's that book on Greenberg 'Bureaucracy of the Senses' which is a great title, and there is this sort of management of what counts, and what doesn't, a priori. So when you ask me if I feel absorbed, I do feel like, why would you ask that rather than how do you feel when making the work, which you have asked earlier, so I feel it as a somewhat leading question I suppose. So I'm wondering what will come. 56.55

Alison: Yes, I see. I'm trying to get people to think about processes that maybe they haven't thought about in certain lights, and this is a frame that Fried put's on it in that light, so we talk about it that way, and then we talk about it in relation to Fried's way. So this next question goes into that painter/ beholder. At any point in your painting practice do you act as the beholder of your own artwork? And is this beholder absorbed in the sense that Fried describes? 57.44

Stuart: Well I think definitely, but again would sooner ditch a Friedian framework, and talk more about... it's more interesting for me to talk about aesthetic political questions of now. One of which - and this is pertinent to what Fried historically said about French painting - is the relationship between private and public space, right now, and the confusions that happen there. Like a colleague of mine, Dean Kenning said, it's not that there's too much private space, we're all being siloed off into your Facebook page, or your cloud, it's that here's not enough genuine public space, with it's attendant formality and dignity, and that that was the issue. And it's true, but part

of that issue is that there's these confusions, one of which is that between the producer and consumer, that's been culturally one of the bigger shifts: people don't just watch TV, they make TV, on their phones and so on and this shot has been happening in some form or other since the late 70's especially in music, but the internet has intensified that whole process. So I do think you're always already the beholder, as much as the producer, and I think perhaps there's some mapping to do there about what those terms really are. Beholder implies a... 59.47

Alison: Held in place by an artwork.

Stuart: Well, yeah it does, but also privileges vision in a particular way, so it's not very embodied reception, which leaves out a lot, like bodies, and who they are, and where they are in the world in all sorts of ways. I think maybe the mapping I speak about, that there'd be more than two terms, in a way, but leaving at that for the moment, there's least with those two a flickering, that neither are wholly present at once, and that is a different relationship to producing culture, working in and on culture. So of course being a painter now, is not the same as thing as being a painter 50 years ago, even though you might seem to be working with similar terms. And I think that in trying to make something at all, that's not just a complete pastiche, is to try and think through the contemporaneity of what might be some very old things, like the way that a mark on a surface is always becoming something else, which is a really old problem. So that's why I was talking about the white washing the wall, the relationship to work. There is now a totally different relationship to those things, to ideas of interiority, that's why Fried's move to project back through art history in this way, is so problematic to me. Maybe it has some hermeneutic value, but as a grand scheme it doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel right because it makes out a community of the subject.

Alison: A community of practice that wasn't necessarily a community?

Stuart: more radical than that - it suggests a stability of the subject itself, that just seems implausible, especially when you think about how art is related to other things, like power, all these kind of things. So there's confusion between producer and consumer. I think there's the classic story of Kandinsky coming into the studio and seeing one of his paintings upside down, and thinking 'Ah, it's fine', and he could do abstraction, that sort of experience I have a lot. Like catching glimpses of the work, and being re-configured yourself, you're not standing back and thinking now I'm going to interpret your work, it's that you're made into the interpreter by something that you couldn't predict. You thought you were making it, but then and

you had to respond to something happened, and the only way to respond to that is some way as an interpreter, and that's why I think maybe an artist can see a possibility in a smudge, that they couldn't have seen 10 years prior, because they're a sophisticated interpreter now, and they wouldn't have noticed what's going on then, that that can carry something.

Alison: That reminds me of a term I read somewhere recently a kind of 'generative grammar'? 1.04.38

Stuart: Yeah, I like that.

Alison: And you learn that grammar, by doing the thing you do that makes the work? 1.05.01

Stuart: It's different for me, it's really different to the plowing of a modernist furrow, because as soon as you use the relationship to language I think of Mikhail Bakhtin who says 'We take our words from the mouths of others', that's exactly what painting feels like. To me, unbelievably so, it's one of the things I've think is really exciting about painting is it's fluidity, it's suggestiveness, but also it's complete promiscuity, as a surface that's going to attract, and include other things, often quite disparate things. Now how to kind of harness that is very difficult, because that can easily go horribly wrong, and to harness that in a way that's concise, and vivid, focused and exciting, that's the trick isn't it? And I've come to think the task of doing that is really, really slow. And I've recently been thinking how to make the practice intelligible to an audience, rather than this, like sometimes people can come by and like this one, or that one, and that's not a bad thing, but maybe there are too few people who are interested in what's going on. But in a way, in real world terms there hasn't been too much opportunity; I've done two solo shows. I think I suppose for what I'm talking about happening you have to get to ten or something?

Alison: So you almost have to do your series. Maybe like a song that has a repetitive lyric that helps you learn the melody? A familiarity? 1.07.12

Stuart: Yeah, that then leads you onto the rest of the song, and sometimes that's not always an attractive job for an artist. The thing of making the practice intelligible means performing the work, lets assume we perform it in the way we want to, because that's another pitfall, somebody might say well we only want you to perform a bit of it. But let's say we are performing it how we want to, and it still needs doing, and still needs reiterating, and I've changed my mind about that recently, I have a job

to do there, it can't just be in here, and obviously I knew that anyway in a basic way, but I'm seeing that more as integral to the work. Rather than just a pragmatic thing, like I must get my work out there, but actually there is no work if the practice isn't visible. And the practice has to be visible, not just the paintings. So the question is how do you make it happen? 1. 09.00

(Pause for Coffee break)

Alison: Exactly. Have you encountered an embodied experience as a result of your painting process, or any other type of manifestation, and if so could you describe?  
1.10.36

Stuart: I'm not sure what that one means?

Alison: Ok, yes it often needs clarifying. So how I usually describe this is from when I was a graphic designer I used to spend many hours in front of the screen working in Photoshop. Then I'd come away from away from the studio, and my reality I would be thinking about it through Photoshop eyes, so I'd be looking to undo something in real life that I couldn't because it wasn't a digital environment, it was a real environment. So a similar thing could happen in painting, if for example if you're always painting to the edge, does that translate. So the question I'm asking is have you found that after working I a particular way in your studio with your process that has continued to manifest itself in some form away from the studio?1.11.37

Stuart: So this is something different than carrying on thinking about it after it?

Alison: Yes, it's more unbeknownst, where you find yourself transferring something from your art practice into the everyday.

Stuart: Oh, I see, right. So something about the phenomenology of making the paintings extending into another.

Alison: Yes, leaking into... 1.12.17

Stuart: I'm actually not sure. Probably, but if I feel a little like I might be confecting something. 1.12.22

Alison: That's fine. We'll leave that one on the boiler. So now I'm talking about absorption as beholder/spectator in the painting that is made. If you were to reflect on the act of painting, with reference to a specific painting, could you describe what the painting process gave you, or still gives you? 1.13.05

Stuart: I suppose it's hard to answer that one without going back to the earlier answers that were unpicking process, and unpicking painting a bit as well. There's the identification, it's a bit like identity categories. I do identify as a painter, not maybe as fully as a lot of people would. I sometimes feel like would I pass for a painter? Or the works pass for painting in a way, and that's something I'm interested in actually. In some people that would manifest in the work as them not being good enough, or they don't work. I've definitely had those conversations, lucky to have had enough of the other ones to know. Trying to mobilize that as a part of the practice as content, so that idea of the painting process and what that includes. To maybe not over complicate it, to not just say something about what it's like to physically apply the paint, and is there something that that has given me. It gives me a particular kind of thinking time, and a particular type of thinking, that I don't feel I can get anywhere else, and in that way the making of the work is usually pressing against what I don't know yet, in some way. It's also to do with a kind of wanting to materialize something in a particular way, and not knowing how, and this is why process is important. There's a fluctuation in process, so rather than having a target you hit, there's a bandwidth, and this is again to do with the fluidity of painting, something kind of coming into being, whether that's on one surface, or across several surfaces over two years, but there is that kind of movement that the work kind of gives. And it's a less teleological kind of way of thinking, because it sprouts into many other things so quickly. So I think that's what it gives me that I'm interested in, you can have something really, really focused, and even myopic, I'm just thinking about this surface, and this application, but seeing how quickly that gets away from you in so many ways, there's not many other ways I can think of that you could be with those two things. And almost needing some kind of frame to do that, and that's what I kind of think art is, generally, but for me it's some kind of painting, some kind of painting-ish thing. That's around. That I can kind of use, and I can't think, there's no other way to hold all those things in view, and even then within the practice you can only hold them together temporarily. Before everything goes back to being what they are as they've been constituted historically, and as norms. Those things are constituted by forces that are much, much stronger than one person, so you can pull them away a little bit, and maybe coalesce in some way, but on your own they just tend to go back. That's why I think critical function of art has to be collective in some way. I don't think a single work can do much, it's only by virtue how that accrues, discourse and value, and gets used, and pleasure gets infused with other things, and all of that. So I guess that kind of immediacy of making, from having painted for a long time, has become attached to a lot of other things. Like done a lot of work of attaching.

And every new body of work has attached it to something else. You can somehow drag all that baggage around with you in this very light way, by using this material, on this evening, and that's really exciting to me. I think a part of the lure of doing it is the idea that that is possible, it's the only way I can explain wanting to do it in the first place, before any attaching had been done. Some sense that it's rich in that way.

1.19.05

Alison: I like how you put the 'lure' of it.

Stuart: Totally. It's fun, but it's not fun enough, because it's too hard, so why would you start making sacrifices? But I think it seems like it could be charged up in that way and attract all this other stuff. The reason I make art is I think I might be able to make art that is smarter than me, or can do more than me. So if I have to do it that seems like a lot to do, but maybe a painting can go out, and do more than me. It's the only way to make certain things thinkable, something unarticulated, but I don't mean that in a way that it's kind of beyond language or anything like that. So I think it brings together things that are otherwise quite discrepant on that scale I guess.

Alison: Again, you've covered some of this. After the course of making a painting have you ever experienced a sense of absorption, or self-abandonment from the finished painting? 1.20.39

Stuart: Well I think another thing it just reminds me, that sounds like a moment of finishing, and that reminds me of something else that has taken this idea of absorption as an idea of coherence, or unity, or oneness, or rightness, those sorts of things, and yeah, that does happen, but which kind? That's what I'm interested in. I suppose I'm interested in, and it's maybe too much hard work to do here, but I really would want to do something to reclaim the idea of irony from the people who have cast it as just like an arch mockery of something. Irony's this really complicated idea, and I like Donna Haraway's use of it where she says it's about holding things together that are mutually contradictory, because all of them seem necessary, and true, and they don't resolve dialectically, so you have to find some way of holding them together, irony is the only way you can do that, and painting seems deeply ironic to me in that. So there is a certain kind of unity, it's a really ironic unity, in a way it's like a good joke. But I think painting is so like that in a really different time space. That thing about a joke is that can condense wildly disparate things for a second, in a way that is so true, but so absurd. That's a kind of coherence you could say, but there's other kinds of coherence which doesn't hold contradiction in the same way, or not so interestingly, and maybe that's more an idea of rightness, and

that's historically contingent as well, and I think that's part of the gambit of wanting to make paintings that need each other in some way is that when trying to make paintings that had an internal logic of unity didn't seem to be the way for me. Doing a kind of expanded painting, like a sort of Jessica Stockholder thing, didn't seem right either, so there seemed to be something at stake in that particular in-betweenness, where they need each other, they're not a series, they're not an installation, they turn away a little bit, but they're not absorbed. They're somewhere pitched amongst all of those things. In my mind there's something interesting, and important there, in other people's minds that's where you find failure. Maybe in Fried's mind that's just what an unsuccessful painting is. 1.23.05

Alison: But you think that they're valid?

Stuart: I don't know if it's valid or not, but I think something's important about what's happening there, that I want to think about which is why I work. And that's what I'm doing, and I don't know for other people, at what point is a result that somebody else might share in, I don't know, but that's the nature of the project. There's something important about that not being quite there, or there, that I want. So back to the question of this kind of absorption, there is that, and they're not internally divided these paintings, they've got a kind of continuity, it's not collage, it's not a disjuncture like that, so I want them to be like something like flashed up on a screen, and there are things that do have to work, things formally that need to happen for that to carry over. The reason why my answers are so long is that those terms touch on really deep problems that I want to think about in the practice. So that's why they generate all this other stuff. So coherence is something I think about a lot, or what's at stake in coherence, why did Fried want to insist on the self-contained-ness of that aesthetic experience? Why was it so imperative to do that? 1.25.02

And how come, in the theatricalization of subsequent practice, that began to include socialized bodies, and sexualized bodies, and these kind of things, how come losing that wasn't too high a price to pay? What's at stake with coherence? It's very interesting to me how, especially at the moment, and to bring back to the way certain aspects of contemporary culture, because again I think Fried's conversation about absorption is so much to do with ideas of public, and publicness, and the emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France of art as a category, as opposed to 'the arts'. It's related to the museum, and to criticism, and so on, and this is something that could be on its way out. We've got this increasing privatization of public space, where at Central Saint Martins today, the only bit of public space you

would have walked across on your way there was the road as you crossed it, the rest of it is owned by private interest. We've got the literal privatization of public space, in the city; we've got similar things online; we have the erosion of the distinction between producer and consumer, all of those kind of things. These are things that these questions are attached to, and that's why I think it's interesting asking about coherence, and painting in the 60's is different to asking in the 80's and so on. So I don't claim to know exactly what the relationship is, but I want to have that in the room as a question.

But I suppose, and this was the thing I was going to say about painting and abstraction, is that we've got this globalised art world, biennale, art fair complex or whatever you want to call it, and the historical language of modernist abstraction at the moment - regardless of what you want to do with it, or I want to do with it - is being used as high commodity, and the very effects that I'm talking about. Whatever your intentions are they always have a double use. One use of this kind of thing is paintings being served up as a sort of slice of plenty. That's what they signify very often, plenitude. And they're just taken, not just on a formal level, I think it's a bit more complicated than that, because I think paintings relationship to it's grounds is really in question in a way right now, that it hasn't been for quite a long time. For instance I think there's a relationship with art to just the bold data of commerce, and some artists would dismiss this as art world stuff and not want to talk about that, but I think it's naive to say that. 1.28.55

Paintings show up on various grounds, not just the ground of the contemplative aesthetic space of the gallery. It is just as often the ground of the art fair booth and in that situation the gallerist is often more like an artist, arranging and structuring these things. It is not that you lose those important types of experience we've been talking about, that most of us who are doing it value, and that there is an attempt to conserve - it's not that you lose those, they're still there, or otherwise I don't think any of us would be doing it, we'd give up and go home. But now they're existing with these other sorts of things, and I don't think you can ignore that.

But the way this happens is quite nuanced, and delicate, and all of these things are attached to those sorts of questions about coherence, and rightness, and pleasure, and who uses it for what? It always gets put to work in some way.

Alison: And not every artist will get the opportunity to see their work in those contexts, or even want to see their work in those contexts. So how you think about your work in that context might change over the lifetime of your career as an artist,

so how your work adapts to that type of addressing is also interesting as well.

1.32.30

Stuart: It's where the animal print came from - I was reading Pierre Bourdieu about taste and distinction, and was thinking this is like a marker of difference. I say that's where it came from, it didn't it came from the London markets, you find yourself taking photos on your phone and stuff, and you think after a while 'why am I taking photos of these things all the time, when it's nothing like my work?' but then it started to come in and so on, and I started to read that in relation to other things, like this painting here with the *ébauche* ground. One thing I suppose that maybe I'm thinking of when I think about what I'm going to do, or what I'm going to push more, is maybe that I see some limitation in thinking about painting recently has been the way that the history of modernism has been figured in a somewhat shallow way, - post war really - especially abstraction, rather than this quite convoluted thing with deep historical roots.

That's why French academic painting is so interesting to me, because you've got this whole pedagogic apparatus of the Academy that was totally yoked to Imperial structures, and orientalism, and those sorts of things, so there that idea of the exotic, and the seductive, all of these things are totally part of how painting gets used in that culture. There's noble kinds of uses, but so often the painting has to play the role of the seducer, so rather than ignoring that or not wanting that, and also not wanting to uncritically embrace that, but trying to include that somehow in one's thinking. And I guess battling against that impulse to illustrate these things, maybe this is the need for a lot of time, to digest that in such a way that can be articulated at a material level, and left as a sort of residue in some way. The worry is that's not apparent to anyone else. (laughter) It's like a comedian that might repeat something in a certain tone of voice, and it's funny because of that difference in cadence, and you have to know the conversation to pick that up. So I've got some faith in that. So you test it by having people round. 1.35.33

Alison: Exactly. The thing is it's kind of that community thing as well though, when you start you have this small community that start to understand that dialogue, that cadence, then it has potential to go and expand. That's why in a way, you talking about your series, the potential of a series is that that cadence is then amplified, or gets a chance to be echoed. 1.35.52

Stuart: Yeah, pretty much. And I think what you're saying is also really important about not everyone gets to see their work in a context world-wide, because if you get

the chance to do this or that more often, then these things we're talking about happen more quicker, and if they don't happen at all, then these things don't happen at all, and it's the difference between, and this is why it's a bit misrepresentative to say these peoples voices are being heard, and these people over here, their voices are not represented, as if we've all got a voice prior to

such representation - we don't, our voices get produced in the doing it. So that does bring you back to the politics of who does get to do it as well, and it's hard work to bring these things into a conversation about painting I find, because it very often wants to go back to what are apparently purely painting issues I suppose.

Alison: Yes, painting issues are practice, are being a person in practice. 1.36.58

Stuart: Exactly, exactly. And I think every sort of 20 years, like in the 80's, where we see a cultural desire to go back to 'business as usual' kind of thing. Talking about having people round, and testing things out, you know Philip Allen, he came round and said, and I took it as a compliment when he said this "I feel like it's a bit like being in a restaurant, and you've served me some meat, and I'm not sure, it seems like it's not cooked properly, but I'm not sure if it's supposed to be like that or not, and I'm thinking it doesn't seem quite right, but I've got a feeling that's how it's supposed to be". And I thought that's kinda good, that's the reaction I want. I realized that's a good reaction to have, but not an easy one to get across. Phil is a sympathetic viewer!

Alison: You have answered this next question already, but I will ask it anyway. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of your finished painting away from it? 1.38.44

Stuart: Yes, we've done that.

Alison: Have you ever experienced a sense of absorption, or self-abandonment from another artists painting, or another work of art? 1.39.11

Stuart: There's lots of things I could talk about with that one. But I don't want to give you like 'this is why Poussin is so great, because I got really absorbed'; I want to try and say something more. 1.39.43

Alison: Is there a particular work that created or had such an effect that, I don't know, that was perhaps pivotal? 1.39.58

Stuart: I guess the painting that I go to see at the moment, that I'm due to go and see

for a look is 'Madame Moitessier' by Ingres. It's a painting I think about in lots of ways, there's the postcard on my shelf at home, and the books I'm reading around that.

Alison: So what is it about this painting? 1.40.42

Stuart: It's interesting to me that yeah there's the painting, but there's all these other things, there's the postcard, there's the writings, there's what surrounds the painting, and all that cuts through it. So Adrian Riffkind's book on Ingres, which is brilliant, it's called 'Ingres, then and now', and he talks about how Ingres was a really interestingly paradoxical sort of figure, and in a lot of ways an arch conservative in trying to make this pure classical gesture, but at the same time he's almost a social realist painter like Manet. Madame Mortissier's dress he had to change it, update it because it took so long to make the painting, like 12 years or something on and off, and by then the dress had gone out of fashion. And the weird architecture in his paintings that's kind of classical, but it's like the Arcades, so there's this really weird mix, and a large part the interest in his works is in these compromised things about it you know they're just so far from being identical to his intention. And I really like that because there's really something on both sides of the spectrum of the apolitical, romantic artist who wants to be just expressive, there's a sort of delusion about intentionality there that would just transfer into the work as significance and be siphoned out the other end by an audience. And then there's maybe what would be a naive, self-styled politically radical position, which just thinks good intention will transfer into an effect in the world. Both seem not really adequate, and in the end not really liveable, because there is the idea that the works are shot through with more things. This is an argument about authorship really.

So the painting itself in the National Gallery is something in particular about that one, because the other one next to it, which is of an amazing portrait too, but Madame Mortissier, that painting has a really amazing surface, and it really is like a beautiful eggshell or something, it's sort of satin, and it's not only because of the way the surface has been treated, it's to do with how it's been painted. How everything's been woven together in this miraculous way that he does. There's also a crack next to the face that if there's ever a perfect example of a spiral crack, it's absolutely perfect. There's probably a really significant pictorial detail about that painting that I don't remember, but I remember the spiral crack. And what's interesting to me pace Fried, is that the absorption for me doesn't happen in front of the work. Well it does, but it doesn't only happen in front of the work, and he really wants us to locate it

there, and not in any discursive way, whereas I think it becomes a figure of other things, attached, and then that reconfigures your seeing of it again, it becomes this palimpsests of all these different seeings. So that's the work at the moment. 1.44.15

Alison: So how often do you visit? 1.44.22

Stuart: Oh, I don't have a routine or anything. But that's the one at the moment.

Alison: So you've just answered his. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of another artists painting away from it? 1.45.55

Stuart: So I put those two together. Two for one.

Alison: So now I'm talking about constructing the painting beholder/spectator. If you have experienced absorption, or self-abandonment in painting practice as we mentioned earlier, and if you have experienced yourself as an absorbed spectator of your own work, does this effect how you consider the reactions of your artwork by another spectator? 1.46.24

Stuart: This is one I feel like speaking to in really practical terms. Looking at as much painting as you can, trying to figure out how they work, kind of knowing what would be necessary to make something function, and in that way yes you're testing it on yourself. And it's a bit like the way a music producer will mix a recording and listen to it. They say you should listen to it on as many different speakers as possible, like the most expensive in the recording studio, but then you should listen to it on a car stereo, and on headphones, because then you hear different things. So that practical element of being with the paintings, re-working them, trying them this way, that way, the other, that's really where I think, and I always say this to students. You can tell students, who have got something, but they haven't looked at much painting, and in their frame that is enough, but I think you need to go see what it can do. And I think in another way that's what's exciting about making art, just on that level, there's so much to do. It's funny the things people like about your work are sometimes the things you're not sure about. So there's this mixture, it's about what counts, it's not straight forward, like you think this is ok, it works, therefore this is what is going to make it work for others. And that's why I think showing is so important actually, because it is like hearing your voice on tape, it's coming back to you. I remember the first time I did a solo show, in the studio before that, fussing around and worrying about edges of the painting, it's like what happens there and there with these particular ones, and when it came to it that wasn't the thing that mattered at all about

them. And I saw that once I saw the show and thought no one's talking about the edges. (Laughter) It's important to care about the edges, but in what way that... and I'm looking at the edges of this one, and it's funny as we're talking I'm thinking of another painting. So we're focused on something else, but something comes from the periphery. But yeah, that's in just a really practical sense. Almost a test, like a process of trial and error, and testing, and showing is part of that. 1.49.28

Alison: So conversely, would you fight any feeling of self-abandonment? 1.49.56

Stuart: Yeah, totally, at certain times you could just be deceiving yourself, or you can be enthralled to an effect, and what you're doing is just really indulgence. There's a whole series of paintings I did around 2007, a years worth of work, and they're fine, and I had been really struggling since leaving college. I'd taken two and a half years in here, and I hadn't shown my work at all, and I wasn't showing it to anyone, not even inviting people round to the studio, but then I'd finally got it together enough to make some paintings and show them to people, but they still weren't right. They were achieved in the sense that they were paintings now, not just scraps, so I'd got that far, and they were beginning to be mine, but they were too eager to please. There was something about the surface, if you wrote down a list of things about them none of those things would have been bad things, in fact they might even seem desirable, but put together they just weren't right. And again that was a moment of seeing it, clearing the studio up, and they were quite small, and putting them up and getting people to round taught me that I'm going to have to strip a lot away for them to be right. Their being right might not coincide with a feeling of rightness in me. So there's a presumption that that would be symmetrical, like this feels right therefore its right. I found that actually not to be true. They needed almost to be a disjuncture. So that's an example of very definitely fighting it, well afterwards. Made all the work, but then realized. 1.52.19

Alison: You talked about your slow process, so that time was probably the route you had to go? 1.52.27

Stuart: Yes, definitely. I haven't got an answer to this at all, but this one thing that's really hard about teaching, is that it's really important to go the scenic route, as an artist. You know, go round the houses, otherwise nothing's really yours. But then maybe it's good if you can give people a little bit of direction, but at what point do you say no it's important for them to make this for another year before they realize, because the temptation is to 'put them straight'. It's difficult.

Alison: Have you, or do you ever construct or position the spectator/beholder in your painting practice? 1.53.39

Stuart: I suppose yes, in so far as they are conceived as groups and that's very much a sense of constructing the spectator. And being conscious of what I'm really interested in is constructing sorts of modes of attention, and in a way the real focus of the practice is the difference between those modes of attention. So between this one, and that one you carry something of that one to that on. That's the real thing and you need more of them. You need several paintings to do that, that's why they're not all one painting of a particular type. So I'm mindful of not trying to construct the spectator, but construct some kind of situation that, I don't even know if I want to say spectator, or what the best word is? 1.54.32

Alison: Yes, there I've used spectator because Hal Foster he talks about the spectator. 1.54.48

Stuart: Spectator sounds more static than I want.

Alison: Right, because there are so many terms that we could pick up and make our own. 1.54.57

Stuart: But it's interesting isn't it? I've only just realized that as I'm saying it, that spectator sounds like someone standing still, and I actually think of people moving, from one painting to another, and it seems more architectural in the way, closer to a kind of architecture.

Alison: So a spectator would almost be sat down in front of a screen, an audience would be more of a group of people; a beholder suggests maybe one person? 46.19

Stuart: Beholder sounds like an eye, this vision? But yeah, I think something more architectural. So trying to construct that situation, because I think leaving space for the spectator to construct themselves is maybe the key difference between maybe the Fried model, where there's a universality to it. It's funny with Fried, I think he's a sophisticated guy, so he's not going to be as crude as that, but in a way it kind of comes back to that, inadvertently maybe. There is in his models, refusals of certain sorts of particularity, they end up with a particular ideal of the spectator. I wonder is there anyone like that? 1.56.34

Alison: Anymore? 1.56.40

Stuart: Was there ever anyone like that? It's this thing about ideals that actually

aren't liveable, because that's not what it's really like, I don't know? Ideals and norms are intertwined.

Alison: So this relates to what you have just said. If so, do you or have you found yourself working in a particular way in order to consider the beholder, to construct this relationship or anticipate it? So you've discussed the series as perhaps constructing? 1.57.20

Stuart: Yes.

Alison: Does it anticipate? 1.57.24

Stuart: Yes, but it's quite early days for that, it's quite nascent, and again this has to do with when you get to do it like that, but that bit of the practice I don't get to do much. This is what the possibility of having a bigger studio, which I'm thinking about at the moment, would mean - maybe I could do that more. I think might that be really important? In terms of artists like yourself come round, they understand, but then fast moving art world people they don't always. And that's not a slight on them, it's just they have needs and you have to consider that. I think actually, can I make what I'm doing visible so those people can actually see. It's alright when you see people who have loads of exhibitions, and install shots behind you, and you can say here's how it looked in a pristine gallery space, and they'll think oh great, we'll have that. But when you're trying to convince somebody of that, you have to do it yourself somehow, and that might be through shows, and it might be through conversation, but that kind of way of not just working within the frame, working somehow around that is just as much a part of it. 1.59.15

Alison: Considering this address to the beholder do you consider 'pictorial unity', or other particular modes of address to the beholder as part of your painting process, if so please describe? You did hint about this. 1.59.30

Stuart: Yes, done unity, but the pictorial is interesting. About what picture is, or what an image is. I was talking about this with Mick Finch, and he was saying what the fuck is an image anyway? We need to think about that. What do we mean? I think there's a sort of register of the relationship between the image, the pictorial, and the material, a particular sort of meshing of that that I'm interested in. I think for me it's like an example of how I don't really make a separation between the physical and the digital in that kind of way because I think, there's another book WJT Mitchell's 'The Reconfigured Eye', and I love that title because it's not just new things to look at, it's

an eye that has changed, a historical change. 2.01.09

Alison: Almost what Fried calls the shifting sensibility. 2.01.18

Stuart: Yeah, and he does actually cover that, he's worked really hard to include that and, still have this interlaced history, and I feel like it's hard work doing that. I've not read the Diderot book and stuff, I will do at some point, so I might be completely vulgarizing what he's doing. But looking at that painting again, again seeing something in the stuff as you're working, well there's things I'm seeing in that that you stop there that I think are quite particular to a digital kind of space, the way that we've got this surface, this coming from behind, this going over the top, it's like a Photoshop space. They're not abutted, they're not layered, they are one thin plane, and that's a particularly digital space I think, and that wasn't what I set out to do but that's a kind of recognition in the process that comes from other sort of visual apparatuses, so you can use the same materials as Titian, but obviously we've got very a different history, and that's really exciting.

So this thing about the image and pictorial that was what was interesting about where that sits, because of course there's the meta question of how very sort of material based, object based practices of high modernism become objects of history, and circulate as images of themselves in some way, to work in that way now you're working with those images, even if you might think you're doing the same thing, that's always part of the way the work is going to operate and how does that change things? How does that change what sort of decisions you make. You might want to resist that. And this is something Simon Gallery would say I think, that he's trying to resist that, and hold that space open long enough to try and do something with that. I'm not resisting that in the same way, for me the idea of paintings circulating in symbolic economies has got into the guts of the work somehow in another way. So there's all sorts of different relationships to that I think that I think come down to the fact that those categories, when you look closely at them complexify and break apart. And there's all sorts of interesting linguistic differences, like they don't say picture in France, they don't say painting either, they've got the verb, peinture, but they say tableau, and that term cuts across theatre and photography, film and painting. Fried's picked up on that from Jean-François Chevrier, and that's a really interesting idea, because to me it partly accounts for why people like Simon Hantaï, Daniel Dezeuze, and Christian Bonnefoi and all those artists continue to paint post-war in the way that they did. Whereas in a way to be critically engaged in the States, not always by any means, quite often, meant a refusal of painting because of the

version of painting that has been constructed there - although Greenberg was still quite a powerful force in France apparently which I didn't realize until quite recently. But it must count for something that there's a history of that, that there wasn't a sense of Painting with a capital P in quite the same way, and there wasn't this kind of medium specificity that was premised on the material format of painting quite a formal categories that were very strictly policed. So I think that's quite interesting, because with an idea like tableau, the whole thing of opens out into thinking of sorts of encounter, ways of looking, modes of address, and all of that that seem quite different, and in a way that's where I look for a way out of always being bounced back to Greenberg and Fried with painting, because frankly I couldn't do anything with it anymore. I couldn't include the things I care about with that schema. And in the same way I couldn't do anything with, and there was a lot of work I admired in the 90's, people like David Reed I think was interesting, and all sorts of people working with abstraction and digital space in kind of in a syntactical way, but I didn't think I personally could do anything with that either. So the 'As Painting' catalogue from the show at the Wexner 2001 was where I first found Hantai's work, and that whole milieu of French artists. It should be back in print, its crazy that it isn't really.

2.07.17

Alison: Yes, it should with more colour pictures as well. 2.07.24

Stuart: Well they would love to do it with full install shots.

Alison: They have them? 2.07.34

Stuart: Yes, they're brilliant.

Alison: You've seen them? 2.07.36

Stuart: Yes but not for long, and on a laptop. It's just getting it done. Laura Lisbon and Philip Armstrong would actually have to do it and they're busy and it's hard. It's annoying because it's a really important book, and MIT Press should realize that. It's out of print. And it's amazing the people you speak to who have never heard of it, I think sometimes 'you of all people I thought would know', but they don't know and they don't realize how much of what is around now owes to that show ... You know Campoli Presti Gallery? Miguel Abreau in New York are kind of twinned, they share a lot of artists. Miguel Abreau would know it, and that whole scene of artists, so it did spawn a lot. But these questions of what an image is, or what pictorial is, I feel like they're the things that I encounter as problems in the material business of making

paintings, rather than a priori categories that I work with. They are the things in the way that somebody gets stuck on. An sometimes that getting stuck is, if I can hold that, in a way, and make that available to others, seems to me like an interesting thing to do. Rather than working it out, and presenting my masterful solution.

Alison: So now we're now talking about the painter-beholder/spectator. Would you consider or describe yourself as a privileged beholder at any time: before, during, or after your painting process? 2.09.10

Stuart: Well I suppose I would ask why the moment of creation would be privileged as the most salient, hermeneutic point? Why? And I would just raise that as a question. It's not clear to me that it's self-evident. I mean generally no. People are interested in what the artist says, and what the artist does, and I think that's not stupid, that makes a lot of sense. And there is this relationship between somebody's work and their life, we've spoken about it quite a lot, but whether that is the same thing as the content of the work is difficult. Those things can be brought into, I suppose I would say want to talk in maybe the way Stuart Hall talks in terms of his methodology of cultural studies. He always talks about articulation, I'm going to bring this into contact with this, they are articulated temporarily and then they might come apart again, so I think there's all sorts of interpretive communities, and these sorts of approaches, but I'm more from a banal level. I think there's too much evidence that artists too often are the worst interpreters of their work. Like 'My god you mean that!?' how many times have you thought that's so interesting what you're doing, and they tell you what they think of their work, and you think 'Oh my god' you're just the most reconstructed naive romantic, you're indulging yourself, and you just hit on something and the painting's far more interesting than that. Well maybe that happens to me too! But also for me that's part of trying to have some faith in the work, hoping it can do more than I can. This is not because I've got a kid now, but I was thinking this before I had kids, but those paintings I have told you about before were kind of over parented in the way that I was just trying to control every aspect of their lives. But if you let them go out, and do their own thing, and then they come back to you as people you only half recognize, everyone is happier, because you get to have a real relationship, they get to have to have a real life, and no one's expecting anything back from anyone else. Its funny Michel Foucault said people think I'm against power, that I think people should be allowed to do whatever they want, that's not quite what I'm saying. People think that if I had kids they'd be allowed to draw on the walls, they certainly would not! (Laughter) I think that's really true. 2.12.35

In some senses, in some conversations I think it would be a privilege, if we were talking, that's why I think when you're talking to artists it's different, because you can have a conversation with other people, people working with painting, and it's almost as if you're talking like to people working in a guitar shop, and talking about different sorts of strings and what they do - but that's not how music operates in the world, it's not like that, the relationship of those involved is quite particular, and though I really value those sort of conversations, I don't think they're the same thing as the work. I think there are kind of broader, and in a way it's a bit of a mirage sometimes when those things become like mistaken for the content of the work, and I think that does come back to the political questions of who gets to show and when, because sometimes that's all we get isn't it? To be honest most of the time that's all we get, like I enjoy having people round here probably more than I enjoy showing, but I realize it's important to show, it's important to do these things that aren't possible unless you do that. But it's all a bit alienating at the same time, because how can I know effect of my work in culture. What is that? I may probably never know, unless you get a fucking coffee table book made about you, and even then you don't know because it makes you so insecure you don't believe anything. It's like your eye trying to see itself, and I do think that in that sense, for certain things it's not for the artist to say in the end, because culture gets used, art gets used, and I only use it in my limited way, and who knows how other people are going to use it? And anyway then you start to think about it the whole idea of a privileged reader is hierarchical. There are some reasons why some readings or viewings are more compelling than others, but I don't think it's like a family tree, but I always mindful of the fact that the artist is very often their own worst interpreters. I've been disappointed so many times. I mean you listen to someone like Ridley Scott, in an interview and he sounded like such a moron. I think, really, how can you be so... The funny one I like is the sort of games that Richter plays with Buchloh in those interviews - they are like the odd couple, he is sort of antagonizing Buchloh a bit, playing up, that's kind of funny, especially the bit where he says 'I think painting like music', and Buchloh says 'really, that's the most hoary, hackneyed way of talking about abstract painting there is, you can't possibly think that' and he replies 'well that is what I think' and you can tell he's winding Buchloh up. And Richter's always been evasive in that way. I think because he knows that if he's too at rest in his own position it's probably going to come off badly for the work. I suppose if I play the authority card, the card of the interpreter, it will misfire somehow. I think that's his way with dealing with that, it to be this kind of trickster. There's lots of ways of dealing with it, and he's aloof, which is as much probably to do with a way of coping with his massive fame, as it is in keeping some

space for himself more than anything else. I think that's where a lot of that comes from. It's his way of managing that. 2.17.43

Alison: Would you describe the experience of painting each painting as a unique occurrence? 2.17.53

Stuart: Yeah, and sometimes that's a bad thing, because you want to try something again and then: nothing. Even when you reduce the variables right down, unless you are using super industrial processes, materials don't quite behave the same way twice, and they can be made to a certain extent, but that requires maybe a limitation too far, like you would have to really focus, and so you can discipline materials to a point, but that slight lack of control is probably why most people who paint paint, because there's better ways of achieving consistency. So I don't think it's a magic that's inherent in painting, it's just if you want to be consistent there are better ways of doing it. Like just making a rule for yourself like I only do it this way, or you work like a sign painter like as consistently as you can, and a lot of people do paint in that way, or artists who make their work like a team, who have assistants or works that they just orchestrate, so there are lots of ways of working with painting that aren't down to the sort of idiosyncrasies of the artist alone in their studio. Someone like Peter Halley who works incredibly consistently in facture, really consistent. So that act of painting is a way of phrasing is based on some notion of a decisive moment, and that's not the only way of framing it, we might not think of it that way, we might think of it as a sort of spread, but I work in a way that does kind of include that, because I'm interested in that there's a relationship to gestural paintings, there's a relationship to improvisation, and even though it's contained in quite a way. You know we haven't really spoken about composition. 2.21. 29

Alison: You can, it's coming up. 2.21.37

Stuart: OK, but yes, some type of improvisation that I value, I set the thing up so it's not really consistent. I slacken the terms enough. Its like, again in music the notation would be adlib for a few bars rather than being really controlled.

Alison: Do you play a musical instrument? 2.22.05

Stuart: I play campfire guitar, yes that's my standard.

Alison: Andrea has a bass in her studio. 2.22.17

Stuart: Ah. When I was a student I played quite a lot, just autodidactic, but I learnt a

bit about music, and I'm interested in how it works, even though I can't read music.

Alison: Well you definitely sound like you should. 2.22.37

Stuart: You know I'm always when I'm teaching for using another music metaphor, but it's good because it's quite clear.

Alison: Well I know I picture songs as paintings, there's an erratic not or... 2.23.07

Stuart: There's a really good thing on youtube. Somebody asked a question on Facebook about what's the Beethoven piece where there's a really atonal motif right towards the end just going over the main thing, but it's really radical because it's almost like a little bit of Schoenberg or something, but way before, and it's really unusual, and somebody knew the answer and posts a link to it. And it turns out there are all these Beethoven clips on youtube, but they're accompanied by graphical animations. There are all these coloured blocks, and they light up with the notes, so if it's chord five notes light, and it's really complex, it's brilliant. So if you just search Beethoven on youtube graphical thumbnails will come up in the search.

Alison: I'll have a look. 2.23.45

Stuart: It's great, in it's visualizing.

Alison: Yeah I'm coming across the music thing quite a lot. I used to be a bit if musician so... 2.23.59

Stuart: What did you play?

Alison: Well guitar, flute, saxophone, in a choir. 2.24.04

Stuart: Oh blimey.

Alison: So yeah, I get that totally. 2.24.15

Stuart: It's funny about the stretcher bars in this painting coming through. I'm reluctant to do that in a way because there's a whole strand of painting referring to itself that I'm actually not interested in, but I know comes in immediately as soon as you do that, but what really makes me do that is like someone playing the guitar, but hitting the instrument, like using the whole instrument to make the sound, that's kind of like the whole object of the painting. That's what that is, but I know it does that other thing that I don't want it to do, but tough. 2.25.00

Pause for a break.

Alison: One thing I've been thinking about considering this address to the beholder, do you consider pictorial unity or other modes of address? When I discussed it with Simon he said pictorial, that's not relevant to me, and I said ok, maybe think of in terms of composition then, because that's how I was thinking about it in relation to tableau in relation to abstract art that like you say doesn't represent a conventional ideal of the picture, so in that respect then do you consider that whole thing of unity with composition in mind? Is that some sort of balance? 2.28.06

Stuart: Yes, definitely. I remember thinking about Judd's negative characterization of composition, you know a bit up here, a bit down here: it's quite important that my paintings weren't compositional in that sense. That's why they may have a pictorial unity, but there's an implication that there's a field that could extend. Not always, but then there's another one of those, and sometimes the repetition does something, and renders the ground, it relativises them, so showing three of those in a row kind of disrupts that. So these are things are always gradated, that's one where I would explain it, that fits the bill perfectly, and this is one that sort of doesn't. They're always gradated. 2.29.27

Alison: They're like a sliding scale? 2.29.34

Stuart: Yes, and with composition I guess that's a difficult one as well. I suppose I think about articulation again, about how they join up with one another, and for me thinking about the architectural situation they're in as being the site of composition in a way. Because I can think of ways I somehow need to make these more singular and basic even, because I think by not having a gallery space to work into, the longer I go like that, the more I feel myself working into the interior of the painting, that's not a bad thing per se, except that it is for me. So again, there are things other people do like that that I could never do. So I start thinking I need to factor that into the new work in different ways, use bigger implements more, or work flatter more, or maybe just prepare more canvases in the beginning so I can be really disposable with them. So in a way that's like composition, but very often in the studio there'll be a collection of paintings and there won't be one hanging up there, and I'll look around the group and it will imply...

Alison: Next. And... 2.31.20

Stuart: Yeah, and that's totally based on the studio, but it is a way of generating something.

Alison: A sentence, or a story, a narrative? 2.31.34

Stuart: It is and it isn't, because it is in here maybe, but this order might never be shown together, but in here it might be a way of going 'Oh right' with these in this configuration there's a space for an implied something very bright, or very dense, and it might begin with something as simple as that. There are loads that get chucked out.

Alison: Going back to what I was asking about painting as a unique occurrence. Do you or have you found yourself trying to replicate specific experiences encountered from previous painting sessions in new paintings? 2.34.43

Stuart: It's interesting hearing it put that way 'recreating an experience', because more usually you'd be asked about recreating an effect because I'm not sure what recreating an experience would do for maybe anyone else, apart from me. But they entail one another maybe in some way? There are things I've tried to do that I can't replicate, but I'll qualify that by saying maybe I can't be bothered to do what it really takes to replicate it. You could, but say something happened in this painting that was like a real chance thing. To replicate it you'd have to get 20 stretchers and just focus on that till you could do it, I'm sure you could do it, but I can't be bothered to do that, I'm not interested enough in that. It's not to say that it's just a one in a million and it can never be re-done, it's not about that, it's about the trade-off in doing something else, but I think it's like anything else that there might be a half thought that you'd had, almost gone near something and you do it, but again there's a repetition, a reiteration in making that I think needs to be some element of that otherwise you're reinventing the wheel every time. That's not what I do, in keeping some parameters fixed for now, so you can work on other things. Recently somebody else was asking questions about the work 'If you were maybe able to somehow map all the parameters of the work, everything's moving, everything is in flux, it's just some things are moving very, very slowly, like this format has been stable for a few years, but that might not be the same in five years. That's moving very slow, but stable for now, so what happens in relation to that can register, can be seen. It's a way of creating some contingency, fluidity without cutting the ground out from beneath itself entirely, into total paralysis. Part of that involves some good old-fashioned experimentation, where I try this, and then try it again a slightly different way, and I think that's probably common to a lot of makers of all kinds. It's a craft you need to pay attention too, and learn something about. What you need to learn and how much you need to do is going to totally depend on what you're doing. We don't all need the

same things. That's why art schools are so heterogeneous now; we're not all learning in the same way. That's the interesting thing is what becomes the demands of ones own works, what the work starts to require. 2.39.08

Alison: Claims on primacy could suggest that part of the desire or need to produce artworks for the painter is to be the first beholder, perhaps not to create the artist, but to create the beholder. Do you find an affinity with this statement, have you worked in a particular way to encourage becoming the 'absorbed' beholder, or does it develop differently for you? 2.39.44

Stuart: maybe I can't answer that one because that question would have needed me to answer the earlier questions about beholderness differently, and I think maybe the way I've answered those means that I've answered between five or six earlier questions in a way, so I'm kind of copping out of that one. 2.40.31

Alison: Well I'm sure the others will have said something that you'll join in on. So we have covered a lot of ground here in relation to painting practice, but do you have anything more you wish to add, anything that comes to mind?

Stuart: No, but I've got a sense of some of the bits that might need nuancing in retrospect. I think that's a good thing to leave till the discussion. 2.41.10

Alison: Yes, like I've said, I see this is very much a start of a dialogue. Well thank you for your time Stuart.

## **Andrea Medjesi-Jones Interview**

**20th March 2015**

Alison: To set the context you might say the first question I am asking everybody could you describe your painting process including such things as mapping, planning, thinking, making, etc. 15.24

Andrea: OK, so painting process, it's interesting, because I don't really feel like a painter any longer, to some extent. It is an expansion of what, perhaps, paint can do. I think of it more than the process of applying paint. I was horribly frustrated just before I did my PhD because I had a very good ethic of coming to the studio and making paintings almost every day. I realised that that wasn't taking me anywhere, because I was either making quite habitual decisions and a lot of the time I was making work that was just for the works sake. I think the PhD helped me a lot just to realise that the time in the studio doesn't necessarily mean the time that you make work. It is also a time to think about work and to look at things. I look at things a lot, like off-cuts lurking on the studio floor and making connections, visual connections between things that are already in the paintings and basically the stuff that's just left over. I think that has a potential language that I can work with. But thinking actually happens in between places too, you think on the train or on the bus, so in some ways that aspect of the work I'm doing now is quite perceptual, because I think and make links between certain visual and material properties and use the studio to test them out.

Alison: Do you find your record thoughts in any way? Many people keep sketchbooks. Do you keep sketchbooks? 17.52

Andrea: No I can't I have tried and I always feel really, really bad not having them, but I keep off-cuts and I collect things, just objects to look at and get me going. And all so I do like reading a lot, and I find it really frustrating when I can't, and am almost forced to come to the studio without having had that relaxation and reflection time, you know with the work. And I think I usually find that that in books, but it is not just high theory, it can be sometimes just a small sentence in a book. And also you know I think it is almost like what is possible and what isn't possible in the realm of words, not just in the studio, but without that and I'm not necessarily referring to making a statement of new things or statement of contemporary things, but just sort of thinking about how you can reinterpret some of the things that you kind of know, but you don't want to know. You want to break it down you want to take part some how. So it's a process that when it works well I'm really chuffed because I think 'yeah'. When

it doesn't, and we have that too when it out of kilter it is the most frustrating thing ever, so it is basically it's about a balance of these separate components, and other times just the sheer frustration of how do I get to the balance. And I realise the other day that you make a piece of work, and that just took that long to make back, actually it is not about that it's a certain specificity of that work, it couldn't have been any other thing because once you actually make a piece of work that you're not happy with you can almost realise that. That is exactly what I don't want. I think most of the time when I make work that I know it is not going to get me anywhere, I have to go through it, in order to come back.

Alison: What do you do, I mean obviously you've got the off-cuts do you have a pile of work that you go back to? 20.32

Andrea: Yes, literally I will. This is the painting I cut up about a month ago, and I worked on it for three, it just wasn't going anywhere so I put it away and sort of lose that preciousness lose that kind of attachment, and then just take the parts that I think may potentially work and play around, and I always have a few stretchers just lying about that I can just quickly use. You know my went to Rome last year, and then when I got back I didn't have a space so I was working in my room and believe it or not I made some of my best paintings in there as well, because it's about a limit, it's what I can and what I can't do. I cannot, in a small room put a massive canvas. Now I knew I always would have to find another studio, and I was just adjusting a process, but it was so interesting because I then decided that right you cannot work with ten colours, you're going to have to work with two. So these decisions really, really helped me, because sometimes you just get too fancy, too spectacular, I want to put it all in.

Alison: Would you describe how you feel during what could be called the genesis of a painting, perhaps recalling a painting you considered successful? Is there any particular seminal painting? 22.11

Andrea: There are quite a few actually that I felt in terms of how they just cemented a language perhaps, but equally perhaps provided me with completely new ideas for new bodies of work. And, frankly, those paintings are usually done on the hoof. So it's just 'let's put this together'. I have usually, quite a methodological approach in terms of how I layer them up, so before even then I act on it, I don't sit on it. I don't ever sit on a painting. If I feel if I am in the studio, and if I'm in a position to do something about it, I literally get on with it and do it. And I think 'ok, I want a layer of this colour, and I want then a masking tape in this spot inter-linked with this and that

will be it and I'll see what happens. It sometimes works, sometimes it doesn't work. When it does work you know (sound of a finger click) you're onto something. Other times I give paintings a long gestation period. When I was leaving for Rome I left some paintings sat in the studio for six months, and for some reason I didn't get rid of them, knowing that its almost like there is something germinating there that I would be able to perhaps to pick up, but if not it didn't really matter. When I got back, and when I was pushed for space, I looked it and thought 'ah just go with it' you know, start interpreting and do things that you wouldn't necessarily consider in the previous body of work. And it paid off. So I always think that for me, when something really interesting happens in the work, it's a matter of just literally getting on and doing it, and being very much in the moment with that. And if it does work it's very much obvious in an instant. Sometimes it's a gut feeling, other times it's just basically a bit like diagrammatic thinking, this diagonal worked for me you know, its like layers of a cake, you put this, that and the other on top. So from your gut, yeah you just go for it, but equally you kind of have an assumption, some prior knowledge as to how materials can operate and behave. And something happens; there is always a slippage there. So it does sound like a recipe doesn't it? 24.53

Alison: It does, but obviously not something like a regimented plan, but like you say you know that materials don't always behave, so if you're talking about the cake analogy, different eggs or different milk, things are going to change, but hopefully at the end of it you'll end up with an edible cake. 25.20

Andrea: You'd be surprised that it sounds so basic, but it is sometimes as basic as that. For instance the temperature was so temperamental in my studio that the surfaces that you'd thought would work didn't. In the summer they would work, because it was hot, but in the winter not. And it wasn't the matter of giving it drying time, it was basically about having the instant drying time. You know with acrylic, or with pigment it just has that point of being dry, but you can still do something with it, and it would still combine itself into another surface or layer. You couldn't do that in the winter. So it's that frustration of what's going on, I can't do this. And being astute to that, realising I mustn't be too temperamental with the work. I have to follow it through properly, and that doesn't always happen, I try and cut corners, but you know...?

Alison: We're human beings.

Andrea: Exactly.

Alison: Could you talk about how much of your process is planned? How you may use a system or how much is arbitrary. 26.38

Andrea: In the current work there is a definitive with a system that I find it really difficult to cope with at the moment, because I used to rely on the visual experience of looking at the painting, and responding to it, so it mainly be would in relation to an image, but the current work is not premised on an image, but it is very much based on a process of pouring the paint, taking and washing the paint away or even the pigment away, and then using the fringing, but you kind of have an idea that you know where the fringing is going to go apply it and it doesn't work. So to some extent what needs to happen is you have to have some gravitational pull as to what that is necessary for that painting to be functioning, or what does it do? What does it rely on? And that doesn't happen instantaneously for instance, and that takes a long time and you can't just go and say put a bit of red on it, because that doesn't solve anything. So at the moment it's slightly frustrating in that in some ways they are quite systematic, but I have to look at them for a long time and then just play, just be silly, apply the fringes, take the fringes off, make more fringes, and take them off. They are really physically demanding because to actually make each layer if you like, a strand of it or gesture of it – it's pretty much gesture to me, you don't know how long, how short, so you really have to be quite systematic. Even to the point where I have to measure them up. I never do that, I never measure anything before in my life, but that's a new demand. And when I was doing this one the other day I thought yeah I'm just going to leave it, and I was working on a premise. Like a previous one I'm just going to put felt around it, and then I looked at it an thought yeah, alright – it didn't work at all. So I just took a pair of scissors and started cutting it and that was it. And what I put in place, if it doesn't work, it's fine. Just make another one. And to me that helps. I've given myself permission to fail, and through that find what is not a failure but maybe a new departure in the work. 29.28

Alison: So you almost answered this. Does this process respond to how you feel the painting is developing? And you've said you allow yourself to fail, to keep making maybe finding new departures. 29.51

Andrea: I mean some experience is so frustrating and you can go on for months, and I have done. And it just doesn't come off the ground. And then you know that at some point the work will give. It has to give because you invested in that. You've tested so many times, and you've hated it for so long, that at some point, it needs to resolve, but that's why I think we come to the studio. You can't do that anywhere

else. And that's why I refer to doing my PhD as the starting point to the actual process. 31.27

Alison: How has this process developed, especially in relation to your past experience of painting what you considered successful paintings? 31.38

Andrea: Again it sounds apparent, but it happened in the studio, and when, I always refer to making, when I make paintings I do leave traces, and I love observing those traces. Those traces, in effect, is something that is present and still part of the work, but for some reason got discarded, edited out, and the reason it got edited out is because either the painting was leading the other way, or I had different ideas about it. But when I've actually stopped to look at all these different elements that were finding their way onto the floor, that were finding their way into different paintings, I realised that all these fragments I was looking at, are actually being composed within the practice, into the painting that's to come. So pretty much, the way that for instance I think about the fringing, and the way that came about is because of what was left. When I was doing a painting 2 years ago, just before I went to Rome, and I was stretching a canvas, there was a strip of canvas that was frayed, and I thought this painting is not doing anything for me at this point and so I just took this frayed bit and applied it. You know, when nothing works and then... And then I realised ok, but in some ways that process of it being on the floor had somehow been put in place, for a particular reason. And because they were always about, I talk about composing these fragments, and these references coming together, I have to think quite randomly as to how perhaps what may and may not work, so you have to test. I always have things that I can put in place. Like these things (showing a collection of off-cuts), this is what I'm referring to. This will be lying on the floor, and I'll be going ok, is there a painting. And now it's just a matter of interpreting it, either on a larger scale or trying to emulate some of the marks. I usually pick a small detail that I would like to operate in a painting. So effectively everything feeds from the work. I thought you do not have to think about context, you do not have to think about subject matter any longer. You can just diversify that. It just becomes about the work. 35.04

Alison: How do you know how well a painting is developing? Is it the case that you are aware to everything you are thinking, or does this understanding come more from a sub-conscious level? 35.14

Andrea: I think it's very material again. I hate over working my materials, and I know when I've done that, and usually it's my own incompetence. It's true. You know, you pour the paint layer down, and it's just too much, it's too dark. My rule of thumb is if

you lose the light in a painting, you're always going back on yourself, so try and keep it light for it to become dark. So you are walking through the shadows of painting. So basically it's always material that I have a good response from to. I've become really good at just letting it be, and going out of the studio. But it's not good on my credit card because I go shopping. (laughter) I don't want this to come across as a negative thing, but I think that for me painting is a lot to do with time, and the understanding of boredom. Because something happens very quickly in a painting that can be very easily lost, and you have to deal with yourself with this idea that I'm going to have to be bored for two days now before I tackle it. 36.45

Alison: So you wouldn't be like someone who spends a year on one painting? 36.54

Andrea: No I couldn't do that, although I really admire people that can do that, particularly representational painters who can spend hours on one work, I really admire that, but I can't. So this is what I find the hard and difficult bit. You have to leave. You mustn't act on it. You need time for reflection. You need to see it in a different light. You need to consider what it potentially could or could not do. I have to be quite strict with myself. And that's why I really sometimes find it difficult.

Alison: So you have strategies to distract yourself, put your thoughts elsewhere and then come back fresh to the work? 37.48

Andrea: Yes, and books too. And that's when I'm prepared to make serious incisions, cuts in the painting, literally cutting as you can see. For instance when I was doing this I thought I really like the surface, but it looks like a representational painting it could possibly go into a cartoony phase, I don't want that, so you have to stop yourself from acting in that direction, so then you step away.

Alison: So you have touched on this a bit, how does this differ from when you feel a painting is turning out successfully, to when a painting is floundering? 38.39

Andrea: As I've said, to me it is pretty instantaneous for me. If I get that first surprise, or if a painting starts to look in a way I've not seen it look before, I'm absolutely and totally excited by it, and then I know I have to run away. And then if a painting where you are just going over and over and over, something that you effectively should have got right in the first place, then I find that the painting is just going to be one of those to linger for months and months on end, and most likely it's going to end up being cut up, but something good will come of it. So it does or it doesn't work. I like for the materials to be very fresh, and very un-jaded by the process, and as soon as

the painting becomes clogged by too many actions in it, I feel I have failed, so I have to remove myself from it. For instance this one was a nightmare, it went on and on, and I think it's resolved, I think it's resolved, but for me it's not the best painting I've done. It's just one of those, you know. And I look at it, and you've got all the elements there that potentially make a good painting, but it's not a good painting. You are a painting. But there are some and you think yeah! I do believe in curating painting, when you put paintings in context. There may be an element in the current work that's going to offset this. One of the things I plan the work as well, for this idea of a room where I think how would one work differentiate from the other, so there's this sense of a partition, but not a sense of monotony. 41.23

Alison: Have there been instances where you have been pre-occupied by a painting away from the studio/workspace? 41.40

Andrea: It's the most interesting phenomena. There's nothing that can put you off normal living like a painting that's not functioning, because you go over it, and over it, and over it, and you're thinking what is it that doesn't make it? And you carry that with you, to home, to work, everywhere. It just eats at you, eats at you all the time. 41.57

Alison: Do you take photos on your phone of your work? 42.18

Andrea: Yeah, sometimes I do that and I look at it, and then you come to the studio and look at it, and you know what I think it's like a first love really.

Alison: That reminds me of a paper written about neuroaesthetics, where they have discovered by examining images of brain activity whilst looking at what they described as beautiful painting triggers a similar part of the brain as when we fall in love. Professor Semir Zeki hypothesizes that artists unknowingly tap into this reaction. So it was very interesting about what you said about that, well, love affair. 43.18

Andrea: Yes it is interesting. It makes you think that to some extent you kind of just have to let go, something always comes out of it inevitably. And even that experience of frustration is very important, because you can find out where you are the strongest in relation to that, and how you can refuse to resolve it in a way that is less good?

Alison: Like leaving a way in that is slightly contentious, because not all work follows the same route? 45.38

Andrea: Yeah, exactly I think a lot of time it's easy to believe this is the work, we all do, we're all contextualizing, summarising, and it's easy to believe that when you're perhaps talking about your relaying it to somebody else, but actually when you do things I think you do have to allow yourself space to walk out of all the theories you perhaps have about your work, because there is an inevitability of your own actions. You know, as I said sometimes I'm too heavy handed and I can't predict that, but that heavy handedness can influence the whole history of the painting and making in a way it may not just work. So I tend to be more forgiving about the ones that don't resolve. I cut them up somehow, maybe that's a resolution, but in a way I always know something good will come of it. It is a definitive strategy.

Alison: Absolutely. That's a good strategy to have. I think it allows you to keep on going.

Andrea: Yeah.

Alison: Otherwise if it was this love affair and it was a terrible ending, you wouldn't know a way back in, so that's very powerful.

Andrea: Yes, with reflection.

Alison: In the course of making a painting have you ever experienced a sense of absorption or self-abandonment? 47.22

Andrea: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. When I was making work that was much more performative, in terms of I worked on large scale, and had to create marks that were actually part of action. When I say that I don't want to compare it to abstract impressionism. You have to very quickly get the colour to the ground, and you have to very quickly make something in order to be able to react to it, and to push it somewhere else. And to some extent I felt that these works were somehow indulgent, and I allowed myself to be much more involved. The control wasn't the priority, it came later on to some extent, but it's a different body of work to what I'm working on now, that has different frustrations. But I always find a way to be very, very playful with it to start off with, and not to be always be so systematic as to completely kill the need to make a painting. Because I think that overt, systematic approach would kill the visual satisfaction. 48.50

Alison: At any point in your painting practice do you act as the beholder of your own artwork? And is this beholder absorbed in the sense that Fried describes? So more of a painting-beholder, rather than a painter-beholder. 49.17

Andrea: It's funny you should ask this because it links to my PhD. When it comes to this absorption, it really has always for me been about a thought, that I would not be able to think unless I made a painting that sparked. So for me that absorption, it is actually providing me with something I didn't know before, and to me that's usually something that is cognitive. It is provoked by the visual analogies, but it is definitely cognitive. It alludes to, it reminds of, it is just present, and I've never experienced that kind of presence before. Now I'm not saying that that is viewed from the point of either the viewpoint of being an artist, or observing it from an artistic background perhaps, but what I am saying is it just is. 51.00

Alison: So you've might have been absorbed by somebody else's work, but not in the same way as you are as an artist-beholder? 51.37

Andrea: Yes.

Alison: Have you encountered an embodied experience as a result of your painting process, or any other type of manifestation? And if so can you describe it? 52.08

Andrea: I'll start from answering it from the end tale. I think this is why I paint. I *really* think this is why I paint, because of that sense of unfamiliarity, and that's actually through the process of being in the studio and making paintings. It is obviously about excitement, but it's beyond excitement. To me it's about the intellectual growth, and sensual approach to who perhaps I could be in this world. It kind of defines the meaning in the instances of making, and I know that I have other experiences like playing the guitar is a different experience, listening to music is a different experience. Making something and having equally visual as well as cognitive response, I have never, ever come across in any other facet of life. So for me that is why I do it. It doesn't always necessarily manifest itself in one piece of work, or even a body of work, but it's an acknowledgment that it does happen, and it affirms the vitality of why you are here. So that's why you keep going basically. 54.40

Alison: So now I'm going to ask about absorption as beholder/spectator in the painting that is made. If you were to reflect on the act of painting, with reference to a specific painting, could you describe what the painting process gave you, or still gives you the painter? 55.20

Andrea: I remember one painting, poor 'Greta, it was 'Greta', and that was done almost three years ago. It was part of the PhD, in one of the books. When I approached the work, using some of the strategies, about the quickness of the work,

thinking through making, just barely, barely primed, the masking tape was later. So basically it was thought through; I'll do this, this, this, this, this, bang, stop. And there was a similar piece of canvas lying around, and I thought I'm going to put an eye down there and it's going to do something no painting has done before of mine. And I was excited, but not just on it's material levels, because I could discern all the processes I was involved with in previous work could find something new and challenging for the future to come, but also there was this pseudo social political commentary. So when I looked at it I thought actually reminds me of something, I'm from former Yugoslavia. And I was looking at it and some of this imagery actually reminds me of lot of the kind of statues and imagery that we grew up with, quite iconic, and I thought I like this. This is now operating on more than one level: I can talk about how it looks visually, I can talk about it materially, but I could also engage about it in terms of context and history and that's completely different. So that for me I don't think any other medium can do as well as painting, in the simplest of ways, because in some ways the simpler the gesture, the simpler the working methodologies become. From this kind of work a lot came through in terms of how I started thinking about this other facet that I need to consider within the making of the work that I've not had in my practice before, and that's where the research really comes in, for me it was irreplaceable in terms of you need to gather information, and when you gather the information you have a base of knowledge and whatever you do it's come from that point. And you can also find similarities between things that you wouldn't originally thought of, and that's I think maturing the painting as well, growing the painting, and learning, and I think sometimes you do have to go outside of your own self and find out what's been done before, who exactly are you looking at, how are you re-evaluating the whole process and how are you bringing it back to yourself, and thinking through it in a very different visual field. 59.40

Alison: After the course of making a painting have you ever experienced a sense of absorption or self-abandonment from the finished painting? 1.00.03

Andrea: Yeah, I guess in a way. Sometimes I make things and I wouldn't be able to cast a judgement on it or place it necessarily, so walking away from it and coming back to it can have a surprising reaction on my behalf, because there are instances when you think 'Oh I'm up to something, something really is happening' and then you come back to the studio and it's like, nothing. Other times you think 'it's absolutely not going anywhere' and then you come back to it and 'Ah, ok', there is a perspective to it that I have not explored. And I guess in that respect there would be some paintings, very seldom, but there are some paintings I would be more reactive

to once they've kind of left my interest to some extent. And I return to them and re-evaluate them, sometimes making different works and progressing, and then you look back and you think 'Ah, ok' I understand this much better.

Alison: But is this still very much from the perspective of the artist-beholder rather than a painting-beholder? 1.01.36

Andrea: Yes, it is.

Alison: You've answered this next question already, but I will ask it anyway. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of your finished painting away from it? 1.01.51

Andrea: Absolutely. And it's funny, there are some instances when I can't wait to go and see it again, or when I'm dreading to see it again. But still you go back. And a lot of preparation goes into this, mentally, going back to the studio. I know that when I come into the studio, the first couple of hours I probably won't be able to do anything. I have to find my way in. I have to find a very constructive way of not just going in and attacking something or approaching something without giving it a thought. And that thought doesn't always happen just by looking, sometimes it's like catching glimpses. This is why I have this big mirror. I absolutely adore looking at the paintings through the mirror. David Ryan and I have talked about this in the past, there is something really interesting that happens between coming too and walking away from painting, and I think we all have that, that you can develop certain strategies like; you must not look for a certain amount of time, and only then can you turn. But it's so important isn't it? 1.03.10

Alison: Yes it is, it's like a screen refresh on a computer or something? 1.03.47

Andrea: Yes, something like that. But also that suspension of judgment, you must not make a judgment quickly, you must keep that sort of environment open. I used to have two mirrors in my last studio, now I'm really loving this one because I can see the whole work. To me it's very, very helpful.

Alison: So that was talking about your experience of your own work. So have you ever a sense of absorption or self-abandonment from another artists painting, or any other work of art? 1.04.51

Andrea: Yeah, absolutely. One of the reasons I became a painter because that happened when I was really quite young? 1.04.52

Alison: Was there any particular moment? 1.05.00

Andrea: Yes. It was in the Museum of Modern Art in Belgrade, I was 13 years old and it was a school excursion, but I can't remember the name of the artist. I just remember that the painting was all green, it was grass green and it was referring to grass itself, but materially I think he was using some kind of artificial material that recalled grass. You come from a tradition of looking at a painting, but I had never seen this kind of thinking through material, and being able to represent something in a way that I'd never thought possible. But it gave me a fully formed experience of a certain atmosphere, and environment, and satisfaction that you could sort of call a spectacle of looking at something. But I was also titillated intellectually. I never thought this could work. I don't know who the painter was, but it doesn't matter, it's all about the memory. And also it's where there is that potential, painting and any other form of art, being able to provide that sense of discovery and acknowledgment. First there's an acknowledgment that you are in the presence of something that is not perhaps what you used to know, and then there's the imagination running wild, and the potential of what this could just be. 1.06.53

Alison: So have there been instances where you have continued to think of another artists painting away from it? So obviously that one did, do you still experience that today? 1.07.10

Andrea: I do think about that moment, maybe more specifically, like for instance Guernica's haunted me for 15 years. I've never been in a position to see the original, but for a good 15 years I was in absolute awe, well it wasn't awe because I hadn't seen it, but it's representation, which again says something about my work as well, and wanting to adopt that representational quality and the print quality. But again going back to painting ticking all those boxes, and ticking all those different experiences, visually for me it was composed of a level of perfection, of all these fragments coming together that I was absolutely absorbed by. And you had the political connotation. So I thought 'wow, it would be nice to be able to do something like that'. For a long time I thought that was how you needed to do it, illustratively, to go about a painting. After that and my PhD the penny dropped, no it doesn't need to be like that. You can think about it from different perspectives. But I think my obsession with that for 15 years, I made so many paintings in that vein that failed. 1.09.11

Alison: So the next question is about constructing the painting-beholder/spectator. If you have experienced absorption or self-abandonment in painting practice as we

mentioned earlier, and if you have experienced yourself as an absorbed spectator of your own work, does this effect how you consider the reactions of your artwork by another spectator? 1.09.58

Andrea: No I don't any longer. I think it's helped me a lot. I don't want to impress anybody any longer. I don't think about the paintings as something that I need to make to please, or provide any kind of aesthetic satisfaction. If anything, counter reaction to that. So what I would perhaps like a spectator to consider is the quality of the object they are looking at in relation to what it is. To consider the material qualities, how it is put together. But I would like to be stimulated, I would like to be able to stimulate somebody with my paintings in the same way that I get intellectually stimulated by painting. I do sometimes go out of my way deliberately with an aspect in paintings, that I know needs to be absolutely spot on for them to be considered, in my estimation, paintings. And I rely on peoples understanding and wanting to participate in that. Everything else is, left to interpretation, is let lose. This may sound controversial, although I don't think it is, but I think there is a very different experience of looking at a painting if you are visually already engaged, than if you come into it just for the sake of entertainment, something that I'm very much against. I don't think of art as entertainment. But I'm not a judge of that. In some respects it's there to speak on it's own merits. And for whatever reasons they do not engage with it, the acknowledgment of it in the world is ok. 1.12.37

Alison: So conversely, would you fight any feeling of self-abandonment? So is that what you were talking about, you avoid trying to plan to make this experience? 12.48

Andrea: Exactly.

Alison: similar although different. Have you or do you ever construct or position the spectator/holder in your painting practice? 1.13.15

Andrea: Positioning is something different, and something I am actually thing about at the moment, in the terms of should I have this position, but I do do that. And that has come through many years of being in the studio and being a practitioner, and I don't want to abandon that now, and by having a position that doesn't necessarily mean that I'm inflexible to that relationship, to what the work can bring, and how we can function outside, but I want to be very much now following my own research and being engaged with what I have unearthed over the last 20 years. That makes me really excited really, and the fact that I know there's something that I've been working

on, and I believe there's longevity in relationship to that, and if that's a position, then that's ok. 1.14.32

Alison: So this relates to positioning the spectator/beholder. If so, do you or have you found yourself working in a particular way in order to consider the beholder, to construct this relationship or anticipate it? 1.14.46

Andrea: There are strategies in place. Sometimes I'm thinking of curation or the bodies of work, and you think I'm doing this, but that one doesn't necessarily make sense in how perhaps a previous body of work had come across, has been put together, and how it's going to talk or even be understood from first my perspective and then perhaps the feedback I got. So there is a sense of being, maybe not strategic, but being considerate as to how you develop on from what you had done before, but within that there is also scope for playfulness, a scope for throwing people and myself, slightly off course. But I do that because I know that I need that to lead me into the next body of work. So I have to throw myself sometimes into the unknown, almost that element of fringing needs to appear somewhere for it to be picked up later on. 1.15 53

Alison: So it's literally a thread for you to follow.1.16.00

Andrea: Yes it's a thread that you almost have to plant in. I think for even my viewers/spectators I think if they do pick up on it it's fine, if they don't that's absolutely ok, but it will maybe look nonsensical in relation, but I hope there is an understanding. Keep the doors open slightly.

Alison: Yes, for a way in. So considering this address to the beholder do you consider 'pictorial unity' or other particular modes of address to the beholder as part of your painting process, if so please describe?

Andrea: No not unity, pictorially I've always tried to upset that balance of maybe traditional figure ground even in the terms of abstraction, upset that material functioning with an image perhaps. For me it was always about a way of thinking and being able to project that process in terms of it's not post modern thinking, it's not modernist thinking, it's nothing like that, just a very particular kind of relationship to the world we live in and again this is where time comes in. I can't see the chronology of how I store information, the memory, for the future if you like. I can't see how, it's not jumbled up, but it's not linear, and it's so informative of many other things. It is

fragmentary, but I always try to work with that relationship this is how the now-ness for me is. 1.18.31

Alison: So now I'm talking about constructing the painter-beholder/spectator. Would you consider or describe yourself as a privileged beholder at any time: before, during, or after your painting process? 1.18.54

Andrea: No, I think what I've already touched on that. To me it's an affirmation. It's something that gives meaning to a lot of aspects in my life in relation to how I understand the World, how frustrated, how angry I am about certain things, and this allows me to channel it somehow, in a way of it becoming what it is, and almost having a hope in the way that things can be looked at and be understood differently. But I don't think it's a privileged position. I think it's factual, very present, and it goes, you have to work hard for it, it's a fleeting thing. 1.19.57

Alison: Would you describe the experience of painting each painting as a unique occurrence? 1.20.15

Andrea: No, no, no. Again, it's a lot of repetition and a lot of frustration as well. I always talk about this because I do think painting is something that is as rewarding as it's frustrating, but where the experience does change is in the inevitability of something becoming different to your expectation to a previous work. No matter how many times you try to make the same painting, which you do, it never ends up being the same painting, and that's another exciting string to paintings bow or however the saying fits. But I would always consider some of the processes or the combination of processes, so in that there is repetition, there is that difference that comes with it. 1.21.07

Alison: So it's unique perhaps in that respect. It might travel the same path but the unknown factor ... 1.21.26

Andrea: Exactly, yes. And that's the bit that keeps you going.

Alison: So you've almost answered this. Do you or have you found yourself trying to replicate specific experiences encountered from previous painting sessions in new paintings, and if this is the case please describe? 1.21.46

Andrea: That sort of playfulness that I told you about earlier, where you allow yourself to put paint down, put some matter down and just see what happens and if you don't like it you just wash it away, that always, that sense of childish excitement

that 'what's going to happen now' that's a starting point and it's funny I am very much a monochromatic painter, not always, but very little colour used. I always think I'm going to put this amazing colour down. (laughter) Yeah right, it always ends up black or grey. That sense of childishness is informed by that knowledge. I have, of late, being practicing, let's just try this, take this away, try something else instead, mix the pigment for instance, do something else see what happens, invert it, I do like inversion as a process as well. As of late I have been using bleach as well, put that down and see how the colour disappears. I guess I start with this "sensationalism", till I bring it into the real and the material. 1.23.51

Alison: So last question. Claims on primacy could suggest that part of the desire or need to produce artworks for the painter is to be the first beholder, perhaps not to create the artist, but to create the beholder. Do you find an affinity with this statement, have you worked in a particular way to encourage becoming the 'absorbed' beholder, or does it develop differently for you? 1.24.49

Andrea: I think it develops differently. Painting for me it's the most intelligent form of communication. I'm not saying that is brought by me, because I am facilitating here something. What's interesting is the plurality of people and events of histories in the studio that you are dealing with to some extent, and for me it's an absolute joy if I can invoke that somehow. That creates a presence of something that is understood, but equally so it's very kind of stimulating intellectually, and visually, in a way of how it's got to be, so no claims to creationism of any kind, If anything a summary of something. You know I've talked of painting as a community, and I'm really very interested in that in a way and I guess the older I am the investing in painting in terms of time, I'm reflecting again on my own history, and the history of painting, and thinking about certain aspects that are perhaps missing, and how they could be potentialized in painting. So that to me is part of the process that brings you here, and again it's not privy to any birth of an image, but a process. It affirms, in a sense that you could still think about the human involvement through painting. 1.26.35

Alison: That reminds me of something Dan has talked about, I think it's a term used in learning theory called 'Community of Practice' where people are working on the same kind of concepts, but differently, and they're chipping away at it from different perspectives and then sharing their understanding, and it's kind of that thing with painting isn't it?

Andrea: It is.

Alison: There's this massive community of practice, and then you have your smaller facets like the abstract or material based or what have you. And these different communities are chipping away, and then we share these perspectives through exhibiting, and then we go back to the studio and carry on.

Andrea: There's something we touched on in the Wimbledon talk, there this privacy of the studio, there's an intimacy to it, but with painting you are never on your own, you bring that culture. Nothing that I can put down in painting is going to be novel. It doesn't work like that, but I believe that the way you frame it, the way you relay it and the way that you individualise it as well, that's a distinction for me. So it's finding the way into that.

Alison: We have covered a lot of ground here today, but do you have anything more you wish to add, obviously this is only the start of the dialogue? 1.28.33

Andrea: No, I think you've been very thorough, because they are intimate thoughts about painting that you don't normally share. We're all full of these observations and I think that's what holds us in the business of making art, business not meaning business as such, and the criticality of it, and I think those observations count a lot.

Alison: Yes, I agree. I'm really looking forward to the round table event and that painter-to-painter dialogue. Thank you so much for your time Andrea.

## **Katie Pratt Interview**

**5th February 2015**

Alison: To set the context you might say the first question I am asking everybody could you describe your painting process including such things as mapping, planning, thinking, making, etc.

Katie: Well it varies, it's not always the same. Sometimes I apply a ground that is not quite benign. For example, this red painting you are sitting in front of... I deliberately let the paint drip, but it's applied hastily and gesturally, to foster gesture. But other times when using encaustic like the black painting called 'Kupfercoombe', that one is squeegeed. So I have a certain kind of loose drawing factor in it before I start working, and then once I have these grounds down I contemplate. I have a good old look at the surface and try and look for similarities, regularities, patterns, emerging patterns, the direction of splashes. ...Or if there is a lot of splashes the same shape, that kind of thing. ...Or if the splashes are pointing in the same direction, which is quite likely - you know - the way gesture is, my physicality in applying the paint. And I think of a set of regulations that will describe the similarities, so anything that is round, or anything that is pointing to the right, or wherever a splash touches a brush mark, or anything like that. And I make decisions about how to proceed to do with what will show up. This one here and the encaustic one, I've used copper, (Kupfer is German for copper). So I have used this copper metallic paint, and then the viridian and white, a kind of copper oxide pun, the black is also a copper oxide pun. I use visual metaphors, which quite often are quite private. I don't really expect people necessarily to pick them up, but they might do. I guess it's kind of giving something any kind of internal logic, however opaque, and then I keep applying these systems. So there is a certain element where a systems is complete, because I've done all I set out to do, but there's always margins, so there's a lot of actual interpretative space, and you set out to do something which seems really clear, but when you actually get stuck in you realize that you are constantly negotiating options, decisions. So it's is a way of mediating how you make those decisions, and slowing it down, and making it marginal, but also of introducing chance. And then I applied more schema in reaction to the first ones.

Alison: So would you say most of your thinking is with the process? Do you have much thinking away from the process? 11.25

Katie: I do but it tends not to be visual but I have of lot of ideological thinking and rationalizing, which tends to be at a very abstract level. This red painting here which

I'm working on, I started it in August, it has taken me an age to do each one of these grey lines around, each element takes a day using a sable brush, so it can give me quite a lot of time to make that connection between whatever I've been reading, what I've been internalizing, and contemplating. So it's not exactly an illustration of my political anxieties, social anxieties. That's what I think about, and it's indirect, but I draw analogies, which some people can see straight away and to other people are totally opaque.

Alison: Well this piece would talk to me about immigration.

Katie: Well organization, how settlements happen, how people relate to each other, or how people decide to stop and stay somewhere.

Alison: That's interesting, because I didn't think of them in that way, but now you've said that it's very clear.

Katie: I think the thing is that that's my interest, and I've said this quite a few times now, but my mum brought a colleague once (she used to work in human resources), and her colleague said, 'These are interesting they are all about organizational behaviour' (laughter). Which is not my field of expertise, but there is a certain relevance there. I think about maths, and I think about physics and how material organizes itself generally, how order emerges, or how we seek order, how we need to group and collect things to make sense of things more than how things actually behave themselves. There is very much the human interpretation element in my work. I think some people are genuinely interested in physics, but I think I'm interested in it in the same way I interested in organizational behaviour. I'm interested in it as an abstract ideology rather than, and abstraction rather than a direct concept.

Alison: So the next question is back to process. How do you feel during what could be called the genesis of a painting, perhaps recalling a painting that you considered successful? 15.20

Katie: I think quite often, especially if you've got to make some work, you've got a certain defined period of time, and then your work has got to be shipped - all packed and sent off. You've ordered your new canvases, and I feel anxious, but I also feel excited, because I think of the raw potential that anything can happen. The possibilities are infinite at that moment in time, and it could go really well, or I could really flunk it, but of course I'm the director, I'm in control. So if things are not going

well it is in my power to intervene. So that I can essentially see something that interests and surprises me at the end of it. It is a bit like starting at the bottom of the mountain.

Alison: Yes, so anxiousness is part of that process. When you get into something and you feel that it's connecting, do you have any other overriding feelings? 16.50

Katie: Well the main thing that I seek is surprise really I suppose. I've always, right from even when I was an undergraduate, very early on in my career, I used to worry about midcareer stasis. And to stop learning, or to stop enquiring to me is something I fear greatly. So when I see something surprises me, a new connection, or a new kind of visual language, or a new use for me of a visual language, I find that it's a very worthwhile moment. Sometimes you look at it and think 'well you know it just looks like one of my paintings', and I can get away with it, but in general they are the paintings I paint over five years later, or that I don't finish for a while, or I show them ... and feel kind of ambivalent. I like to surprise myself, and I quite often say that when I'm teaching to students, you know why do people want to make work? And everyone has different reasons. What brings you fulfillment? Well I like to feel it is contributed something. I do very often respond to other peoples work, for example from here we're 10 minutes walk from Greengrassi and Covi-Mora. So when Joanne Greenbaum shows, she is one of my favourite artists, so it's very nice, it's a real privilege to be able to walk there, and spend half an hour and be back here within an hour. So her last show was '16 x 12 inches', and - this is very glib - but I've got a couple of works of the same format something like 30 x 40 cm something like that. But I've always done works of a similar size so it is no more than me doing a slightly longer, thinner painting than I would have done previously. One thing that I picked up from her work is that she is much more able to be not exactly flippant, but kind of casual with her starting point so some works are biro on gesso, but there is much more sense of kind of meandering, of letting herself be wrapped up by the process in her work, so it's great to see that in someone else's work as a kind of counterpart. Anyway both galleries have great artists. I really like both of those galleries. One shows a ceramicist, he's not alive any anymore, Simon Carroll, and I'm really interested in his work, the physicality of it, because of the sheer baroque quality. It is quite astounding; it makes Meissen look minimal. It is really quite something else. It's very special work I think. 21.39

Alison: I will definitely seek his work out. It sounds intriguing. That brings me to the next question. Could you talk about how much of your process is planned, how you

may use a system, or how much is arbitrary? You have already talked about some of that. 22.22

Katie: Yeah, well I talk about using chance, but I'm never quite sure whether that's disingenuous or not, because when you look at them you can see that they don't really look like chance has played too much of a role, because they are too esoteric for that, they are too singular. I guess maybe if I do use chance, there are so many chance encounters that you end up with this really complex formula that generates something like this. It's hidden. I talk about them as if they were unplanned, as if it all happens on the surface, and to a certain extent that is true, but there is also a kind of ideological intention. I plan a series, that blue one over there that called 'Jemerera' I did the ground at the same time as I did one that is in here but you can't see it, called 'Purley Heights', which is a kind of ochre colour. And once again a very kind of glib point of inspiration... We'd just come back from a winter trip to Tunisia, and the colours I saw: the sandstone architecture, the Roman remains and the cold blue sky became a starting point. And they are quite different paintings. 'Jemerera' took me ages to make, and 'Purley Heights' was a much quicker work to make. 24.19

Alison: Was there any reason? 24.29

Katie: Yes, but also I like to go fast and slow. I like to change my pace. I think a lot of artists do that. If you work really quick all the time... it's really essential sometimes to resolve things really quick, but other times you really need that contemplative space. So in a sense, by committing myself to several hundred hours, which I have done in a few of them like that one, this one... Some of them have just taken months, and that kind of tedium is essential to organize your thoughts. When I did those I was thinking of digitalization. They look like a kind of digital language, you know start-stop, so I think about those kind of contrasts. And I do drawings. I draw on photographs, design pad drawings, and I found a drawing in the street that someone was throwing out on an estate next to where I live, so I drew on top of it, frame and all. It's marbling somebody has done a seascape out of blue marbling and I put pencil in wood grain, and around the pencil I coloured it in a green sharpie, and then there's drawing on sticky back plastic that makes blue windows go frosty.

Alison: So that found-object addition?

Katie: Yes, it's a bit of a problem, because you don't encounter objects like that very often. I found some at the council skip, someone had done some abstract painting

on the back of a sheet of glass, but the glass was cracked, so that was a shame, but I can do it at home if I can't get to the studio and you've only got an hour you can still a bit of it. It took quite a lot of time, but it is an element of practice.

Alison: It's interesting, it's a bit like a dialogue in a way with someone else's discarded work.

Katie: Well I see it as a ground. There is quite often an element of chance, a found object, a chance encounter, something I didn't know that was going to happen. And the thing is it is such an esoteric thing, unless you have a group of them you can't really do anything with it, you can't really show it, because there's no context for it.

Alison: So how does your process respond to how you feel a painting is developing?  
28.38

Katie: I think it's truly disingenuous to say the painting happens to me, you know I set up the walls, and then it just executes itself through my brush, that's clearly nonsense for some of the reasons I've touched on. I am faced with choices, like is that splash round or not you know, what are the margins of round? Shall I go round to the left, or right around that object I'm not allowed to paint over? So it's up to me to save a work. I guess I say that the works are against intuition, but they clearly just aren't. It reduces intuition into tiny little bite-size morsels, instead of this great big wall. And that's a huge part of what my subject matter is, why I chose to do it. Because I used to feel totally overwhelmed by waiting to know how to solve a painting, to do this intuitive process. So to say that it is gone away, that it is totally out of my control, and that I don't care whether something is working or not is slightly disingenuous, but I guess a process like these grey lines that I am painting at the moment in that red, I don't know whether I'm going to keep doing it until the whole surface is covered, or until each of these blobs meet, but I suspect they'll be a kind of critical point. At the moment it appears to be getting more interesting every great line that I do, but there will probably become a point where it begins to look very much like a kind of surface rather than an image, and do I stop at that point, or does that undermine it? Those kinds of intuitive decisions can be problematic in my work, because it can make it look illogical. 31.07

Alison: A-logical?

Katie: Like you've kind of swallow your own rationale, so unless people can see why you've painted what you painted, whether it's because you wanted to give the vase

of flowers a certain form, or whether it is a representation reason, or a documentary reason, or a kind of compositional formal reason, there's often no reason for people to enter into. But I suppose the other thing I can always do is super impose something else over the top, so if the painting looks, I don't know what would constitute failing, looks un-interesting, or illogical like I just said, kind of random, then I suppose you just work on it some more until it's solved. How long's a piece of string?

Alison: When the deadline comes knocking on the door?

Katie: Well then maybe that's a work you don't show. But I wouldn't want to send something out into the world not feeling it's not ready. I've got enough work here.

Alison: So how has this process developed, especially in relation to your past experience with painting what you might have considered successful paintings? Do you try to recapture it? 33.09

Katie: I think if you try to recapture it, then you end up self-parodying. Well I would. And I can't imagine many people in the arts thinking that's a healthy way forward. You might pick up on something you see as unfinished business in the work, you know - I've just discovered that, so I'm going to un-tap it a bit more. Certainly that thing I said about intuition, experience taught me that I could sit and look at something indefinitely, and not be any clearer about how to bring to a formal resolution if the decision is too big, so I break the decisions down. I suppose the development from one work to the next, from works of other peoples I see, as I described. For me that is part of the whole essence of being an artist, that you are kind of reaching out, and communicating somehow with the history of art, and the arts and the sciences, and other people who are making work as closely related to mine. Which is why people like doing group exhibitions, because that puts a context to your work and focuses your subject matter. 35.12

Alison: Some of this you probably have answered in some ways. How well do you know a painting is developing? Is it the case that you are aware of everything that you are thinking, or does this understanding come more from a subconscious level? Obviously you have talked about chance... 35.40

Katie: Well it's pseudo chance. I call it chance, but compared to some people who really use chance, you can look at them and see that they are not really systematic, they are not really chance driven. Those are props that I use to support myself really

kind of intellectually, and intuitively, ultimately. 36.20

Alison: So have you had painting sessions that were particular bad, and so you've avoided doing a certain thing that arose from that? 36.30

Katie: Yeah, I think basically, when they tend not to be going that well is when I do something, which is hastily considered. Well sometimes you just know what you're going to do, and you don't need to give it very much time at all but when I'm doing something which kind of is a lazy decision, then they can look quite prosaic, quite workaday, quite un-interesting, and they work best is when I have quite a complex formula, so that really strange mathematical functions and anything could happen, anything could spread off in really weird an unexpected directions. So you couldn't just sit down and think right I'm going to do a drawing of a really weird shape, but by using the strange math formulae that I devise, I can make really quite peculiar geometric forms, like the red on that painting there 'Jemerera'. It has a certain geometry to it, but it's not a shape you would sit down and draw if you were going to do a drawing. I don't see it in my head, I don't picture it, but I do visualize certain elements. Like I visualize the contrast between the red, and this cerulean blue, and the Naples yellow as well, and the white of the primer, there is, some gesso at the bottom that is left bare, and then I've used some white oil paint. We associate that white with that blue because of landscape, and aeroplanes, and clouds, sea, foam.

Alison: Because we were talking about understanding coming from a subconscious level, it sounds to me like your understanding comes much more from the practice process? 39.34

Katie: Well it does, but there is also the way that I relate it to, you know I was talking about settlements, and I think a lot about legislation and adjudication, because that's what I'm doing, I'm thinking: is that there, can I see it or is it so faint that it doesn't really count, where are the boundaries? This is what law lords do on a daily basis (laughter), and also whether things should be centralized or localized, the paintings don't give me answers, but they're a forum for this kind of consideration, and it's very difficult to knock that into a structure, but all these things are important. 40.25

Alison: I like your description that your paintings are a forum for this through process or consideration. 40.39

Katie: It is a lot of time you're alone with yourself making work, and I guess a lot of artists worry about what they are contributing communally and socially. I used to be

envious of ambulance drivers, (laughter) because you know of what social benefit your job is, so being an artist could be a certain amount of introspective navel-gazing. I mean how are you contributing? I'm more at ease with that now, with that whole thing. These aren't manifestoes, you've got to think of something whilst you're working, so it's a time for infiltration, if you read even a novel, I've just finished some Flaubert, and short stories or a book of John Cooper Clarke poems for example, it is quite a contrast that you think back on, what you've just been reading, a movie you've just seen, or what you read in the newspapers, I mean these aren't direct illustrations, but they are informed by, and I draw analogies between the activity. Just as you were arriving I was talking to Silver the painter down there about the burning of the Jordanian pilot, and does that change your politics, does it change your strategic world view about violence say? And that's the kind of thing that comes out in the work I think.

Alison: So we've talked a bit about knowing how well a painting is developing, and whether this understanding comes from the subconscious level. How does this differ from when you feel a painting is turning out successfully, to when a painting is floundering? 44.08

Katie: like I said, painting is not something that happens to me, I find that kind of attitude slightly, I don't encounter it a lot in professionals, I have to say because you don't get to be professional if that's what you think, that this idea that it is not my fault, I very much you know, it's in my power to change it, to work out what it needs. I guess sometimes you can try too hard, and spend too long on it, and it just gets more and more tired, and hackneyed. I can give you some examples, this one here 'Ethnicity' I finished that one last March, and it went through an exhibition at David Lehman in Los Angeles. I'd had it photographed, but it just felt under cooked, and then I put the pale green on afterwards, this bright green was earlier, this was subsequent, because I just felt it was under achieved, or too easily achieved. That Prussian blue painting 'Austin?' I started in about 2001 or 2000, the carmine paint and pale blue lines, I just didn't know how to resolve it, and I just got it out of the cupboard and finished it. And there is another I started in 2011, and I've only just finished it this year, this one I've reworked.

Alison: So you quite often have an on-going process? 46.21

Katie: I think I give up on them, and think they are quite slack and done and then I really work. Like this one from 2000 called 'Pool' which I can't remember if I've exhibited or not, to me now it just a kind of ground, I've lost the connection with it,

so I am definitely going to work on it again, and see what happens. I'm interested in the colours in it, there's a red oxide, and a brown oxide, and this colour, Holland's Blue-grey.

Alison: I'm a Payne's grey fan.

Katie: I think the ground is Payne's grey. Payne's grey is a brilliant colour, it's cold, yet it's warm, it's translucent, but it's opaque (laughter).

Alison: So you have this real on-going conversation with your works, almost like a narrative in a way.

Katie: I think there's definitely a narrative, it is kind of a chart of thinking and decision-making, very literally. It's not normal for me to rework old works, but it occasionally happens, and I just happened to have some examples. That weird, yellow one up there was made by picking bits of paint off the floor, and putting them together in groups. 47.45

Alison: I've done something similar.

Katie: I think lots of people do, with stickers too. My elder daughter, she's a teenager, I've noticed that little children, like when they are toddlers, you give them stickers and they'll put all the cats in one corner, or the geometric shapes, put like things together. And the same thing with food, if the beans touch the carrots then that's a terrible thing.

Alison: So here the beans aren't touching the carrots, I like that.

Katie: Well I've connected them with oil paint lines.

Alison: It reminds me of targets, if we aim here, we'll hit here.

Katie: Or shipping routes.

Alison: Yes, less warlike.

Katie: Well I was talking about Isis earlier. I think that quite often they look very aerial, and they definitely have these kind of iso lines, these lines that connect like things, so people are going to see that, that connection is often made. I always get asked why don't I sew them, and that really annoys me, when you're doing a slide talk and an undergrad student or somebody asks you that, I mean would you ask me that if I was a man, and if the answer yes, then I'll give it some thought.

Alison: That's a good answer.

Katie: Well it's the truth. It's only because I'm a lady. (Laughter)

Alison: (Laughter) Yes, that's an important point. It's all about painting.

Katie: Well also I think people want to talk about their own work and when somebody asks that they're sewing themselves.

Alison: Ah, yes. So the next question. Have there been instances where you've been preoccupied by an ongoing painting away from the studio? 50.50

Katie: Oh yeah, definitely. Yeah you kind of carry it with you, think how am I going to sort this out. I think distance is quite often essential, which is why sometimes things that have been lying around the studio and not really working for a long period of time, you want to pick them up and finish them off. It is much easier to do with small works, it's very difficult to leave a large work unfinished just because it's so domineering, they so much space physically some of those crates take up a lot of room. 53.26

Alison: So we've talked about being preoccupied by work away from the studio. In the course of making a painting, have you ever experienced a sense of absorption or self- abandonment? 54.03

Katie: It depends on what I'm doing. Yeah I suppose I do, I go into this world where I start thinking about higher things, like I was saying politics, social issues, philosophy whatever it happens to be, and yeah I guess I do otherwise I wouldn't be able to stay, it holds my attention quite easily if I can if I can stay warm, and I have the time, and I don't have to go anything for 13 or 14 hours until I physically drop, and so I must do. When I'm doing the grounds, I suppose that's when I see quickly, I see fast change, so that can be very absorbing. Small ones are quite satisfying, because no matter what I set out to do, it's not going to take that long to do a small one. No matter how small a brush I use, or how many lines I set out to make, however many marks I've got to make on a surface, if the surface is small, it is achievable, there's something in how long it takes to do something that size, per square inch. So if you've only got hundred and 40 square inches to do that is not going to take nearly as long as if you have 2800 odd. The painter Róza Lee who is no longer alive I remember her saying that to me she, she calculated how long it took her to do a square inch. But that's why you need a relief to be able to go fast at times as well, so you need to slow down and contemplate, and you need to be able to speed up. And I

think that not just in my work, but work in general it is quite intriguing when you see both in one work, so you can see something that has happened really hastily and one thing has happened really slowly. 56.02

Alison: Like a temporal quality?

Katie: Yes, a temporal shift in pace. Lots of people talk about a shift in pace.

Alison: At any point in your painting practice do you act as the beholder of your own artwork, and is this beholder absorbed in the same way that Fried has described? 56.57

Katie: Yes, I thought you were going to ask that when I read your text. Well it's the point of your PhD. What I was thinking earlier, you know, how candid am I being? But I guess for me I really do all the looking during the process, and right at the end of it being complete. I can't pick a time when you've walked into your own exhibition, and contemplated your own work. And yet, when I think about my art history knowledge for example, I think about how I've studied going round museums right across Europe, and spending days in the Prado, in Vienna, looking at other peoples work, absorbing it, looking at everything, and thinking about it, contemplating it. Trying to draw connections across works and artists, and I would never do that with my own work in the same way, but then I suppose it is more structural when you made it, and because you don't have that detachment you know why something is how it is, you don't need to sit and wonder about it. 57.55

Alison: Yes, that makes sense, unless you surprise yourself I suppose? 58.27

Katie: Well yeah, but then you know I stand back and look at it I have plenty of time to look at it, while it's being photographed, or when it's finished, I'll have a cup of tea, have a look at it, and I'll go home and come back the next day, and think I want to start another one, but I still haven't finished looking at this one. And I think everyone has a kind of dialogue where you leave it up whilst you start something else, so you're looking over your shoulder, and I know in the past I have thought a lot about looking sideways, looking at something askance, all looking without really thinking about it just because it is present. So I'm working on this one, but I'm looking at something I've already finished, or thinking about what I'm going to do next. 59.09

Alison: Yeah, I know some people use mirrors or look at pieces upside down. 59.20

Katie: Yeah I don't, the kind of decisions I make aren't compositional , or not directly

compositional, there are more general like Payne's grey, if I use it thinly it's translucent, and if I use it thickly it is opaque for example, so decisions like that. Things shine through it, and in other places it'll be obscure, and then I'll put in a mathematical system for where those places will be, rather than a visual system, but it is kind of driven by the general visuality of the work. I want to have it mainly translucent, therefore I'll devise a formula where I can see most of it, but there will be places where it's obscured, the under painting is obscured.

Alison: So have you encountered an embodied experience as a result of your painting process? Or any other type of manifestation and if so could you describe it?

Katie: So what do you mean by embodied? Is it in the lexicon?

Alison: I can't think – I will double check. So how I usually describe this is from when I was a graphic designer I used to spend many hours in front of the screen working in Photoshop. Then I'd come away from away from the studio, and my reality I would be thinking about it through Photoshop eyes, so I'd be looking to undo something in real life that I couldn't because it wasn't a digital environment, it was a real environment. So a similar thing could happen in painting, if for example if you're always painting to the edge, does that translate. So the question I'm asking is if there is something you do in your practice that becomes so much a part of you that you almost continue to do it, or try to do it outside of the studio, outside of making the work? 1.01.29

Katie: Yeah, I have had that sensation. I'm trying to think of a for instance, but I do know what you are talking about. I've certainly had it when I've been cycling for a day you sleep and you see road passing underneath you. I suppose at the moment my painting days are frequent, but relatively curtailed compared to what I have been used to other period in my life because for example today I've got to go and pick my kids up at four. So in the summer, if I get a proper long day in the studio, I think it has to be a sustained concentration, and yeah I definitely take it away with me, and definitely apply processes to other things. So I look at an onion that I'm cutting and can see the rings, seeing pattern is replicated, but also have a tendency to want to apply the processes that I use in painting to other things, but if that happens at home I'll probably sit down and do a drawing. 1.02.36

Alison: Tap straight into it?

Katie: Yeah.

Alison: So if you were to reflect on the act of painting with reference to a specific painting could you describe a painting process gave you all perhaps still gives you the painter? For instance is there a one painting you look at it and instantly you recall the whole experience of producing that piece? 1.03.26

Katie: Yeah, I think I can with most of them, I think the moment of knowing what you are going to do to conclude a work, why you did something, or with a work like this with the grey lines take a long time, or another one this one here with the blue lines took me a very long time. I can definitely remember them, and the sensation, and also sometimes there's a kind of synaesthesia, like if I'm listening to a particular music and then go away for a couple of days and then come back and look at what I was looking at when I was listening to music. In my last studio my neighbour used to cook bacon in the studio a lot, so even when she wasn't there I'd start painting and I'd start to smell bacon. 1.05.10

Alison: So after the course of making a painting have you ever experienced a sense of absorption or self-abandonment from the finish painting? 1.05.27

Katie: I don't think I'll get it from my own work, I really don't, because I think that element has been used up. I don't know? I can't imagine sitting and being absorbed by a finished work that I'd made, in the same way that I would with someone else's. I certainly have with other people's work. I can't really imagine being transported. I can't think the time is ever happened. Interested, but not transported. 1.05.33

Alison: Have they been instances where you continue to think about your finished painting away from it? 1.07.50

Katie: Yes, I definitely have done that, definitely, and I've been at work, maybe not actually teaching students, but at my desk at work maybe doing something procedural like a timetable, and thinking I wish I was in my studio looking at that painting and not just because the task at hand is not as interesting as painting, but because I want to be looking at it right now. 1.11 21

Alison: Like it was triggered?

Katie: Yes.

Alison: Again you've touched on this earlier. Have you ever experienced a sense of absorption or self-abandonment from other artist's paintings, or other works of art? 1.11.53

Katie: Yeah, I think so. Yes definitely especially if you're include things like music or film, but yes I definitely remember doing it with Vermeer, and Mondrian, and Malevich, I have definitely done it with them. (laughter) Well it's not the norm. Extreme interest and interest in an exhibition as a whole as well, and I've definitely spent a lot of time engaged with looking at any one work lots of times. Velasquez in Madrid, Las Meninas, and Spanish and Flemish still lives, Flemish landscapes, I like those a lot. Yeah, I suppose it depends, you're talking about the kind of ecstasy, where you forget other things, and that's not the norm for me. 1.13.07

Alison: So rather than being critically engage, analyzing technique or competition or something I would describe it as like when you were saying that when you painting your mind is elsewhere. It is kind of like you're so absorbed by the painting that time might flash by. 1.13.45

Katie: Yeah, yes it definitely does. I have talked in the past about time bending, lumpy time, the difference between tedium where time is really slow and ecstasy. Frequently I don't want to have to finish to do the school art club, which is purgatory I can tell you. (laughter). A living hell. (laughter). But it is not normal, but it certainly has happened a few times looking at artwork specifically those artists definitely, and there were several things in the Prado. One of the things that is great about going to see museums with Alex my other half is that he is a very knowledgeable art historian, but he can really spent a long time as well, looking at something and being bowled over by it. I really hate it when people rush me around museums, and don't give me time to look at what you need to look at.

Alison: Have you both been absorbed by the same painting? 1.15.04

Katie: Yeah, yeah, and because we were talking about it as well, it's synergetic, so you notice things that you might not have done. So he really likes Courbet and Corot, and can spend a long time in front of a Corot. (Laughter)

Alison: I like that group absorption, (laughter) that's something to think about. So have they been instances when you have continued to think about other artists away from them? 1.15.45

Katie: Yeah, definitely, and I've gone back to see specific works to exhibitions to see specific works. I've described some instances earlier with Joanne Greenbaum, Simon Carroll. I recently saw the Katie Moran show, and Sarah Tsze, and I saw the last Venice biennale, and I saw the last American pavilion there. Anyway, so it has

happened, I'm trying to think about works I've seen quite a lot in the studio, especially if it's quite recent like Fontana, I like Fontana a lot. Yeah, I definitely do. I saw that amazing David Hammons show in January at White cube, and Virginia Overton I saw that, which is the next show at White cube Mason's Yard. And that's really like the essence of sculpture, it's objects commanding spaces, and it has all of the kind of purity and the sculptural experience, and that kind of physicality is very important to me in my work. Sometimes you are in an exhibition like that and you don't really take it that seriously, but afterwards you realize that you are really carrying something with you, that weight that you feel when you go to see her, to experience the work, to feel the space around you. Kind of the presence of the space. The upstairs gallery is quite architectural, with wood that is curved or had to be bent to fit in, and then downstairs there are rotating beams. So it's really charting the space, really palpable sense of physicality, and I use paint in a very physical way, so I'm not very spatially aware, but I am physically aware. So exhibitions like that have quite an impact on me. When I think of Fontana, I think about the physicality of the surface. I think about the big lumps of stuff where he just put his fist through it. I admire the audacity, being so audacious. 1.18.53

Alison: So if you have experienced absorption in painting practice as discussed earlier, and if you've experienced as and up to spectator of your own work (which you haven't, well not particularly), does this affect how you consider the reactions of another spectator of your artwork? So that question doesn't really work for you. 1.19.28

Katie: Well I guess I was thinking about the questions that I have anticipated, I guess that in a certain sense the finished objects aren't for me, the process is for me, the act of making them is for me, but once they are objects in the world, I'm not really their audience. That's what I was thinking as I was coming here this morning, and anticipating that you would ask me that question. So I don't know whether I'd presume to think people are going to be transported by my work, but I would hope they'd be interested, that they would be able to pick up some of my intention, and transpose their own interests onto it. So it's a kind of malleable discussion board, discussion forum, chat room. Yeah, it's a chat room of the twenty-first century. (laughter) 1.20.27

Alison: Yes, your own chat room. (laughter) So you've kind of answered this next question, but I'll ask anyway. Conversely would you find any feeling of self-abandonment, and if so why? 1.21.00

Katie: I probably would, I'm a control freak. (laughter) No, I wouldn't. I suppose I sometimes reproach myself for not looking enough at my own work in a way in a way I would do if I was looking at... Like when I went to the Manet show in Paris, just getting the opportunity to see some of those works, when will you see them again or Malevich show at Tate? No, I wouldn't, I think I'd be quite pleased, reassured by it, because I don't think I look enough at my finished work, for me it's all about the thinking that happens in making it, the kind of problem-solving that happens in making it, and seeing it emerge, but I don't think once it's finished. I kind of reproach myself for not spending time looking at it. So no, I'd be pleased. 1.22.23

Alison: So have you, or do you ever construct or position the spectator/beholder in your painting practice? You have answered this a bit. 1.22.45

Katie: Well I do think about looking at work close up, and looking at it from a distance, so walking into a room and seeing it, and what they see from a distance, and what they see close up. 1.22.58

Alison: So there is some element of...

Katie: Yeah, I think about... you know we all know how people kind of walk around museums, if you're walking around clockwise looking over your left shoulder as you walk past it, so there is this reading thing that you get from walking around left to right. How the light is going to affect it, how it will look when it has direct light hitting it.

Alison: As we were talking about constructing or positioning the spectator/beholder. If so, do you, or have you found yourself working in a particular way in order to consider the beholder? 1.24.05

Katie: Only in that sense, only that in what you get when you're close up what you get from a distance, and so what you get over time, so what you see instantly, but what you get when you've spent some time looking at it, but other than that not really. I just think that, in the same way that commercial galleries expect you to be able to make works for a market, you can't really anticipate what's going to sell, I think mainly because people can smell a pup, they know when they are being fleeced. There is something about authentic, I say things like this and then hate myself for saying it, but it feel so Greenbergian, there's something about authenticity in intention that kind of shines through, and when someone is looking at a genuine problem-solving or dilemma being played out within an arena, or a genuine

revelation of thought that's altogether different to when they are seeing a kind of re-enactment. Re-enactment a kind of metaphor, you know earlier when you're asking about copying the work you've really done or redoing a work, I take the structure of something and use it in a completely different visual scenario, but I wouldn't want to... or take an element of an idea and develop it and take it to another level, concentrate on it in a different way, but it's a similar thing from me I think. I can't anticipate how a viewer is going to react. It is like being told how you feel. I can't know what someone else is going through. 1.26.39

Alison: This question links to the previous one. Considering an address to the beholder do you consider pictorial unity, or other particular mode of address to the beholder as part of your painting process? 1.26.55

Katie: Well kind of. I do use signifiers, like blue is going to be read as a landscape somehow. This one at the back, it's the way that the brushstroke has been applied called 'Bluixcity' it looks like reflections on water, but then it would do if you think paint is a runny thing. You think how water is painted, especially from photographs, so you get a sense of being very, very specific about defined edges, so there's a sense of that in this work, which has been refuted by the drawing on top, but as an under-painting it was very prevalent I guess. 1.27.49

Alison: Bluixcity? Your titles, how do you come to them?

Katie: Well they tend to insinuate landscape, and place, but they don't always. There's normally some kind of clue from the work that triggers them, because they are normally conglomerates, or composite words?

Alison: A bit like your works?

Katie: Yes. Exactly. They are invented, 'Bluixcity', 'Kupfercoombe' as someone who lives in England, you can only think of Rural, and there are lots of minimal references, as I said kupfer-copper, and it looks like mining slag, and you could imagine this idyllic village, idyllic name for a mining village. Yes, they're all made up words. The one up there is called 'Minataunton', because it looks a bit like a minotaur, and this one here is called 'Pool' just because it's wet looking with a pool of paint in the middle. Poole's in Dorset, and I suppose I was working at the University of Southampton at the time.

Alison: Yes, all ties in. So constructing the painter beholder/spectator. Would you consider or describe yourself as a privilege beholder at any time before, during, or

after your painting process? 1.31.00

Katie: Do you mean of my own work? At risk of sounding like a total snob when you go around museums, and you hear how trite people's reactions are. So I was at Moroni's exhibition, and some of the things that people say there that you over hear, you think 'you're really not engaged in this at all' so from that aspect, yes I suppose. Yeah, well I guess I do feel privileged to have an insight into, not just my own studio practice, but the artists who have let me into their studio, and talk to me about their work, and I often feel privileged teaching as well, because not only do you get to hear inside someone's head, and see what comes out on a regular basis, but you also get to see it transform overtime, which is really exciting actually, so you get to see the solutions they come up with, what they propose as issues, or what you are proposing to them as issues, and then you get to see how they extend the possibilities of the work, it's really exciting. So yeah. 1.32.29

Alison: So you consider yourself privileged from sharing that, so when it comes down to your own painting practice, do you still feel that you are a privilege beholder as in the first beholder? 1.32.44

Katie: I don't feel privileged in that sense, no. I don't feel privileged to witness my own paintings unfold, but I do feel privileged to have chosen the path of being an artist, and the opportunity really to have maintained it, and I think it's more difficult now, I found it very difficult to establish myself professionally, but I think it's more difficult now for students to establish themselves. To have such a strong sense for pretty most all of my life, certainly since I was a child, what I wanted to do, I feel really privileged to have something that I feel engaging as a vocation. 1.34 49

Alison: That's interesting it's like you encounter privilege from every other aspect, apart from the unfolding of your own practice. 1.35.06

Katie: No, well the unfolding I find exciting, but the kind of scopophilia, you know the stopping to look at the end, that's thing I don't, feeling privileged to see my own work, that doesn't do it. I suppose I get excited when I've done a work that I feel is significant, that people are going to want to see, and people are about to see it, and that's really exciting, and you think that shows going to open, and there's this work that's really important to me in it, I'm really excited to see what people think about that.

Alison: Would you describe the experience of painting each painting as a unique

occurrence? 1.35.52

Katie: Well you recognize certain symptoms, so certain symptoms re-occur, and I do need to see something new in each work, otherwise I really don't feel that engaged. I need to have a certain reason for being in existence, whether it's to endorse other work in a series, it could just be to make a serious click, but there has to be some reason for that work, something that I'm discovering in it, or something that it has to relate to other work, mine or I could peoples. 1.36.39

Alison: You have kind of answered this next question. Do you or have you found yourself trying to replicate specific experiences encountered from previous painting sessions in new painting sessions? 1.36.55

Katie: I want to be surprised, but at the same time if I feel like a door has just opened I'm going to want to open the door, and have a good look and poke around the room. It's a bit like if you just discovered an author, you're going to want to read another one of their books. To expand the interrogation, the enquiry. 1.37.23

Alison: Last question. Claims on primacy could suggest that part of a desire or need to produce artworks or paintings is to be the first beholder, perhaps not to create the artist but to create the beholder. Do you find an affinity with this statement? Have you worked in a particular way to encourage becoming the absorbed beholder or does it develop differently for you?

Katie: It's not really something I think about. Obviously I don't want people to be bored by my work. I guess my problem with it is this kind of insinuations of a kind of God complex. I don't know whether primacy really matters to me that much, and I don't feel... I don't really hold that much sway about the premiering. Obviously you don't want to show the same old hackneyed work, again, and again, and again, but new contexts are as valuable as new material, and I think that as well there is a lot of stuff knocking about, so this sense of primacy in the world, I mean look at my studio it's got a lot of clobber in here, so it is quite close to saying show it once then throw it away, and also you know you have an exhibition, and people don't get to see it, so does it matter that you saw it before Malcolm, or would it better if Malcolm saw it first, I don't know. And I'm another viewer as well, so it's not really something I feel an affinity with. 1.39.49

Alison: You did say earlier that the painting process is that it's not so much about the finished thing for you it's the actual process.

Katie: I think so. Well it's very important that they get finished, so if they don't get finished then that's really a bad thing, lack of resolution, lack of solution, unfinished work is not knocking around, it's a bit like having a pile of ironing which I have got, a to do to do list, it is taking up space but it hasn't justified itself, it is an encumbrance.

Alison: We've covered a lot of ground. Is there anything else you would like to add. There is always the round table event later on. 1.41.00

Katie: I think I've said a lot, so I could add at a later date.

Alison: Yes, so thank you.

Katie: I'll bicker about it with Bick.

Alison: Yes, that sound's like a plan. I will schedule time in round table for that. (laughter).

Katie: Yes, and he can prattle with Pratt.

Alison: (Laughter). I see this is something you've obviously talked about before.

Katie: We definitely talk about painting a lot, it's a common ground.

Alison: That would a great time to be a fly on the wall. Thank you very much for your time Katie. 1.41.44

## **Gary Wragg Interview**

**2nd April 2015**

Alison: This first question is to set the context, and to help us understand more about your practice. Could you describe your painting process including such things as mapping, planning, thinking, making, etc. 5.54

Gary: I'm not sure that I can. There isn't a way. There is not a process. There's not a way. There's no formula. An anti-formula. There may be a process during the work, but it isn't something you adhere to religiously, at any time it could swivel off tangent and go somewhere else. Often I have a feeling that I want to do something, sometimes I have a feeling of what it is, sometimes I don't know what it is, and it might be about a particular kind of colour, putting a colour on, and that may be fermenting for months or even longer, and when I come to put the colour on, it doesn't happen, some other colour comes in. So it's not predictable, but the feeling of that colour will trigger doing something to get the painting moving, and so it's all in that instant when you are magnetized to the canvas, that you engage with the canvas itself. But what's going on, is going on before you even touch the canvas, and it's in you, it's part of you, it's happening, though you may not be aware of it. You know thinking about what we know about the world, and what we don't know about the world; we know so little really, and what we have are infinite systems, infinite systems going on, simultaneously while we're alive, and continue after we are alive, and before we were alive, that we know a little bit about because we're the tip of the iceberg, in most cases. But in most cases that's all we can see, and the rest we cannot see, and so we're a little bit helpless, but we know there's something there, and so people build their beliefs around what's there, what they can't see, like God, you know, and I don't believe in God, but it's things people can't see yet they like the security in it. So there's this underlying sort of stuff that goes on, but what you see is what you see in my work. What you see is what you see, and there's no story, there may have been a story to motivate the work, and there can be many kind of stories, of all different sorts. If you look at my book, you will see all different sorts of motivations to bring a painting about, but when it gets to the painting, the painting becomes the magnet. The painting surface becomes the magnet that attracts, and it pulls you to it, or pushes you away, but what happens on the canvas, is what is pulled to it. And this is really to do with the eye, the eye working with the painting. Drawing is always the core of using colour, and when the colour is applied, it's about area and edge. And if you have an edge then you must have another part, like a centre. So there can be not just one centre, but many centres, and so layering

becomes a very important part of the painting, and because they're experiential, it isn't a formula that: I'll do this at 4 o'clock and I'll do this at 6 o'clock, do that at 7 o'clock, and by then I can do this tomorrow, and then we're done. It's not like that. So each day you see it afresh, and you may see it differently, then what happens, happens. So a lot of looking, a lot of sensing, so you have what you can see in front of you, and again what you can't see, that you feel, or you may not even feel, but is somewhere around that makes you get up, and walk around, and look at another painting. So what happens in the studio is a dialogue between the paintings really, and I move from one painting to another, not in any logical terms, but as the day takes one to move around, and applying the paint or applying whatever it is that's going to be applied happens. It happens... It has to be precise, it can seem casual, but the precision is always absolutely a priority. It has to be precise, but it isn't working with the idea of being precise. The important thing about making paintings, for me, is that in the first place it's a sense of freedom, freedom to be oneself. And the important thing about being oneself is it's just so, it's the way you are, and I don't like to think about the way that I am, or what I am. It's just that the painting in the studio allows you just to do as you need to do, as you intend to do or not to do, and it goes through a whole gamut of feelings, or sometimes emotions, stronger bases than just feelings, or completely neutral. But often the substance is in the neutrality, not feeling, not knowing, not nothing, but it's in the looking, And then you do it, and then you don't know what you're doing, you don't know what's there, because it's not a figurative thing, it's not anything that's recognizable, and there has to be in a certain sense, a repetition of things, because you are something that involves a constant, a kind of repetition. But of course you're aware that you're changing, and today isn't the same as two weeks ago or yesterday, and that you don't want to repeat yourself, you want to move on, not because you want to move on, but because your relationship of looking at the painting evolves and moves you on. Some people have criticized me in the past for ignoring what's been happening in the last 30 years, just doing what I do, but I can't do anything else really. I'm aware of what's been going on, and I look at shows and I talk to people, and I'm very aware of what's happening, but when it comes down to it you do what you do. You've only got one shot on this planet, and you do what feels right for you. You know I'm not playing chess, I'm not doing strategies for the art market for anything or anybody, I'm just doing it to see what happens, because it's a process of identity, what you do is telling you something about yourself, even though you may not get what it's telling you, or what it's offering you. You may miss it completely, but anyway you wouldn't have it any other way, but it's there. 16.05

Alison: This was something that Stuart Elliot was talking about. You create the painting, but the painting can create you, this relationship you have with it. 16.47

Gary: Yes.

Alison: You change as you create.

Gary: Yes, I agree with that.

Alison: You've kind of hinted about this. Would you describe how you feel during what could be called the genesis of a painting, perhaps recalling a painting you considered successful? 17.14

Gary: Well the thing is the important thing is, for me, living in the moment. So as far as the past is concerned it's gone. I'm only concerned with what is happening now. 17.20

Alison: And that will always be different?

Gary: It will always be different. That's what my book is about, about the constant within the change.

Alison: So where I've asked how you feel during the genesis, it's always different so there's no one-way of describing it? 17.55

Gary: There isn't, no.

Alison: Again you have hinted about this. Could you talk about how much of your process is planned, how you may use a system, or how much is arbitrary? 18.08

Gary: You live your life in the normal world, wherever it may be, traveling in one's local district or daily life, and anything can become part of the painting, absolutely anything, and that's exactly what has happened over the last six decades, that's what's happened, anything can be part of it. 19.09

Alison: Is there a particular memorable piece that comes to mind? 19.20

Gary: Well for instance, the Bayeux tapestry. I think it was in the early 90's and I went with my family to Normandy for a summer holiday, and I always wanted to see the Bayeux Tapestry. We went to see it, and it was completely not the way I thought it was going to be, I had a completely different idea about it. You could call it ignorance really. Yes, just ignorance, but anyway it was great to see it, and I enjoyed walking round. Have you seen it?

Alison: I did a project on it when I was very young, but I've only seen pictures of it.

Gary: And there was one section that particularly attracted me. It was when Harold got shot in the eye and fell off his horse. And I decided well this isn't how I thought it was going to be, so I was going to do it how I thought it ought to be. So I went back to the studio after returning from the holiday, and I actually drew in that part of the tapestry with the horse being hit and falling on its head, vertical, and Harold falling off the horse. From there I just worked on the painting. A big painting, and just worked on it, and it became very white, really white. And everything was painted out; everything that could be was painted out. What the key moment was the moment where, in the height of battle, and everybody has experienced what I'm going to say, things get so fast or sometimes ferocious, or so hectic around you, especially in a traumatized situation, where you have a slow down. It's like slow motion, so slow, like that. And it was this kind of feeling of slowing down, but it was also like a feeling of like in the midday sun, like this, where you have the flashing of metal and swords, where you see a flash on the sword, or flash on the shield, or the helmet, because it's so ferocious and quick, it's a blur, it's a complete whiteout. And this is how the painting came about, like that. But it was really just through painting, not through any wish. Not through any conscious thought. And when I finished the painting, it took a year or maybe two years, they always take a long time, when I concluded the painting I found myself saying to myself 'What on earth does any of this have anything to do with me? Why am I doing it? Why have I done it? Why have I been involved in this?' And then I went to see my sister Maureen who lives in High Wycombe and she said she'd just been looking at the family tree, and she'd discovered that there's a connection to 1066!

Alison: Gosh. 23.55

Gary: Yeah, and it completely blew my mind. And that's what I mean, you know it's like the wires in the TV, it's here and there connecting to one, and one wire doesn't work, but you're kind of wired up to all these kind of things around on the planet, around, and you're totally not aware of them, even so you're driven to do something. And you may be completely mystified by why you're driven to do something, but you do it with total conviction, and it has to be a certain way. And you find your way in this certain unknown, and it materializes. And the reason why I paint or one paints, is because you haven't seen this anywhere, even though you admire and great wonderful painting, it's that what you want to see is not there, so you do it, because you need to see something. It's a need, it is not a desire to see something, it's a

need, that you make happen, and I think that's what painting is really about. And that's just one instance. I mean there are so many instances with different works.

Alison: Out of curiosity, what did you originally expect of the Bayeux Tapestry? 26.11

Gary: I expected it to be like you might see in the Wallace Collection, like these huge wall pieces. I didn't expect it to be this little, thin thing. So it was ignorance. (laughter)

Alison: (laughter) Ah, yes... So continuing along this line, where you talk about none of your processes planned, and you don't use systems. Does this process respond to how you feel the painting is developing? For example if you feel a painting isn't working do you address things in a certain way to turn them around? 27.26

Gary: Yes, I challenge the painting. I challenge it by putting something there that doesn't belong. To kick it and then just to see what happens, whether that gets kicked out or whether the painting's obstinate and it stays as it is and it throws that challenge out. And just take it from there. It's a device that I often use. I mean we do survive by devices. 28.14

Alison: How has this process developed, especially in relation to your past experience of painting what you considered successful paintings? 28.28

Gary: Well right from the early days, the relationship, the integral relationship between what is still and what is moving has been part of the painting. Because the painting is always still. It isn't moving around, but as the person in front of it, what makes you alive is the fact that you move. And you can't help it even if you're still there's still movement. So there's movement within stillness, and then there's stillness within movement, and again this is the connection with Tai Chi. This is exactly what Tai Chi is; stillness within movement and the Chi Kung part, the breathing part is movement within stillness. So this is how the painting is always developed, even before I knew about Tai chi. It's there, and that's in my book as well. 29.39

Alison: So when did you come to Tai Chi? 29.43

Gary: 1973. So my paintings before that were very much to with the process of stillness and movement, and the small things against larger things. There's always been in the paintings a kind of a grid that has popped in an out of paintings, to be uniform, to be regulated, as it was in the 70's paintings, that were sprayed and made with acrylics. And it was like a Zen process. I made a bed to stretch the canvas on,

with polythene and foam on so it had a bit of give. And it was a big 12ft bed that I could stretch the canvas on, and after it had been sprayed I stretched the canvas, and then applied the grid with bi-cutters. It was a very laborious process, a very slow process, and then, with pots of paint stationed around the whole bed, the gradations of colour for the grid. And again it was an intuitive thing, all of that, but the actual process, I had to sit on it, cross-legged and just cut these things, and when it had all been taped up to actually paint it, it was completely Zen.

Alison: Very contemplative? 31.29

Gary: Absolutely, yes. But things change, and experiences make you change, and so then at some point it was to do with breaking it all up, and exhaust you. In 1975 I was mugged in the East End, and I got really cross, really angry, and this anger came out in the painting, and it was like an energy that triggered and released something that you weren't aware of. You found another you. And over the years I've always thought that what you know about you know about yourself is really like a faceted crystal ball, you know with facets, and while you can see one side looking at it you cannot see the other side, or what's around the other sides, so you have to turn it to see what's there. And it seems to me that ones personality; the make-up of being oneself is like that. And so then it's not that you leave the previous state behind, it's still there, but it's on the other side of the ball now instead of being here it's on the other side of the ball now, it's round the back, and sooner or later it will come back again, because it's the cycle of the constant within the change of oneself. And so it does, and occasionally the good comes back in a different way. It's a stabilizing device.

Alison: How do you know how well a painting is developing? Is it the case that you are aware to everything you are thinking, or does this 'understanding' come more from a subconscious level? So you have kind of hinted about this. 34.21

Gary: Well again, when it seems to be good you can dupe yourself, you come in the next day and it looks terrible, we've all had that experience, it's not uncommon. This is why time is a very important element in the painting for me. You can see the painting in different lights, and I like to see the painting upside down, sideways, on the floor, leaning against the wall in different lights so the light catches the surface in different ways, and to see this in different ways as the painting develops. So you really get to know the painting, and the criteria of when to leave it. When I'm happy with it I'm allowing it to leave the studio, and if there is a hesitancy about it, it doesn't go. When it stops bothering me, and I can put it in the racks, and then put some

information on the back and maybe think about the title, or a title may come and I maybe put it on the back during the process, but it's usually at the end when I really know that it's concluded, because the other thing is that having said that, the one thing about having a large studio with racks is that you have a lot of work that isn't in other collections it is still here, and when people come for a show, you pull different things out and then you see combinations that you hadn't seen before and I really love that because it usually triggers something, but there may be a lame duck that bothers you and so it's not safe and I can work on the painting. 36.31

Alison: Do you have paintings you've gone back to over many, many years? 36.53

Gary: Yeah, I have. I try not to, I do my best to restrain myself, but if it really does bug me then I have to go for it, because in the end it's what you see that is the value of it. I mean the value of a painting is looking at it, and how it invites you in to look at it. If it does that it has value, and this isn't money value, it's talking about the real value of the painting.

Alison: Are there particular paintings that you have kept for yourself because of that, brining them out and looking and watching the dialogue between the individual pieces? 37.50

Gary: Sure. Yes. There are paintings I would never let go.

Alison: Like your Bayeux Tapestry piece? 37.55

Gary: Yes. If I know it would be accessible to me and loved then I may sell it. There was somebody who has always loved that painting, and wanted to buy it, I won't say who it is, but I don't know if they will and I'm not making any kind of fuss about it. So I just leave it happily in the racks.

Alison: So it's just there, ready and waiting for you at any time. 38.24

Gary: Yes.

Alison: How does this differ from when you feel a painting is turning out successfully, to a painting that is floundering?

Gary: Most paintings are a succession of layers that emerge into the fore and then at some point may be emphasized or quietened down. If it is floundering then I will do my best to give it all the time needed to take the work on and perhaps to resolve. 39.07

Alison: Have there been instances where you have been pre-occupied by an on-going painting away from the studio/workspace? 39.20

Gary: Oh yes, oh often, oh absolutely. Most of the time, because when I leave the studio, the paintings, I live them. On the tube going back, watching the television, middle of the night, you know this is just part of something that is a rhythm going through you, like a river. Sometimes it gushes and wakes you up, or something's happens, and sometimes it's so smooth, and you're not aware of anything, but certainly it's on going, and sometimes you just forget things, and suddenly they pop up like trying to remember somebody's name, 'dam can't remember that name' in a conversation, then three o'clock at morning, where did that come from, why did I wake up? (laughter) 40.18

Alison: (laughter) Yes it's always 3 O'clock. Do you take photographs of the work for when you're away from it? 40.30

Gary: Yes, I always do. I always take a lot of photographs and recently I bought a better camera, which becomes very important.

Alison: In the course of making a painting, have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment? 41.14

Gary: Oh yeah. Totally absorbed, and then sometimes completely can't sort of like I can do this one, I can't do that one. So I've been working on these ones, and can't do anymore with that one, I have a feeling for the next stage, but there could be so many options. And what I had before what was happening with those paintings, that start you drawing, I had a completely different perception of what was going on, what passes through your mind, that what was going to happen there, and then suddenly it wasn't that at all, it's all changed. So what is important about time, is that the painting happens in it's own time. You can't hurry it, you can force things, but for me that's not a good way to make it happen. It happens in it's own time, it moves in it's own time and it will bring you back in it's own time, while the other paintings have their own time, and they all have different times of involvement, and I think for me it's a question of working with that, and the involvement in one can certainly trigger something in the other one. So it's a dialogue, it's like they speak to you, it's like you have this dialogue with them, in visual terms. In Tai Chi Chuan there is a classic saying 'Forget self, stick and follow with the other person, idea, feeling' etc. 43.04

Alison: I can see why you have so many on the go. It's like one may remain quiet for

a certain amount of time? 43.21

Gary: It's exactly that, and you know that they're all on going, and can change radically. There are little whispers sometimes, or shouts.

Alison: So at any point in your painting practice do you act as the 'beholder' of your own artwork and is this beholder 'absorbed' in the sense that Fried describes? So, do you see your paintings more as if you were the spectator, the audience? Are you able to do that, shift that position, or are you always the painter-beholder? 44.05

Gary: Well I think you're so involved with it, but there are times when you have a detachment to try to see from another point of view as a spectator, as a spectator coming from a different discipline even. That was what was so interesting in collaborating with movement artists, that was interesting, but that does happen occasionally, but on the whole you are the painter. However, there is a meditative detachment aspect within the development of a work that manifests in varying ways specific to a work. 44.30

Alison: Have you encountered an embodied experience as a result of your painting process, or any other type of manifestation, and if so could you describe it? So for example when I was a graphic designer are used to work a lot on the computer in Photoshop and I would spend long days immersed in Photoshop. Then I would come away from the studio and I would, try to mentally use the computer keys, for instance control Z, to un-do something. So in real life, not digital life if something went wrong I would automatically try to un-do it, mentally, forgetting that I wasn't in that 'space' anymore. So you are so in tune with your practice it carries on into your other life. 45.45

Gary: Well Courbet said that the sign of a really good painter is that they should be able to do the same painting over again. I've never been able to do that. (laughter)

Alison: I was going to say I think I'd struggle. (laughter)

Gary: I've never been able to do anything like that. (laughter) I remember Terry Frost used to do these cheap trips back to Penzance up to the gallery. And he came to a show of mine at Flowers once. Not in the Kingston Gallery, it was before that in London Fields and they were small paintings, and he saw one painting, and it was a little blue painting about 24 x 20, and he said 'I really like that painting', and I said 'Ok', and he said 'I'll challenge you', I said 'Ok I'm up for a challenge', and he said 'Why don't you make a big painting of that little painting, a really big painting', and I

said 'I never do that, the scale is to the painting', and he said 'But I challenge you to do it', so I did. And I got it very near, but of course it wasn't the same because everything changes, nothing can be the same, but it was exciting doing it. So it is specific to what it is in the end. I mean like one I've begun over here one could do on a small scale, but the relationship with it is completely different, because it's actually the precision of needing to do that, because I know where it comes from and why I needed to do it, it's to do with this recent situation of my wife dying that I just had to come in, and do that, because it was to do with that she didn't have the freedom to express herself, and was kind of trapped with this illness, and what it did to her. It was agonizing, I just wanted to be able to give her this freedom, and so it's a very specific, precise movement, it's not just arbitrary, and that's a way a lot of the paintings happen, and a lot of the drawings happen. I remember coming back from Malaysia in 1983, and on the plane I draw all the time, all time, all the time, and I'm not sure what's happening, I just draw, you know these things are specific to that size, that is the experience, and they stay like that.

Alison: Yes, scale can totally change all sorts of things. Often it's not as simple as scaling up a small work, as Sickert used to do for a composition. 51.00

Gary: Yes, yes it doesn't. But that's not to say that a little thing can't trigger a bigger thing, or a big thing trigger a little thing.

Alison: Of course, but as in trying to do a reproduction of that thing is a different. 51.05

Gary: It is. It is.

Alison: We're obviously not as good as Courbet then. (laughter) 51.13

Gary: No, not as good as Courbet. (laughter)

Alison: So have you encountered this embodied experience, I'm not sure how we have answered that? Obviously you were talking about this emotion this charge that you had to communicate onto the canvas. I suppose that's an emotion that in some ways is an address. 52.05

Gary: It is a need, it's a desperate need. It's fulfilling something, but it can only be in the painting, but the fact that you've done it is very positive, and you couldn't have done anything else. 52.33

Alison: Therapeutic? 52.46

Gary: Yes therapeutic as well. Yes. But it's more than just therapeutic. Therapeutic is fantastic, we need more healers on the planet, not just successful people who are good businessmen. We need to understand ourselves. We don't very much, we do in many ways tremendously, but there's so very much that we don't understand, we're completely helpless.

Alison: When you were talking about your daily experience of the studio, and the paintings you may be working on, how you get onto the train and you're thinking about them constantly, have you ever felt like if you've been so engrossed or particular in painting in a certain way, have you felt like you're reliving it in some sense? 53.50

Gary: Yeah, sure, yeah.

Alison: Like we discussed earlier, kind of like a muscle memory. 54.00

Gary: Yes you do relive things a lot. That's where repetition is a vital ingredient to doing what you do, and of course the muscle memory: the act of doing it, the way we use the paint, the way we wipe the brushes, all these things.

Alison: Was there any particular paintings so encompassed your life outside of the studio? 54.41

Gary: Yes, I think if I go back. I think there'd be many instances. But it triggers the thought that when I knew my Dad had lung cancer in 82, 83, we knew for a while, and my paintings instantly became a want to heal him, really wanted to heal him, they were about that. There's a big painting called 'Gold Blood' that was to do with that, and this was to with Tai Chi as well, the kind of energy you can give in a relationship, just by being with somebody.

Alison: That's really interesting to here. So, now I'm thinking about the absorption as beholder/spectator in the painting that is made. If you were to reflect on the act of painting with reference to a specific painting, could you describe what the painting process gave you or perhaps still gives you, the painter? 56.29

Gary: Impossible.

Alison: Because it's always different? 56.30

Gary: You can never know all the different things that are going on, you just know you've done it. It's like climbing up a mountain, it has so many crevices and pitfalls,

and you get to the top, and you think 'How the hell did I get here'? And sometimes that happens, how did you get there? It wasn't even understanding, wasn't knowing, wasn't anything, was just the drive to see the painting through, and to get there.

57.27

Alison: Is it that journey, traveling from a need to do something, to being satisfied that it can leave the studio, is it that journey that brings you back all the time, is it a sense of accomplishment that keeps you keeping on? 57.51

Gary: Very much so. I mean energy creates energy, and for instance often when I have an exhibition, I will show what I have been doing, but I will show a painting that lead into what I've been doing, and then I will show a painting that's leading out of it into something else. So I've often done that when showing.

Alison: Brilliant, because it is that continual thought thing, an on-going process, that dialogue. 58.27

Gary: Yes, totally, it is. You know this is the long haul. It's not just a fickle thing, just here and there. It's your life and you do it to the best of your ability in the way that you do it. The way I paint is the antithesis of the way somebody like Lucien Freud paints, it couldn't be more apart in every way, and the value that is involved is in being oneself. No, it's on going.

Alison: Like I said this reminds me about what Stuart Elliot was saying about an on-going dialogue with his paintings. One needs to talk to the other, and displayed in a certain way so the understanding unfolds, the dialogue. 59.30

Gary: Well the thing is you see the process is really cyclic. If one is talking about the complete process it is cyclic, so I often go back to go forward. So since I've been here my work has dialogue with my work from the 60's, and still is investigating something that was started then, very much to do with the edge. Edge activity, and an open centre. You see it has come round again. Not the same. And I had this conversation with De Kooning in his studio about this, and he had a famous saying that he 'changed to be the same' and it's exactly what it is.

Alison: After the course of making a painting, have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment from the finished painting? 1.01.05

Gary: I'm sure I have, I can't remember anything at the moment, but I'm sure that has happened. Yes. You're glad to leave it, that's something that's over, and then

you move on. 1.01.29

Alison: Because some people have said that it's a different process from being engaged during the process to standing in front of a finished work? 1.01.43

Gary: Well as I said what I said about the faceted crystal ball, it's like what you did is right in front (sound of clapped hands) of you here (sound of clapped hands), but now it's turning, and something else is in front of you, but it doesn't mean it has gone away, it's just round the other side of the ball, it's still there just as much as the one you are seeing. So it's always about what you can see, and the things that you cannot see, always. It's always there, and that's you.

Alison: I think we've answered this, but I'll ask it anyway. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of your finished painting away from it? 1.02.35

Gary: Yes, we've answered that.

Alison: Have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment from another artists painting, or any other work of art? 1.02.54

Gary: Oh yeah. Absolutely. I mean the reason one paints, is one loves painting. And part of that is looking at all the wonderful paintings in the world: the great paintings, the not-so-great paintings, and the awful paintings, it's all part of it. Oh yes, at some points you're totally involved with Velásquez, at another point you're totally involved with Goya, or then you're involved with Matisse, or then Monet, or then Bonnard, or the Greek fifth century sculpture or pots. Whatever. 1.03.39

Alison: Tapestries? 1.03.48

Gary: Tapestries. You know the art of the art world just absorbs you, and that's what you love, but then you have to leave it. For a past few years my objective has been to trying to kill Matisse. (laughter) You have to get certain paintings, certain painters out of your system to continue, so what you do, again it's a need, is why you do it. Not so much an idea, it's a need. There's this wonderful story of Jackson Pollock that Brian Roberston told me, when he was alive. Lee Krasner would work upstairs, and Pollock would work downstairs. And one day when Lee was upstairs she heard this crashing downstairs, and she went downstairs and went 'Jackson, what's going on, what's happening, what's all this noise?' and there he was throwing this Picasso book from one end of the room to the other. (laughter)

Alison: (laughter) That's brilliant, I love that. 1.05.14

Gary: And she said 'Why are you doing that?' and he said 'Well every time I think of something new to do, I pick up this book, and he's done it!'

Alison: So maybe that's a good thing to do now and again? 1.05.37 (laughter)

Gary: (laughter) Yes, the Matisse book. These great artists give you so much, and of course this is why for me art is always in the moment, painting is always in the moment. Whatever has been done in the past, what Goya did, what Rembrandt did, or what Matisse did, these paintings are with you right now and they're giving you something. It's a gift and it's giving you something wonderful, if you want to use it. You know, it's up to you. It's a gift and you want to use it and do something with it you can. If you miss it, you miss it, but that's what is there, and that's why the history of painting is a treasure chest, and you open the box and you take out what is there that is wonderful, and then you do something with it.

You don't just wear it, that's jewellery, but what you do with a painting, or a sculpture, because something can't be done again, you can't go back and do a Monet, you can't go back and do a Matisse, you can't do that. You can't be so intoxicated that you only do that. You are yourself, and completely unique, never been on the planet before, you never will be again, it's your one chance, and you just do what you do. It may be all a bit of a muddle, or maybe so vague you don't know what it is, there's not much you can say about it, especially with abstract paintings. It's a strange thing. It's not like figurative painting where you can say this is a portrait painting, this is a group portrait of so and so, it isn't that, it's something that is completely sort of what it is.

Alison: So this has answered the next question. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of another artists painting away from it? 1.08.01

Gary: There you we go. I always believe that the main qualities in life are generosity and kindness, and I think that's what motivates you to paint, and that's how you develop the paintings by giving to them. In fact that's what Franz Kline said, he said 'Painting is not about knowing what you're doing, it's about giving'.

Alison: That's brilliant.

Gary: Yes, absolutely brilliant.

Alison: So now I'm going talking about constructing The Painting-Beholder/Spectator. If you have experience 'absorption' or self-abandonment in

painting practice as we discussed earlier, and if you have experienced yourself as an 'absorbed' spectator of your own work, does this affect how you consider the reactions of another spectator of your work? 1.0.25

Gary: Well, if you take the world of spectators there is no control, it is out of your control, you cannot control, unless you are seriously into manipulation, and I'm not. For me it's live, and let live. People think what they think, do what they want to do. So no. I can't do anything on that one. Again, painting isn't like a chess game where you are trying to manipulate, and strategically move here or there. You are just doing what you have to do. I mean being aware that some things you want to stay away from, you have to work in an area, and that's the area that you choose at the time, and you know that means and negating and rejecting. So in fact that is a greater part of painting really, the rejection process, that it's what you kick out or don't allow in, is mostly what the painting that occupies your time is mostly to do with that. When it's an additive layering process. 1.10.51

Alison: Conversely would you fight any feeling of self-abandonment? 1.11.09

Gary: In the painting? With the spectator?

Alison: If you were considering the spectator, would there ever be a strategy where you were trying to do the opposite of, you know where you were talking about the magnetic properties, would there be the opposite, where you were trying to propel? 1.11.46

Gary: Well there are times when you meet people or people ask you to talk about painting. Well you can talk about it as much as you can, if people have their ideas about painting, and you think well that's way off the mark, you might indicate that. And that of course happens, you meet all sorts with your exhibitions and so on. You agree, you disagree, that's life, that's how it is and that's fine. 1.12.49

Alison: So would you or do you ever construct or position the spectator/holder in your painting practice? 1.13.01

Gary: I don't think so. I don't think that's really possible with a painting. I mean if a painting and the wall where people are going to see it in a gallery, it's free movement. And where people choose to stand to look at a painting for me that's really a key thing about experiencing a painting, but some people will stand anywhere, and not see the importance to move with the painting and see it in different ways, at different distances, at different angles. Some people just stand in

one place and move on. Like you see in the National Gallery or something, where people stand in front of a painting for 20 seconds and then move on to the next one. Or Tate Modern, walk along with a pram or something. This is not looking at painting, this is not what painting's about, but unfortunately it's a part of big galleries, and little galleries. People come in look around and go out, they're interested or not interested. I mean if I'm seriously interested by a painting, I will be in front of it for a long time. 1.14.22

Alison: So this next question I will ask it anyway. If so, do you or have you found yourself working in a particular way in order to consider the beholder, to construct this relationship or anticipate it? 1.14.39

Gary: No I don't think so. No. 1.14.53

Alison: Considering this address to the beholder do you consider 'pictorial unity' or other particular modes of address to the beholder as part of your painting process? So this may not apply either? 1.15.02

Gary: No.

Alison: By pictorial unity I don't necessarily mean of the picture, another way of translating it might be through composition? 1.15.10

Gary: Well no, because there is no composition usually. I mean there is an integral self-sufficiency, but it's different from your idea of composition. They used to be composed, but not since 75, 76. It's quite often a disparate incidence, and disparate spaces that live together, and then it can look like a composition. (laughter) 1.16.02

Alison: (laughter) Unintentionally? 1.16.06

Gary: Yes. It can look intentionally composed. And that started in the 70's when I was teaching at Camberwell Art School. It was 1975 and in the summertime, in the summer term in Covent Garden, before I had my first one man show at the Acme Gallery in 76 with all black and white, they were charcoal on canvas. The Odhams Press was being pulled down in Covent Garden, and the workmen cordoned off the whole area with these big screens, these 8ft screens, so I thought this is just amazing. So I went to see the people at Odhams Press and asked 'Do you mind if I bring students here for two weeks? And 'Can we tack up canvas all around on these screens and work with you pulling this building down?' so that's what we did. So rather than working with composition we were working with de-composition. It's all

coming down, not being put up, but it's diminishing. It was amazing and it was so enjoyable.

Alison: That sounds like a brilliant project. Did you take photographs? 1.17.42

Gary: I never bothered with photographs then. In retrospect one should have done all these things. It's in the paintings. There is a painting called 'Watch it come down'.

Alison: So would you consider or describe yourself as a privileged beholder at any time: before, during, or after your painting process? So privileged as in the first to see the work, or the first to see the creation, the unfolding of the work? Would you consider yourself as a privileged beholder? So this relates to a quote by Stephen Mulhall describes the painter-beholder as 'merely the first beholder, privileged only temporarily, however the painter-beholder necessarily beholds the process of producing the painting and that privilege belongs to no other beholder'. So do you feel privileged? 1.19.36

Gary: I never thought in those terms. I never thought in terms of privilege. It is an evolving experience that occupies your life, your time, and of course nobody else sees it, I invite very few people to the studio. 1.19.51

Alison: Well in that case I'm very, very privileged.

Gary: But I don't think in those terms. 1.20.02

Alison: And you have kind of hinted about this next one. Would you describe the experience of painting each painting as a unique occurrence? 1.20.21

Gary: Yes. Definitely. 1.20.23

Alison: Do you or have you found yourself trying to replicate specific experiences encountered from previous painting sessions in new paintings? 1.20.35

Gary: Yes. Like I was talking about the 60's paintings. Yes, it's taken... Well I've been here since 2008.

Alison: And you're still working on that? 1.20.46

Gary: Yes, on the edge, and the centre, but differently now. Again, working with charcoal like I did in the 70's paintings, sort of overlapping, so the language that one has been involved with, that one has created, returns, but differently. Again, that's what one is, what's coming through, and used in a different way. 1.21.38

Alison: Is there a particular painting that you find yourself recalling more than others, as in the experience of that painting, not necessarily that haunts you, but maybe it's seminal? 1. 21.52

Gary: There have been. There have been paintings that haunt you, at different times, for different reasons, in different decades. There are.

Alison: Having the show last year did it awaken any of those? 1.22.21

Gary: There are paintings that haunt me for instance that I did at the Stockwell Depot in 1968 and 69 when I was there, was I was still a final student at Camberwell Art School, and I did four, quite big paintings. These were edge paintings. I did a number of small paintings that survive, but those big paintings, when I moved studio from afterwards they were stored, after the Slade I moved to my studio to Martello Street, and in that move we had to get them across the gate, and the gate had spikes on it. We got them over, but the guys dropped them, and they were impaled. These paintings that were so important to me were just ruined. So those paintings have haunted me, and the paintings that I have been involved in, in the last few years are to do with that.

Alison: Wow, they have stuck with you. 1.23.53

Gary: Yes. I often want to replicate them, but even if I try to I can't, the wind takes me in a different direction, it blows me in a different direction.

Alison: That's was quite a traumatic experience, obviously etched on your memory. 1.24.15

Gary: Yes, well you forget about it, at times it goes, but these things come back, because the paintings are important to you, and as I say the value in painting is in looking at it, or what happens when you look at it.

Alison: Claims on primacy could suggest that part of the desire or need to produce artworks for the painter is to be the first beholder, perhaps not to create the artist, but to create the beholder. Do you find an affinity with this statement, have you worked in a particular way to encourage becoming the 'absorbed' beholder, or does it develop differently for you? 1.26.10

Gary: Can you say exactly what an 'absorbed beholder' is?

Alison: Well you could describe it as you know we were talking about being absorbed

in a painting, that is a beholder who is totally absorbed in a painting, an absorbed beholder. So working in a way to encourage ourselves in becoming the absorbed beholder. You were talking about the need to have to paint, does that need link to this? 1.27.02

Gary: Well I guess it's one of the reasons why there are painters, not very many, who you would talk to if you felt the need about your work, or about a painting. I mean that happens with the Greenberg people, they would often, like Larry Poons would often call somebody down to the studio to talk about how to crop a painting, like the elephant skin paintings, where should it be cut, where should it be cropped, and a dialogue can be helpful in certain circumstances. Or certain painters would call on other painters, for their opinions they highly respected, and you could find some direction with about the question marks in the painting. So occasionally that can happen by chance as well, when you have a show, and somebody makes the odd remark and it kind of sticks, and you think 'Oh yeah that's interesting'. But it can swivel you to see it slightly different, and that's a great thing about an audience, that people can hit the thing from different angles, and sometimes you catch one of those angles, and it throws some light on what you may do next or at some point. So to be open to that I very important, yeah. Having said that, quite often they don't amount to much. I always remember John Mclean who was a wonderful, wonder painter, wonderful person, and we had studios next door to each other at the Oval for about 10 years in the 90's. And often John would call me and say 'Gary, come and have a look' and I'd go in and he'd say 'What do you think I should do with this? Should I put this green up there, or should I make that bigger?' So I'd have a long look and talk, and he'd say 'Yeah, that's really good' and then I'd go in the next day and he'd taken not a blind bit of notice, I knew he would. And he came into my studio sometimes. I didn't invite him in as much as he invited me in, because I don't do that, but occasionally it was good. It was good. So these things are sometimes really important, even if we ignore, or tend to put to the side what has been said, it's a reaction that can trigger another reaction in us, and that really is the nutritional point. 1.30.51

Alison: I like the way you put that 'nutritional point', yes it does feed. 1.30.59

Gary: Yes, so we need each other. We don't work in a vacuum. I mean like this is remote, working here, it's wonderful and I love it, but we still don't work in a vacuum, we are part of something. In the end it's all about people. 1.31.32

Alison: So this statement of working just to become the absorbed beholder, does it

describe you then? 1.31.43

Gary: I don't think so.

Alison: So we have covered an awful lot here. 1.31.52

Gary: Yes, we have.

Alison: But it may just be the tip of the iceberg. Is there anything else you would like to talk about or anything you feel is more pertinent, or to point out? 1.32.20

Gary: Simple things really, that are the foundation of Tai Chi practice, and there are just a few complimentary opposites that are really important. The first one is the hardness or the softness, and how they relate to each other. The second one is how a space opens or closes, or spaces open or close or how a painting seems to open or close. And the next one is the relationship between stillness and movement. It's really important. These are the main things. The other one is what is full, and what is empty. So these are the complimentary opposites. Cornerstones for me, apply to all works or whatever, or music, but in my own work these are the things, in a sense yardsticks to get some sort of orientation from. It always fascinates me for instance the whole business of looking, and looking at paintings where the painting is still, and it is never going to move, it's hung on a wall, and you're relatively still if you're on one spot, but you will move because you are alive, and you may move to another part to another angle so you're moving. But you can be still when you're looking at the painting, but the painting is very active, visually, optically, that is a lot of movement. And it's this impossibility of opposite, which is so fascinating about painting, that it is flat, but what you are seeing are spatial sensations, but they're only spatial in relation to the flatness, and it's that thing, that relationship that makes it a painting. Cezanne had paintings like that, when all the elements of a painting are like this are like this exclamation with his hands with his fingers locked together, that you have the space, you have the activity locked, but you have the flatness all together, and it's all being equally important. It can't just be space without an understanding of surface, and it can't just be surface because you've always got space. So it's always a combination of the two impossible things coming together, and that's part of the beauty of painting, and not like anything else, not like photography, completely different to anything else.

Alison: Do you find you use scale to address these opposites? 1.35.50

Gary: Yes. Obviously scale is a volatile thing.

Alison: Because I am looking around us and there are quite a lot of small works to wall encompassing works. 1.36.06

Gary: Yes. Always like that I always have a contrasting scale around and working on. Always. Because I find that helpful, as you say one feeds the other. Sometimes, not all the time. The thing is I try to keep my mind completely kind of empty, that's why I call it my empty place, so that I can catch things on the wing. Not even looking, and then something you see in the corner of your eye and then it will bounce over into something else, and then you think about something behind you. So it's awareness of seeing and not seeing. It's the life of the studio.

Alison: Gary, many thanks for your time. As we said we have covered a lot today and I look forward to it's continuing at the round table discussion. 1.37.05

## Interview Summary of quotes from collaborators interview transcriptions

This document is a brief collection of some select quotes from transcriptions of the collaborators interviews. It is meant as a way to help find points of interest, and further reading to highlight potential issues to raise in discussion. Answers to Question 1 and 25 are covered in more depth in the individual interviews.

2. Would you describe how you feel during what could be called the genesis of a painting, perhaps recalling a painting you considered successful?

**Bick:** 'It is *always* up for renegotiation. So my own absorption in a piece of work involves a lot of contingency.' (AB INT: 10.55)

**Callery:** 'I know that a work has to go through a process of becoming bad before it can become good. I've always been suspicious - in terms of my own work - I have always been suspicious of works that come easily.' (SC INT: 5.48)

**Elliot:** 'it's a bit like musical improvisation in that if you imagine someone playing on stage and they play like a jazz musician and they strike a note, and it's awful, totally wrong, but then what they play after that retroactively makes it right. So something weird temporally is going on that kind of disrupts a teleological 'this, then this.' The other interesting thing to me though is the thing they do about retroactively making that right, might in itself become a well-known move, and may enter culture as another 'standard thing.' (SE INT: 27.20)

**Elliot:** 'So if I'm doing it right it should be just like buttering toast, very quotidian.' (SE INT: 29.53)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'I always think that for me, when something really interesting happens in the work, it's a matter of just literally getting on and doing it, and being very much in the moment with that. And if it does work it's very much obvious in an instant. Sometimes it's a gut feeling, other times it's just basically a bit like diagrammatic thinking, this diagonal worked for me you know, its like layers of a cake, you put this, that and the other on top. So from your gut, yeah you just go for it, but equally you kind of have an assumption, some prior knowledge as to how materials can operate and behave. And something happens; there is always a slippage there.' (AMJ INT: 24.53)

**Pratt:** 'Well the main thing that I seek is surprise really I suppose. I've always, right from even when I was an undergraduate, very early on in my career, I used to worry about midcareer stasis. And to stop learning, or to stop enquiring to me is something I fear greatly. So when I see something surprises me, a new connection, or a new kind of visual language, or a new use for me of a visual language, I find that it's a very worthwhile moment.' (KP INT: 21.39)

**Wragg:** 'the important thing is, for me, living in the moment. So as far as the past is concerned it's gone. I'm only concerned with what is happening now.' (GW INT: 17.20)

3. Could you talk about how much of your process is planned, how you may use a system, or how much is arbitrary?

**Bick:** 'So the pre-knowledge, based on years of practice, of how these materials interact with each other would also constitute a form of pre-planning; but then what I'm doing with those components is setting up the conditions in which a combination of what might be logical material syntax and the kind of purely aleatory idea of doing something because I don't know what else to do, become part of what makes this work arrive at a form of balance. There has to be a component of it that I would describe as disruptive, something that stops me falling into habitual ways of knowing how a painting might work its way to possible resolution.' (AB INT: 13.20)

**Callery:** 'You start with those conditions and again, inevitably, something unexpected happens and trips you up.' (SC INT: 7.39)

**Elliot:** 'I suppose there's a kind of romantic idea that if it's too planned, it won't be as interesting, which I don't believe actually, and I don't mean here, but there is something about, and I think this is quite personal, quite related to my temperament, is that if I plan too much (laughter) I have trouble.' (SE INT: 33.40)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'In the current work there is a definitive with a system that I find it really difficult to cope with at the moment, because I used to rely on the visual experience of looking at the painting, and responding to it, so it mainly be would in relation to an image, but the current work is not premised on an image.' (AMJ INT: 29.28)

**Pratt:** 'I guess maybe if I do use chance, there are so many chance encounters that you end up with this really complex formula that generates something like this. It's hidden. I talk about them as if they we're unplanned, as if it all happens on the surface, and to a certain extent that is true, but there is also a kind of ideological intention.' (KP INT: 24.19)

**Wragg:** 'You live your life in the normal world, wherever it may be, travelling in one's local district or daily life, and anything can become part of the painting, absolutely anything, and that's exactly what has happened over the last six decades, that's what's happened, anything can be part of it.' (GW INT: 19.09)

4. Does this process respond to how you feel the painting is developing?

**Bick:** See last answer.

**Callery:** 'When I am making a painting the way it looks is not as important as how it makes me feels. So, a work can actually feel right bodily and what it actually looks like is not as significant for the developing working process, it's not of primary importance.' (SC INT: 8.41)

**Elliot:** 'there's a bit of room for response, but more likely the response would be to make another painting. So I think there's a little bit of, maybe how people conventionally would work on a painting of many layers and revisions, and changes and so on. I do do that, but it's across many canvases. It's like the layers in Photoshop, they're just 10 jpeg's rather than 10 layers.' (SE INT: 36.22)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'some experience is so frustrating and you can go on for months, and I have done. And it just doesn't come off the ground. And then you know that at some point the work will give. It has to give because you invested in that. You've tested so many times, and you've hated it for so long, that at some point, it needs to resolve, but that's why I think we come to the studio. You can't do that anywhere else.' (AMJ INT: 31.27)

**Pratt:** 'I think it's truly disingenuous to say the painting happens to me, you know I set up the walls, and then it just executes itself through my brush, that's clearly nonsense for some of the reasons I've touched on. I am faced with choices, like is that splash round or not you know, what are the margins of round? Shall I go round

to the left, or right around that object I'm not allowed to paint over? So it's up to me to save a work. I guess I say that the works are against intuition, but they clearly just aren't. It reduces intuition into tiny little bite-size morsels, instead of this great big wall. And that's a huge part of what my subject matter is, why I chose to do it.' (KP INT: 31.07)

**Wragg:** 'I challenge the painting. I challenge it by putting something there that doesn't belong. To kick it and then just to see what happens, whether that gets kicked out or whether the painting's obstinate and it stays as it is and it throws that challenge out. And just take it from there. It's a device that I often use.' (GW INT: 28.14)

5. How has this process developed, especially in relation to your past experience of painting what you considered successful paintings?

**Bick:** 'There are also an identifiable body of works where the whole surface is built up of successive layers of hot wax ironed to a smooth surface, but within that, variation or variety is the consistent imperative, that something should always aim not to be like something else.' (AB INT: 15.00)

**Callery:** 'what I've have done more and more - this is what really interests me - is to rely less on the way a work looks and to rely more on the way it makes me feel.' (SC INT: 10.01)

**Elliot:** 'we've all got things about our work that we can't find out yet, and I'm also mindful of the fact that that can happen over a really long period of time, you know, in the future as well. There's no rush on that. Maybe I'll do that when it makes sense to spend a year on one type. Maybe there will be a time when it feels like the right thing to do that, at the moment it's not a priority. It's totally part of the work and why the work has evolved the way it has, technically as well as to do with what sort of time I've got, and that's been an interesting thing, in terms of what's different about what the work needs, and what I want, and they're not always the same thing, well usually not.' (SE INT: 38.47)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'I always refer to making, when I make paintings I do leave traces, and I love observing those traces. Those traces, in effect, is something that is present and still part of the work, but for some reason got discarded, edited out, and

the reason it got edited out is because either the painting was leading the other way, or I had different ideas about it. But when I've actually stopped to look at all these different elements that were finding their way onto the floor, that were finding their way into different paintings, I realised that all these fragments I was looking at, are actually being composed within the practice, into the painting that's to come.' (AMJ INT: 35.04)

**Pratt:** 'Certainly that thing I said about intuition, experience taught me that I could sit and look at something indefinitely, and not be any clearer about how to bring to a formal resolution if the decision is too big, so I break the decisions down.' (KP INT: 35.12)

**Wragg:** 'Well right from the early days, the relationship, the integral relationship between what is still and what is moving has been part of the painting. Because the painting is always still. It isn't moving around, but as the person in front of it, what makes you alive is the fact that you move. And you can't help it even if you're still there's still movement. So there's movement within stillness, and then there's stillness within movement, and again this is the connection with Tai Chi. This is exactly what Tai Chi is; stillness within movement and the Chi Kung part, the breathing part is movement within stillness. So this is how the painting is always developed, even before I knew about Tai chi.' (GW INT: 29.39)

6. How do you know how well a painting is developing? Is it the case that you are aware to everything you are thinking, or does this 'understanding' come more from a subconscious level?

**Bick:** 'I think I rely on not knowing, I think I rely on not knowing in the sense that a philosophical belief in un-knowing things that goes back a long way in my own thinking.' (AB INT: 16.01)

**Bick:** 'I'm very fond of a quote I can roughly paraphrase by Roger Hilton, of all people, who somewhere in his journals says something like 'sometimes my paintings are completed when my back is turned' and I think what that tells you is that the dynamic relationships of a studio practice are actually very particular.'  
(AB INT: 18.57)

**Callery:** 'The idea of judging a work successful on my own terms - I would know it not by standing and scrutinising but by experiencing the painting more obliquely. If I stood near to it without scrutinising, just sensing, I would know whether it works or not. How that perception operates is a really complex to describe in words. We probably don't have a sufficient developed language to describe experience. We can talk about what something looks like, but we can't talk about what something feels like quite so well. I guess that's why I make the work I make, because we don't have the language for it, so I'm interested to develop the language we need as painting.'  
(SC INT: 14.22)

**Elliot:** 'This has to do with what lens you are looking at the work through historically, or which bits of the language one feels are yours, or explicitly borrowed, or unlocatable. The work can highlight those things in you, as much as you guiding the work. I feel very much rewritten by the work as often I do that I am making it.'  
(SE INT: 41.00)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'I think it's very material again. I hate over working my materials, and I know when I've done that, and usually it's my own incompetence. It's true. You know, you pour the paint layer down, and it's just too much, it's too dark. My rule of thumb is if you lose the light in a painting, you're always going back on yourself, so try and keep it light for it to become dark. So you are walking through the shadows of painting. So basically it's always material that I have a good response from to.'  
(AMJ INT: 36.45)

**Pratt:** 'Well it's pseudo chance. I call it chance, but compared to some people who really use chance, you can look at them and see that they are not really systematic, they are not really chance driven. Those are props that I use to support myself really kind of intellectually, and intuitively, ultimately.'  
(KP INT: 36.20)

**Pratt:** 'the paintings don't give me answers, but they're a forum for this kind of consideration'  
(KP INT: 40.25)

**Wragg:** 'When it seems to be good you can dupe yourself, you come in the next day and it looks terrible, we've all had that experience, it's not uncommon. This is why time is a very important element in the painting, for me. You can see the painting in different lights, and I like to see the painting upside down, sideways, on the floor, leaning against the wall in different lights so the light catches the surface in different

ways, and to see this in different ways as the painting develops. So you really get to know the painting, and the criteria of when to leave it. When I'm happy with it I'm allowing it to leave the studio, and if there is a hesitancy about it, it doesn't go.'

(GW INT: 36.31)

7. How does this differ from when you feel a painting is turning out successfully, to a painting that is floundering?

**Bick:** 'all the time I'm floundering but things are also going well both at once. It has to be the uncertainty that animates everything in the studio so it becomes quite important that there are a lot of works on the go rather than just one.'

(AB INT: 21.22)

**Callery:** 'As for the finished result itself perhaps is not really for the artist to say if it's successful or not. The painting has to go out in the world and be robust enough to survive and gather meaning. You can achieve all that you want in the studio and it can reflect your ambition entirely but at the same time it's actually got to find a place in the world. That is much more difficult.' (SC INT: 16.42)

**Elliot:** 'It's not an automatic mistrust; it's a kind of awareness, that just historically if you could correlate that somehow, you'd probably be wrong as often as not. The other thing to say about all this is because the making in a way is so perfunctory, and quite quick, there's not a lot of time, there's not the days of making and marinating in something that would maybe play better a host to those kind of ideas. It's all over quite quickly, so there's not much room for that, and in a way that's deliberate too.'

(SE INT: 44.46)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'If I get that first surprise, or if a painting starts to look in a way I've not seen it look before, I'm absolutely and totally excited by it, and then I know I have to run away. And then if a painting where you are just going over and over and over, something that you effectively should have got right in the first place, then I find that the painting is just going to be one of those to linger for months and months on end, and most likely it's going to end up being cut up, but something good will come of it.'

(AMJ INT: 41.23)

**Pratt:** 'it's in my power to change it, to work out what it needs.' p.6 'it is kind of a chart of thinking and decision-making' (KP INT: 47.45)

**Wragg:** 'Most paintings are a succession of layers that emerge into the fore and then at some point may be emphasized or quietened down. If it is floundering then I will do my best to give it all the time needed to take the work on and perhaps to resolve it.' (GW INT: 39.07)

8. Have there been instances where you have been pre-occupied by an on-going painting away from the studio/workspace? If so, please describe.

**Bick:** 'All the time. Not endlessly but inevitably at certain points things crop up. I think in terms of how this connects to the overall ideas that you're discussing inevitably during those times when I am able to go and look at art and not just painting, at art including architecture, space, light ideas can sometimes become recognisable in things I am seeing, contemporary or very historic, and those things can then be reabsorbed and can be readdressed in what I am doing in the studio at a later stage.' (AB INT: 22.05).

**Callery:** 'I am all the time. They follow you around in your head.' (SC INT: 16.48)

**Elliot:** 'I think about them all the time ... I had to physically test absolutely everything in the beginning, but now I've had a bit more experience of materials, and making paintings, it's a little like how a composer writes music, and that's changed after painting for 15 years or something, to feel able to actually go through ideas a little bit.' (SE INT: 46.20)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'It's the most interesting phenomena. There's nothing that can put you off normal living like a painting that's not functioning, because you go over it, and over it, and over it, and you're thinking what is it that doesn't make it? And you carry that with you, to home, to work, everywhere. It just eats at you, eats at you all the time.' (AMJ INT: 41.57)

**Pratt:** 'Oh yeah, definitely. Yeah you kind of carry it with you, think how am I going to sort this out. I think distance is quite often essential, which is why sometimes things that have been lying around the studio and not really working for a long period of time, you want to pick them up and finish them off.' (KP INT: 53.26)

**Wragg:** 'Oh yes, oh often, oh absolutely. Most of the time, because when I leave the studio, the paintings, I live them. On the tube going back, watching the television,

middle of the night, you know this is just part of something that is a rhythm going through you, like a river. Sometimes it gushes and wakes you up, or something's happens, and sometimes it's so smooth, and you're not aware of anything, but certainly it's on going, and sometimes you just forget things, and suddenly they pop up like trying to remember somebody's name, 'dam can't remember that name' in a conversation, then three o'clock at morning, where did that come from, why did I wake up?' (GW INT: 40.18)

9. In the course of making a painting, have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment?

**Bick:** 'I think it is why I come to the studio.' (AB INT: 23.17)

**Bick:** 'so far as my practice is a studio practice, the studio is very much designed to do everything it possibly can to create the scenario where I am critically absorbed in my work while I'm here.' (AB INT: 23.17)

**Callery:** 'What you do is you start to act, to take action. You're gradually able to act less self-consciously and you're absorbed in the process. You're confident that every action that you take works, you're not so self-critical. There are moments when you feel confident that you can make a gesture, you can add something to a work, and you've built up enough confidence in the way you're working that you know it will work and you don't need to criticise it while you're working. There are no words only actions. You don't need to be critical.' (SC INT: 17.56)

**Callery:** 'You're not aware of your self trying to do something, you are just doing it, so you're still totally aware, in fact you are more aware of yourself I would say, and you're aware of a better part of yourself where you are at your most confident.' (SC INT: 18.43)

**Elliot:** 'Obviously that happens, but then how much to invest in that fact is another question, because there are lots of the times when it doesn't, and then there are times when it happens checking Facebook, or cooking. So whether or not that is an index of anything important, or how much that could be connected to what Fried has been saying, I'm not sure. I'd question that because there's a temptation there, with that idea that I am cautious of. I think that temptation would be to try to re-coup a particular value for making or value for painting in particular that is kind of contrary to

all those things that went against Fried's schema since 1967, so that's to say theatricality. I don't have his sensibility at all. I think he asked an important question and he identified, at that moment, quite clearly, a set of ideas, a set of things that were happening, but I think he was totally wrong on what that meant, or what was good or bad about that. So that would be the temptation that I would want to avoid with this idea of absorption, of with carrying it over into some state of making, which sounds like something people call 'flow' or whatever.' (SE INT:48.40)

**Elliot:** 'I suppose what I'm not happy about is the idea of engagement being clear. What that is. What Fried is saying would presume that we know what engagement is, and we know what it means, you've got it, or you've not got it. Add to that what I was saying before about maybe a danger of, and I think painting is so vulnerable to this, to be honest, particularly in this country. It's that there's a romanticization of painting, wanting to try and pull away from the world in some way, and I think the attractiveness of some of those ideas is really, really, owed to that. I personally really try to shake that off, because again I think it excludes too much. So the idea of engagement, there's 24 questions right there, as to what that is. I guess it's whether one accepts those terms in the first place.' (SE INT: 54.23)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'Yeah, yeah, absolutely.' (AMJ INT: 48.50)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'I always find a way to be very, very playful with it to start off with, and not to be always so systematic as to completely kill the need to make a painting. Because I think that overt, systematic approach would kill the visual satisfaction.' (AMJ INT: 48.50)

**Pratt:** 'Yeah I suppose I do, I go into this world where I start thinking about higher things, like I was saying politics, social issues, philosophy whatever it happens to be, and yeah I guess I do otherwise I wouldn't be able to stay, it holds my attention quite easily if I can if I can stay warm, and I have the time, and I don't have to go anything for 13 or 14 hours until I physically drop, and so I must do. When I'm doing the grounds, I suppose that's when I see quickly, I see fast change, so that can be very absorbing.' (KP INT: 56.02)

**Wragg:** 'Oh yeah. Totally absorbed, and then sometimes completely can't sort of like I can do this one, I can't do that one. So I've been working on these ones, and can't do anymore with that one, I have a feeling for the next stage, but there could be so

many options. And what I had before, what was happening with those paintings, that start you drawing, I had a completely different perception of what was going on, what passes through your mind, that what was going to happen there, and then suddenly it wasn't that at all, it's all changed. So what is important about time, is that the painting happens in it's own time. You can't hurry it, you can force things, but for me that's not a good way to make it happen.' (GW INT: 43.04)

10. At any point in your painting practice do you act as the 'beholder' of your own artwork and is this beholder 'absorbed' in the sense that Fried describes?

**Bick:** 'In playing with the tension between those different physical properties, what I am not doing is coming up with a recipe to say to the beholder 'okay guys these are complicated, you have to look hard because these are elaborately made as there are all these different components, which are very tricky to put together'. Rather than that I am using these different processes to distract myself so that I am consistently put in a position where the attentiveness that I pay to the playing out of work-making is as important as the time that I necessarily have to spend in the making process itself. It then becomes a dynamic of taking responsibility for looking at something in order not to rely on becoming some sort of technical virtuoso. It also becomes a process where I'm willingly aware that there is no guarantee that anyone else will want to do the same thing. And that's very important to me in that I think I have to be disarmed from all kind of ideas of my status, or of grandeur, or of any kind of pomposity that might come from making claims that all the attention I've given my work in the studio means that other people should also give it a commensurate amount of time.' (AB INT: 27.46)

**Callery:** 'I use myself as an example of a person, so it's generally to do with scale. It's to do with standing up against something, measuring something in terms of my own height, or understanding a spatial dimension, physically using myself as an example of a human being. So I stop being the artist for a second, I say right, here I am, I am a human being stood up in front of this, how does it relate bodily?' (SC INT: 20.50)

**Callery:** 'The process of making the work and the process of experiencing the work are interrelated immensely. The machinations of this process do not end when the making process is completed. The painter's experience of how to make a painting relates to the experience of the person that stands in front of it. It's one of the things

that allow the work can operate in the present tense as lived experience. I would say an exhibition does not mark the end of the work; it's another part of the work, and the person standing in front of your work is another part of the work.' (SC INT: 21.05)

**Elliot:** 'Well I think definitely, but again would sooner ditch a Friedian framework, and talk more about... it's more interesting for me to talk about aesthetic political questions of now. One of which - and this is pertinent to what Fried historically said about French painting - is the relationship between private and public space, right now, and the confusions that happen there ... So I do think you're always already the beholder, as much as the producer, and I think perhaps there's some mapping to do there about what those terms really are. (SE INT: 59.47)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'When it comes to this absorption, it really has always for me been about a thought, that I would not be able to think unless I made a painting that sparked. So for me that absorption, it is actually providing me with something I didn't know before, and to me that's usually something that is cognitive. It is provoked by the visual analogies, but it is definitely cognitive. It alludes to, it reminds of, it is just present, and I've never experienced that kind of presence before. Now I'm not saying that that is viewed from the point of either the viewpoint of being an artist, or observing it from an artistic background perhaps, but what I am saying is it just is.' (AMJ INT: 51.00)

**Pratt:** 'I guess for me I really do all the looking during the process, and right at the end of it being complete. I can't pick a time when you've walked into your own exhibition, and contemplated your own work. And yet, when I think about my art history knowledge for example, I think about how I've studied going round museums right across Europe, and spending days in the Prado, in Vienna, looking at other peoples work, absorbing it, looking at everything, and thinking about it, contemplating it, trying to draw connections across works and artists, and I would never do that with my own work in the same way, but then I suppose it is more structural when you made it, and because you don't have that detachment you know why something is how it is, you don't need to sit and wonder about it.' (KP INT: 57.55)

**Pratt:** 'I think everyone has a kind of dialogue where you leave it up whilst you start something else, so you're looking over your shoulder, and I know in the past I have

thought a lot about looking sideways, looking at something askance, all looking without really thinking about it just because it is present.' (KP INT: 59.09)

**Wragg:** 'Well I think you're so involved with it, but there are times when you have a detachment to try to see from another point of view as a spectator, as a spectator coming from a different discipline even. That was what was so interesting in collaborating with movement artists, that was interesting, but that does happen occasionally, but on the whole you are the painter. However, there is a meditative detachment aspect within the development of a work that manifests in varying ways specific to a work.' (GW INT: 44.30)

11. Have you encountered an embodied experience as a result of your painting process, or any other type of manifestation, and if so could you describe it?

**Bick:** 'I am really thinking about that question because it is almost like I don't know how to answer it. Partly this would be because I work with a set of principles that apply equally to everything else that I do, - in other words, the work in academia, writing, lecturing, PhD supervision, teaching, is all part of the same practice ... at certain points in giving a lecture, for example, things become clear in a way that they first became manifest as a thinking process in my practice.' (AB INT: 31.35)

**Bick:** 'I'm kind of against there being too much of a dialectic of the cerebral versus the physical, and I think that, for example, the physical side of heating wax and making a precise form with it, is not million miles away from cooking. At the same time, drawing quickly, but precisely, for example, is not a million miles away from playing a musical instrument. The idea that those things can be attended to in the same way is about an aesthetic, but it's about the idea that an aesthetic is also socially and politically important.' (AB INT: 32.55)

**Callery:** 'Well, I would say what good art does is it helps you look at the world in another way. It's not so much my own work rather the work of other artists that has helped me look at the world in a different way.' (SC INT: 24 49)

**Elliot:** 'I'm actually not sure. Probably, but if I feel a little like I might be confecting something.' (SE INT: 1.12.22)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'I think this is why I paint. I really think this is why I paint, because of that sense of unfamiliarity, and that's actually through the process of being in the studio and making paintings. It is obviously about excitement, but it's beyond excitement. To me it's about the intellectual growth, and sensual approach to who perhaps I could be in this world. It kind of defines the meaning in the instances of making, and I know that I have other experiences like playing the guitar is a different experience, listening to music is a different experience. Making something and having equally visual as well as cognitive response, I have never, ever come across in any other facet of life. So for me that is why I do it.' (AMJ INT: 54.40)

**Pratt:** 'Yeah, I have had that sensation. I'm trying to think of a for instance, but I do know what you are talking about ... I get a proper long day in the studio, I think it has to be a sustained concentration, and yeah I definitely take it away with me, and definitely apply processes to other things. So I look at an onion that I'm cutting and can see the rings, seeing pattern is replicated, but also have a tendency to want to apply the processes that I use in painting to other things, but if that happens at home I'll probably sit down and do a drawing.' (KP INT: 1.02.36)

**Wragg:** 'It is a *need*, it's a desperate *need*. It's fulfilling something, but it can only be in the painting, but the fact that you've done it is very positive, and you couldn't have done anything else.' (GW INT: 52.33)

### **Absorption As Beholder/Spectator In The Painting That Is Made**

12. If you were to reflect on the act of painting with reference to a specific painting, could you describe what the painting process gave you or perhaps still gives you, the painter?

**Bick:** 'There are certain pieces that definitely have been key works in my world of painting. I would say that these particular works have been a trigger to what has come afterwards.' (AB INT: 34.54)

**Bick:** 'They might be roundabouts because there might be points where you have a number of different directions you can go off in from, even though you only arrive in on one road.' (AB INT: 36.03)

**Callery:** 'I try not to do that actually because I try not to attach personal detail to the work. I try to be quite objective.' (SC INT: 28.27)

**Elliot:** 'It gives me a particular kind of thinking time, and a particular type of thinking, that I don't feel I can get anywhere else, and in that way the making of the work is usually pressing against what I don't know yet, in some way. It's also to do with a kind of wanting to materialize something in a particular way, and not knowing how, and this is why process is important.' (SE INT: 1.19.05)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'I remember one painting, poor 'Greta, it was 'Greta', and that was done almost three years ago. It was part of the PhD, in one of the books. When I approached the work, using some of the strategies, about the quickness of the work, thinking through making, just barely, barely primed, the masking tape was later. So basically it was thought through; I'll do this, this, this, this, this, bang, stop. And there was a similar piece of canvas lying around, and I thought I'm going to put an eye down there and it's going to do something no painting has done before of mine. And I was excited, but not just on it's material levels, because I could discern all the processes I was involved with in previous work could find something new and challenging for the future to come, but also there was this pseudo social political commentary. So when I looked at it I thought actually reminds me of something, I'm from former Yugoslavia. And I was looking at it and some of this imagery actually reminds me of lot of the kind of statues and imagery that we grew up with, quite iconic, and I thought I like this. This is now operating on more than one level: I can talk about how it looks visually, I can talk about it materially, but I could also engage about it in terms of context and history and that's completely different. So that for me I don't think any other medium can do as well as painting, in the simplest of ways, because in some ways the simpler the gesture, the simpler the working methodologies become.' (AMJ INT: 59.40)

**Pratt:** 'I can definitely remember them, and the sensation, and also sometimes there's a kind of synaesthesia, like if I'm listening to a particular music and then go away for a couple of days and then come back and look at what I was looking at when I was listening to music. In my last studio my neighbour used to cook bacon in the studio a lot, so even when she wasn't there I'd start painting and I'd start to smell bacon.' (KP INT: 1.05.10)

**Wragg:** 'You can never know all the different things that are going on, you just know you've done it. It's like climbing up a mountain, it has so many crevices and pitfalls, and you get to the top, and you think 'How the hell did I get here'? And sometimes that happens, how did you get there? It wasn't even understanding, wasn't knowing,

wasn't anything, was just the drive to see the painting through, and to get there.'  
(GW INT: 57.27)

13. After the course of making a painting, have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment from the finished painting? If so, please describe.

**Bick:** 'Yes. Yes.' (AB INT: 36.15)

**Callery:** 'There is an enjoyment actually, not in sitting and staring at it, but just being in the presence of the work. It could be a spatial quality, or colour, or luminosity, or the way a work might absorb light, or the way we relate to them physically because of their physical proportions or the way they work in relation to the wall, or what they do to the room, or what they do to the context. So it's not a thing of abandonment necessarily, it's more like understanding the character of the presence of the work.'  
(SC INT: 30.32)

**Elliot:** 'Well I think another thing it just reminds me, that sounds like a moment of finishing, and that reminds me of something else that has taken this idea of absorption as an idea of coherence, or unity, or oneness, or rightness, those sorts of things, and yeah, that does happen, but which kind? That's what I'm interested in. . I suppose I'm interested in, and it's maybe too much hard work to do here, but I really would want to do something to reclaim the idea of irony from the people who have cast it as just like an arch mockery of something. Irony's this really complicated idea, and I like Donna Haraway's use of it where she says it's about holding things together that are mutually contradictory, because all of them seem necessary, and true, and they don't resolve dialectically, so you have to find some way of holding them together, irony is the only way you can do that, and painting seems deeply ironic to me in that.' (SE INT: 1.23.05)

**Elliot:** 'I think Fried's conversation about absorption is so much to do with ideas of public, and publicness, and the emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France of art as a category, as opposed to 'the arts'. It's related to the museum, and to criticism, and so on, and this is something that could be on its way out.' (SE INT: 1.28.55)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'Sometimes I make things and I wouldn't be able to cast a judgement on it or place it necessarily, so walking away from it and coming back to it can have a surprising reaction on my behalf.' (AMJ INT: 1.03.10)

**Pratt:** 'I don't think I'll get it from my own work, I really don't, because I think that element has been used up. I don't know? I can't imagine sitting and being absorbed by a finished work that I'd made, in the same way that I would with someone else's. I certainly have with other people's work. I can't really imagine being transported. I can't think the time is ever happened. Interested, but not transported.'  
(KP INT: 1.05.33)

**Wragg:** 'I'm sure I have, I can't remember anything at the moment, but I'm sure that has happened.' (GW INT: 1.01.29)

14. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of your finished painting away from it? If so, please describe.

**Bick:** 'Yes, yes, I mean when I was talking about older key paintings I could think of a particular one, there's little point in describing it orally, because it's not here so we can't see it, I can think of a particular one, but if I went away I might pick four or five.'  
(AB INT: 37.25)

**Bick:** 'It is quite often hard to differentiate when you are absorbed in everything, so if you have four or five works on the go at once you won't necessarily realise that there is one that is headed off somewhere else. I can think of a number of situations where it has really been another person who has pointed that out, and I would also say that this external prompting is a very important aspect of my approach.' (AB INT: 39.33)

**Callery:** 'Of course, especially if there is something wrong with it.' (SC INT: 31.01)

**Elliot:** 'I think about not one painting over a stretch of time, but I do think about what maybe the current two or three things that I'm about to do, and I'm flipping all these possibilities around.' (SE INT: 46.20)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'Absolutely. And it's funny, there are some instances when I can't wait to go and see it again, or when I'm dreading to see it again. But still you go back. And a lot of preparation goes into this, mentally, going back to the studio. I

know that when I come into the studio, the first couple of hours I probably won't be able to do anything. I have to find my way in. I have to find a very constructive way of not just going in and attacking something or approaching something without giving it a thought. And that thought doesn't always happen just by looking, sometimes it's like catching glimpses. This is why I have this big mirror.' (AMJ INT: 1.03.10)

**Pratt:** 'Yes, I definitely have done that, definitely, and I've been at work, maybe not actually teaching students, but at my desk at work maybe doing something procedural like a timetable, and thinking I wish I was in my studio looking at that painting and not just because the task at hand is not as interesting as painting, but because I want to be looking at it right now.' (KP INT: 1.11 21)

**Wragg:** 'Oh yes, oh often, oh absolutely. Most of the time, because when I leave the studio, the paintings, I live them. On the tube going back, watching the television, middle of the night, you know this is just part of something that is a rhythm going through you, like a river. Sometimes it gushes and wakes you up, or something's happens, and sometimes it's so smooth, and you're not aware of anything, but certainly it's on going, and sometimes you just forget things, and suddenly they pop up like trying to remember somebody's name, 'dam can't remember that name' in a conversation, then three o'clock at morning, where did that come from, why did I wake up?' (GW INT: 40.18)

15. Have you ever experienced a sense of 'absorption' or self-abandonment from another artists painting, or any other work of art? If so, please describe?

**Bick:** 'I think it's what I am always looking for when I go and look in a collection, or a museum, or even in art fairs, which are incredibly pressured kind of competitive commercial contexts. I am looking for artworks with which somehow contain something, which demand, from me, a particular form of attentiveness; so this is the measure of everything really finding works which do that, in art fairs as well, becomes a very important means of understanding how works of art contain and stimulate forms of attention.' (AB INT: 39.00)

**Callery:** 'Of course. Of course, because that's what it's all about.' (SC INT: 1.48.55)

**Callery:** 'There was one work by Johns, which was two parallel vertical panels with cut cans, and letters that stuck out. It was extraordinary work. It is quite rare but I do

remember walking away from it and thinking that spending time with it was a very special art experience that I miss it already. I remember looking back at the work and knowing I can't have that moment again. That is something I find special about art.'

(SC INT: 33.49)

**Elliot:** 'There's lots of things I could talk about with that one. But I don't want to give you like 'this is why Poussin is so great, because I got really absorbed'; I want to try and say something more.' (SE INT: 1.39.43)

**Elliot:** 'the painting itself in the National Gallery is something in particular about that one, because the other one next to it, which is of an amazing portrait too, but Madame Moitissier, that painting has a really amazing surface, and it really is like a beautiful eggshell or something, it's sort of satin, and it's not only because of the way the surface has been treated, it's to do with how it's been painted. How everything's been woven together in this miraculous way that he (Ingres) does.' (SE INT: 1.44.15)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'Yeah, absolutely. One of the reasons I became a painter because that happened when I was really quite young?' (AMJ INT: 1.04.52)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'It was in the Museum of Modern Art in Belgrade, I was 13 years old and it was a school excursion, but I can't remember the name of the artist. I just remember that the painting was all green, it was grass green and it was referring to grass itself, but materially I think he was using some kind of artificial material that recalled grass. You come from a tradition of looking at a painting, but I had never seen this kind of thinking through material, and being able to represent something in a way that I'd never thought possible. But it gave me a fully formed experience of a certain atmosphere, and environment, and satisfaction that you could sort of call a spectacle of looking at something. But I was also titillated intellectually. I never thought this could work.' (AMJ INT: 1.06.53)

**Pratt:** 'Yeah, I think so. Yes definitely especially if you're include things like music or film, but yes I definitely remember doing it with Vermeer, and Mondrian, and Malevich, I have definitely done it with them. (laughter) Well it's not the norm. Extreme interest and interest in an exhibition as a whole as well, and I've definitely spent a lot of time engaged with looking at any one work lots of times.'

(KP INT: 1.13.07)

**Wragg:** 'Oh yeah. Absolutely. I mean the reason one paints, is one loves painting. And part of that is looking at all the wonderful paintings in the world: The great paintings, the not-so- great paintings, and the awful paintings, all part of it. Oh yes, at some points you're totally involved with Velásquez, at another point you're totally involved with Goya, or then you're involved with Matisse, or then Monet, or then Bonnard, or the Greek fifth century sculpture or pots.' (GW INT: 1.03.39)

16. Have there been instances where you have continued to think of another artists painting away from it? If so, please describe.

**Bick:** 'All the time.' (AB INT: 39.53)

**Bick:** 'the late paintings found in Mondrian's studio when he died, which are speculative, he was using painted masking tape, charcoal, and you can see that they were never meant to be looked at as finished art works. But somehow they become all the more powerful, certainly to the contemporary eye, because there is so much contingency frozen, fixed into them. Knowing that Mondrian would have finished or completed them in another way, the decisions as to where the charcoal is brushed back, to where the lines of colour painted onto masking tape sit, become very vibrant, and very acute, and its that physical sensation of vibration that you get as you look at that one painting in particular, which kind of stays with me. It's a reminder that Mondrian is an incredibly intuitive artist, and the intuition exists in the physical qualities of the work more successfully than it does in his own kind of statements about his practice.' (AB INT: 43.41)

**Callery:** 'Of course, you never stop doing that. In fact sometimes it can be too much, you can't stop. You have to stop or you'd be awake all night.' (SC INT: 34.14)

**Elliot:** 'what's interesting to me pace Fried, is that the absorption for me doesn't happen in front of the work. Well it does, but it doesn't *only* happen in front of the work, and he really wants us to locate it there, and not in any discursive way, whereas I think it becomes a figure of other things, attached, and then that reconfigures your seeing of it again, it becomes this palimpsests of all these different seeings.' (SE INT: 1.44.15)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'Guernica's haunted me for 15 years. I've never been in a position to see the original, but for a good 15 years I was in absolute awe, well it wasn't awe

because I hadn't seen it, but it's representation, which again says something about my work as well, and wanting to adopt that representational quality and the print quality. But again going back to painting ticking all those boxes, and ticking all those different experiences, visually for me it was composed of a level of perfection, of all these fragments coming together that I was absolutely absorbed by.' (AMJ INT: 1.09.11)

**Pratt:** 'Yeah, definitely, and I've gone back to see specific works to exhibitions to see specific works ... sometimes you are in an exhibition like that and you don't really take it that seriously, but afterwards you realise that you are really carrying something with you, that weight that you feel when you go to see her, to experience the work, to feel the space around you. Kind of the presence of the space.' (KP INT: 1.18.53)

**Wragg:** see previous answer

### **Constructing The Painting-Beholder/Spectator**

17. If you have experienced 'absorption' or self-abandonment in painting practice as discussed earlier, and if you have experienced yourself as an 'absorbed' spectator of your own work, does this affect how you consider the reactions of another spectator of your artwork?

**Bick:** 'I think it is absolutely essential to be very detached on that point. I think it is important to listen very carefully to what other people say about your work, and to learn from it. It's important to let other people make decisions about your work, but it's also important to sort of not care too much on one level without that being a form of arrogance. What I would describe it as is a form of detachment where you are fundamentally disconnected from the work of art once it is out in the world, so you have to let it get on with its own existence.' (AB INT: 45.38)

**Callery:** 'if you understand painting as communication then you find ways of communicating that state. Although you can't unequivocally communicate clearly for everyone in exactly the way that you want - there must be a bit of give in it - there has to be for individual interpretation and individual misinterpretation.'  
(SC INT: 36.14)

**Elliot:** 'This is one I feel like speaking to in really practical terms. Looking at as much painting as you can, trying to figure out how they work, kind of knowing what would be necessary to make something function, and in that way yes you're testing it on yourself ... it's not straight forward, like you think this is ok, it works, therefore this is what is going to make it work for others. And that's why I think showing is so important actually, because it is like hearing your voice on tape, it's coming back to you.' (SE INT: 1.49.28)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'No I don't any longer. I think it's helped me a lot. I don't want to impress anybody any longer. I don't think about the paintings as something that I need to make to please, or provide any kind of aesthetic satisfaction. If anything, counter reaction to that. So what I would perhaps like a spectator to consider is the quality of the object they are looking at in relation to what it is. To consider the material qualities, how it is put together. But I would like to be stimulated, I would like to be able to stimulate somebody with my paintings in the same way that I get intellectually stimulated by painting.' (AMJ INT: 1.12.37)

**Pratt:** 'I guess that in a certain sense the finished objects aren't *for* me, the process is for me, the act of making them is for me, but once they are objects in the world, I'm not really their audience.' (KP INT: 1.20.27)

**Wragg:** 'Well, if you take the world of spectators there is no control, it is out of your control, you cannot control, unless you are seriously into manipulation, and I'm not. For me it's live, and let live. People think what they think, do what they want to do. So no. I can't do anything on that one. Again, painting isn't like a chess game where you are trying to manipulate, and strategically move here or there. You are just doing what you have to do.' (GW INT: 1.10.51)

18. Conversely would you fight any feeling of self-abandonment, and if so why?

**Bick:** 'Yes. I think the unknowing is itself a certain measure of detachment, a certain sense of calm wonderment, if you like, in looking at art is important. The idea of existential abandonment, which in certain artistic positions privileges certain kinds of behaviour, such as spontaneity, and gesture, is fraught with the potential for self-delusion. It's my personal position that this way of approaching art-making doesn't interest me at all, because I think it very quickly becomes fake.' (AB INT: 49.03)

**Callery:** 'I think you can be antagonistic to certain work that has very emotive hook. It's like being in the cinema, and if you know the cinema a bit, you know that they will use tricks to manipulate your emotions, when I feel that happening I resist it. I don't like to be coerced. I don't like to be told how to react emotionally.' (SC INT: 37.19)

**Elliot:** 'Yeah, totally, at certain times you could just be deceiving yourself, or you can be enthralled to an effect, and what you're doing is just really indulgence ... Their being right might not coincide with a feeling of rightness in me. So there's a presumption that that would be symmetrical, like this feels right therefore its right. I found that actually not to be true.' (SE INT: 1.52.19)

**Medjesi-Jones:** see previous answer

**Pratt:** 'No, I wouldn't, I think I'd be quite pleased, reassured by it, because I don't think I look enough at my finished work, for me it's all about the thinking that happens in making it, the kind of problem-solving that happens in making it, and seeing it emerge, but I don't think once it's finished. I kind of reproach myself for not spending time looking at it. So no, I'd be pleased.' (KP INT: 1.22.23)

**Wragg:** 'Well there are times when you meet people or people ask you to talk about painting. Well you can talk about it as much as you can, if people have their ideas about painting, and you think well that's way off the mark, you might indicate that. And that of course happens, you meet all sorts with your exhibitions and so on. You agree, you disagree, that's life, that's how it is and that's fine.' (GW INT: 1.12.49)

19. Have you or do you ever construct or position the spectator/beholder in your painting practice?

**Bick:** 'No, is the short answer, but on the other hand I've always been incredibly interested in architecture, and how architecture has all sorts of very subtle ways of governing our behaviour. As a result of which, installing work in a space is very, very important for me.' (AB INT: 51. 01)

**Callery:** 'I do all the time. I think about the viewer now more than I ever did. I think constantly about how the work will impact or engage, or attract someone who's in the gallery, or looking at the work. I think about how someone would encounter the work

a lot and that actually helps me to understand what the work needs to be and do.’  
(SC INT: 38.51)

**Elliot:** ‘I suppose yes, in so far as they are conceived as groups and that’s very much a sense of constructing the spectator. And being conscious of what I’m really interested in is constructing sorts of modes of attention, and in a way the real focus of the practice is the difference between those modes of attention.’ (SE INT: 1.54.32)

**Elliot:** ‘So trying to construct that situation, because I think leaving space for the spectator to construct themselves is maybe the key difference between maybe the Fried model, where there’s a universality to it.’ (SE INT: 1.56.34)

**Medjesi-Jones:** ‘Positioning is something different, and something I am actually thinking about at the moment, in the terms of should I have this position, but I do do that. And that has come through many years of being in the studio and being a practitioner, and I don’t want to abandon that now, and by having a position that doesn’t necessarily mean that I’m inflexible to that relationship, to what the work can bring, and how we can function outside, but I want to be very much now following my own research and being engaged with what I have unearthed over the last 20 years. That makes me really excited really, and the fact that I know there’s something that I’ve been working on, and I believe there’s longevity in relationship to that, and if that’s a position, then that’s ok.’ (AMJ INT: 1.14.32)

**Pratt:** ‘Well I do think about looking at work close up, and looking at it from a distance, so walking into a room and seeing it, and what they see from a distance, and what they see close up.’ (KP INT: 1.22.58)

**Wragg:** ‘I don’t think so. I don’t think that’s really possible with a painting.’  
(GW INT: 1.14.22)

20. If so, do you or have you found yourself working in a particular way in order to consider the beholder, to construct this relationship or anticipate it?

**Bick:** See previous answer.

**Callery:** ‘It’s to do with what I want. With the kind of experience I am trying to create for the viewer. It’s not that I’m just trying to give them something to look at. I want to

move people around. I want them to be in motion, to go from one side to another.’  
(SC INT: 39.48)

**Elliot:** ‘Yes, but it’s quite early days for that, it’s quite nascent, and again this has to do with when you get to do it like that, but that bit of the practice I don’t get to do much.’ (SE INT: 1.59.15)

**Medjesi-Jones:** ‘There are strategies in place. Sometimes I’m thinking of curation or the bodies of work, and you think I’m doing this, but that one doesn’t necessarily make sense in how perhaps a previous body of work had come across, has been put together, and how it’s going to talk or even be understood from first my perspective and then perhaps the feedback I got. So there is a sense of being, maybe not strategic, but being considerate as to how you develop on from what you had done before, but within that there is also scope for playfulness, a scope for throwing people and myself, slightly off course.’ (AMJ INT: 1.15 53)

**Pratt:** ‘Only in that sense, only that in what you get when you’re close up what you get from a distance, and so what you get over time, so what you see instantly, but what you get when you’ve spent some time looking at it, but other than that not really. I just think that, in the same way that commercial galleries expect you to be able to make works for a market, you can’t really anticipate what’s going to sell, I think mainly because people can smell a pup, they know when they are being fleeced. There is something about authentic, I say things like this and then hate myself for saying it, but it feel so Greenbergian, there’s something about authenticity in intention that kind of shines through, and when someone is looking at a genuine problem-solving or dilemma being played out within an arena, or a genuine revelation of thought that’s altogether different to when they are seeing a kind of re-enactment.’ (KP INT: 1.26.39)

**Wragg:** ‘No I don’t think so. No.’ (GW INT: 1.14.53)

21. Considering this address to the beholder do you consider ‘pictorial unity’ or other particular modes of address to the beholder as part of your painting process, if so please describe?

**Bick:** ‘I suppose, because it’s a strong desire to disrupt any idea of a kind of unified, regulated, approach there’s a belief for me in there being a contradictory aspect to

how my works operate; they are meant to contradict themselves at times, they are meant to put together propositions which aren't supposed to fit.' (AB INT: 56.43)

**Bick:** 'pictorial disruptiveness... I think I mentioned to you before I am very interested by Michael Baxandall's writing on Piero della Francesca. For example where he argues that what had traditionally been viewed as mistakes in perspective or human proportions in della Francesca's work are actually deliberately there in order to somehow unsettle the viewer and create the conditions where they might become more attentive.' (AB INT: 58.57)

**Callery:** 'Pictorial is to do with making pictures, so I'm out of that.' (SC INT: 42.42)  
'if I make a work that has the interior of the painting exposed then I am trying to find a way of engaging the viewer in a work that needs to be navigated and looked at in different ways.' (SC INT: 43.31)

**Callery:** 'My paintings aren't pictures. You need to find another term. I think that's where we actually have lots of problems, not me and you, but discussions and issues around contemporary painting.' (SC INT: 44.37)

**Callery:** 'That's why I come up with terms like 'physical painting', which is really blunt but is designed to avoid 'abstraction'.' (SC INT: 45.28)

**Elliot:** 'the pictorial is interesting. About what picture is, or what an image is. I was talking about this with Mick Finch, and he was saying what the fuck is an image anyway? We need to think about that. What do we mean? I think there's a sort of register of the relationship between the image, the pictorial, and the material, a particular sort of meshing of that that I'm interested in. I think for me it's like an example of how I don't really make a separation between the physical and the digital in that kind of way because I think, there's another book WJT Mitchell's 'The Reconfigured Eye', and I love that title because it's not just new things to look at, it's an eye that has changed, a historical change.' (SE INT: 2.01.09)

**Elliot:** 'this thing about the image and pictorial that was what was interesting about where that sits, because of course there's the meta question of how very sort of material based, object based practices of high modernism become objects of history, and circulate as images of themselves in some way, to work in that way now you're working with those images, even if you might think you're doing the same thing,

that's always part of the way the work is going to operate and how does that change things? How does that change what sort of decisions you make. You might want to resist that. And this is something Simon Callery would say I think, that he's trying to resist that, and hold that space open long enough to try and do something with that. I'm not resisting that in the same way, for me the idea of paintings circulating in symbolic economies has got into the guts of the work somehow in another way. So there's all sorts of different relationships to that I think that I think come down to the fact that those categories, when you look closely at them complexify and break apart.' (SE INT: 2.07.17)

**Elliot:** 'I remember thinking about Judd's negative characterisation of composition, you know a bit up here, a bit down here: it's quite important that my paintings weren't compositional in that sense. That's why they may have a pictorial unity, but there's an implication that there's a field that could extend. Not always, but then there's another one of those, and sometimes the repetition does something, and renders the ground, it relativises them, so showing three of those in a row kind of disrupts that. So these are things are always gradated, that's one where I would explain it, that fits the bill perfectly, and this is one that sort of doesn't. They're always gradated.' (SE INT: 2.29.27)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'No not unity, pictorially I've always tried to upset that balance of maybe traditional figure ground even in the terms of abstraction, upset that material functioning with an image perhaps. For me it was always about a way of thinking and being able to project that process in terms of it's not post modern thinking, it's not modernist thinking, it's nothing like that, just a very particular kind of relationship to the world we live in and again this is where time comes in.' (AMJ INT: 1.18.31)

**Pratt:** 'Well kind of. I do use signifiers, like blue is going to be read as a landscape somehow. This one at the back, it's the way that the brushstroke has been applied called 'Bluixcity' it looks like reflections on water, but then it would do if you think paint is a runny thing. You think how water is painted, especially from photographs, so you get a sense of being very, very specific about defined edges, so there's a sense of that in this work, which has been refuted by the drawing on top, but as an under-painting it was very prevalent I guess.' (KP INT: 1.27.49)

**Wragg:** 'Well no, because there is no composition usually. I mean there is an integral self-sufficiency, but it's different from your idea of composition. They used to be

composed, but not since 75, 76. It's quite often a disparate incidence, and disparate spaces that live together, and then it can look like a composition.' (GW INT: 1.16.02)

### **Constructing The Painter-Beholder/Spectator**

22. Would you consider or describe yourself as a privileged beholder at any time: before, during, or after your painting process?

**Bick:** 'On a philosophical level of being there in the first instance, a priori, a view of the work that I make as its progenitor, I tried to make that sense of being the absorbed creator as low key as I possibly can. I try to make that notion of creativity something which someone else could disrupt, that someone else can show me something in the making of the painting I might not have spotted myself.'  
(AB INT: 1.01.48)

**Callery:** 'I don't like the word privileged.' (SC INT: 46.38)

**Elliot:** 'Well I suppose I would ask why the moment of creation would be privileged as the most salient, hermeneutic point? Why? And I would just raise that as a question. It's not clear to me that it's self-evident. I mean generally no. People are interested in what the artist says, and what the artist does, and I think that's not stupid, that makes a lot of sense. And there is this relationship between somebody's work and their life, we've spoken about it quite a lot, but whether that is the same thing as the content of the work is difficult.' (SE INT: 2.12.35)

**Elliot:** 'In some senses, in some conversations I think it would be a privilege, if we were talking, that's why I think when you're talking to artists it's different, because you can have a conversation with other people, people working with painting, and it's almost as if you're talking like to people working in a guitar shop, and talking about different sorts of strings and what they do - but that's not how music operates in the world, it's not like that, the relationship of those involved is quite particular, and though I really value those sort of conversations, I don't think they're the same thing as the work.' (SE INT: 2.17.43)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'To me it's an affirmation. It's something that gives meaning to a lot of aspects in my life in relation to how I understand the World, how frustrated, how angry I am about certain things, and this allows me to channel it somehow, in a way of it becoming what it is, and almost having a hope in the way that things can be

looked at and be understood differently. But I don't think it's a privileged position. I think it's factual, very present, and it goes, you have to work hard for it, it's a fleeting thing.' (AMJ INT: 1.19.57)

**Pratt:** 'Yeah, well I guess I do feel privileged to have an insight into, not just my own studio practice, but the artists who have let me into their studio, and talk to me about their work, and I often feel privileged teaching as well, because not only do you get to hear inside someone's head, and see what comes out on a regular basis, but you also get to see it transforms overtime, which is really exciting actually, so you get to see the solutions they come up with, what they propose as issues, or what you are proposing to them as issues, and then you get to see how they extend the possibilities of the work, it's really exciting. So yeah.' (KP INT: 1.32.29)

**Pratt:** 'I don't feel privileged to witness my own paintings unfold, but I do feel privileged to have chosen the path of being an artist, and the opportunity really to have maintained it' (KP INT: 1.34 49)

**Wragg:** 'I never thought in those terms. I never thought in terms of privilege. It is an evolving experience that occupies your life, your time, and of course nobody else sees it, I invite very few people to the studio ... But I don't think in those terms.' (GW INT: 1.20.02)

23. Would you describe the experience of painting each painting as a unique occurrence?

**Bick:** 'No, I would describe it as continuous. I would describe it as an endless activity. I don't think I can make a distinction between endlessly painting the same painting, and continuously trying to arrive at a painting that exists somewhere unreachable in my head.' (AB INT: 1.02.09)

**Callery:** 'No, because I don't divide it up, it's a much more broader activity where individual paintings form a part of my art making activity as a whole.' (SC INT: 46.49)

**Elliot:** 'Yeah, and sometimes that's a bad thing, because you want to try something again and then: nothing. Even when you reduce the variables right down, unless you are using super industrial processes, materials don't quite behave the same way twice, and they can be made to a certain extent, but that requires maybe a limitation

too far, like you would have to really focus, and so you can discipline materials to a point, but that slight lack of control is probably why most people who paint paint, because there's better ways of achieving consistency. So I don't think it's a magic that's inherent in painting, it's just if you want to be consistent there are better ways of doing it.' (SE INT: 2.21. 29)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'No, no, no. Again, it's a lot of repetition and a lot of frustration as well. I always talk about this because I do think painting is something that is as rewarding as it's frustrating, but where the experience does change is in the inevitability of something becoming different to your expectation to a previous work. No matter how many times you try to make the same painting, which you do, it never ends up being the same painting, and that's another exciting string to paintings bow or however the saying fits. But I would always consider some of the processes or the combination of processes, so in that there is repetition, there is that difference that comes with it.' (AMJ INT: 1.21.07)

**Pratt:** 'Well you recognise certain symptoms, so certain symptoms re-occur, and I do need to see something new in each work, otherwise I really don't feel that engaged. I need to have a certain reason for being in existence, whether it's to endorse other work in a series, it could just be to make a serious click, but there has to be some reason for that work, something that I'm discovering in it, or something that it has to relate to other work, mine or I could peoples.' (KP INT: 1.36.39)

**Wragg:** 'Yes. Definitely.' (GW INT: 1.20.23)

24. Do you or have you found yourself trying to replicate specific experiences encountered from previous painting sessions in new paintings, and if this is the case please describe?

**Bick:** 'No, I don't try and replicate, so I would consciously not try to replicate.'  
(AB INT: 1.02.49)

**Callery:** 'No. If I did I would get really worried. The idea of replicating specific experience is very relevant for me in a different way. I would, for instance try to find a way of remembering certain kinds of experience of moving through landscape and how it's possible to stimulate an experience of similar character through an encounter with a painting.' (SC INT: 48.29)

**Elliot:** 'It's interesting hearing it put that way 'recreating an experience', because more usually you'd be asked about recreating an effect because I'm not sure what recreating an experience would do for maybe anyone else, apart from me. But they entail one another maybe in some way? There are things I've tried to do that I can't replicate, but I'll qualify that by saying maybe I can't be bothered to do what it really takes to replicate it.' (SE INT: 2.39.08)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'That sort of playfulness that I told you about earlier, where you allow yourself to put paint down, put some matter down and just see what happens and if you don't like it you just wash it away, that always, that sense of childish excitement that 'what's going to happen now' that's a starting point.' (AMJ INT: 1.23.51)

**Pratt:** 'I want to be surprised, but at the same time if I feel like a door has just opened I'm going to want to open the door, and have a good look and poke around the room. It's a bit like if you just discovered an author, you're going to want to read another one of their books. To expand the interrogation, the enquiry.' (KP INT: 1.37.23)

**Wragg:** 'Yes, on the edge, and the centre, but differently now. Again, working with charcoal like I did in the 70's paintings, sort of overlapping, so the language that one has been involved with, that one has created, returns, but differently. Again, that's what one is, what's coming through, and used in a different way.' (GW INT: 1.21.38)

Claims on primacy could suggest that part of the desire or need to produce artworks for the painter is to be the first beholder, perhaps not to create the artist, but to create the beholder. Do you find an affinity with this statement, have you worked in a particular way to encourage becoming the 'absorbed' beholder, or does it develop differently for you?

**Bick:** 'I am interested in being absorbed by the work, and thought of some of the artists who I research, as much as I am in creating conditions within my own work for that idea of absorption to happen. What is incredibly interesting to me is that when those artists are from a very specific school within modernism, their belief systems and their approach almost inevitably completely clashes with my own, and the argument that comes out of that, the tension, is for me a very key aspect of trying to answer your specific question here.' (AB INT: 1.07.02)

**Callery:** 'There's always a big question about who the paintings belong to or who they are made for? Certainly, you make paintings for yourself at the beginning because you are trying to find something out, and then gradually you make them for different reasons. I make paintings, because previous paintings suggest what I need to make next. This is the route that defines what I can produce and it just has to be followed. So there is always a bit of tension. I wouldn't really say I make them for myself, I make them because they need to be made, and once they are made I hope they will go somewhere.' (SC INT: 48.55)

**Elliot:** 'Maybe I can't answer that one because that question would have needed me to answer the earlier questions about beholderhood differently, and I think maybe the way I've answered those means that I've answered between five or six earlier questions in a way, so I'm kind of copping out of that one.' (SE INT: 2.40.31)

**Medjesi-Jones:** 'I think it develops differently. Painting for me it's the most intelligent form of communication. I'm not saying that is brought by me, because I am facilitating here something. What's interesting is the plurality of people and events of histories in the studio that you are dealing with to some extent, and for me it's an absolute joy if I can invoke that somehow. That creates a presence of something that is understood, but equally so it's very kind of stimulating intellectually, and visually, in a way of how it's got to be, so no claims to creationism of any kind, If anything a summary of something. You know I've talked of painting as a community, and I'm really very interested in that in a way and I guess the older I am the investing in painting in terms of time, I'm reflecting again on my own history, and the history of painting, and thinking about certain aspects that are perhaps missing, and how they could be potentialized in painting. So that to me is part of the process that brings you here, and again it's not privy to any birth of an image, but a process. It affirms, in a sense that you could still think about the human involvement through painting.' (AMJ INT: 1.26.35)

**Pratt:** 'It's not really something I think about. Obviously I don't want people to be bored by my work. I guess my problem with it is this kind of insinuations of a kind of God complex. I don't know whether primacy really matters to me that much, and I don't feel... I don't really hold that much sway about the premiering. Obviously you don't want to show the same old hackneyed work, again, and again, and again, but new contexts are as valuable as new material, and I think that as well there is a lot of stuff knocking about, so this sense of primacy in the world, I mean look at my studio

it's got a lot of clobber in here, so it is quite close to saying show it once then throw it away, and also you know you have an exhibition, and people don't get to see it, so does it matter that you saw it before Malcolm, or would it better if Malcolm saw it first, I don't know. And I'm another viewer as well, so it's not really something I feel an affinity with.' (KP INT: 1.39.49)

**Wragg:** 'Well I guess it's one of the reasons why there are painters, not very many, who you would talk to if you felt the need about your work, or about a painting. I mean that happens with the Greenberg people, they would often, like Larry Poons would often call somebody down to the studio to talk about how to crop a painting, like the elephant skin paintings, where should it be cut, where should it be cropped, and a dialogue can be helpful in certain circumstances. Or certain painters would call on other painters, for their opinions they highly respected, and you could find some direction with about the question marks in the painting. So occasionally that can happen by chance as well, when you have a show, and somebody makes the odd remark and it kind of sticks, and you think 'Oh yeah that's interesting'. But it can swivel you to see it slightly different, and that's a great thing about an audience, that people can hit the thing from different angles, and sometimes you catch one of those angles, and it throws some light on what you may do next or at some point. (GW INT: 1.30.51)

**Wragg:** 'So we need each other. We don't work in a vacuum. I mean like this is remote, working here, it's wonderful and I love it, but we still don't work in a vacuum, we are part of something. In the end it's all about people.' (GW INT: 1.31.32)

**Round Table Discussion 1**  
**1st July 2015**

Present: Alison Goodyear (researcher), Professor Malcolm Quinn (Director of Studies), Ruth Solomons (assistant), Simon Callery (artist collaborator), Stuart Elliot (artist collaborator), and Gary Wragg (artist collaborator).

Alison: With the powerpoint presentation running I have an example of each of your works, and I have the document of the History of Absorption and the Lexicon printed out that are also on the wiki page. By the way how are you getting on with the wiki page? You've managed to access it ok? 00.41

Simon & Stuart: Yes. 00.42

Gary: No I haven't, but you sent me the files. 00.45

Alison: Yes, just in case. 00.50

Gary: So I've been going over them, but I didn't access them. 00.53

Alison: Fair enough. 00.55

Simon: I've accessed it, but I can tell you right now I haven't read everything, because it's an awful lot to read. 1.01

Alison: Well I wouldn't have expected you to. 1.02

Gary: So thank you for the summary. 1.05

Alison: That's good that the summary has helped. 1.07

Simon & Stuart: Yes thanks. 1.10

Alison: In the end the interviews worked out at 96 pages, 56,000 words. So I would not have expected you to read all of them. 1.20

Malcolm: That's a beautiful appendix Alison. 1.22

Alison: Yes, thank you. It's probably larger than the thesis. (Laughter) So obviously it did take a while to transcribe, and thank you all for your patience with that, and thank you for getting back to me after looking it over. Obviously it won't be published, and if can be then I'll come back to and we can discuss further editing if required at another point. But for the purpose of this research thank you very much. 1.50

So the way I thought we'd go about today is through looking at that summary document, looking at the questions that I originally asked everybody – of which I have a printed copy here if needed, and I have a copy of the interviews too if at any point we need to refer to them. 2.15

So with the summary I had to keep that short as well, although that was nearly 20 pages long. There were so many really interesting quotes, but I've tried to keep it to one or two per voice to be fair. So I thought that might be a good way to kick off, and then if anybody has anything they'd like to add or another way of following something, please say. 2.35

Malcolm: May I point out something Alison? 2.36

Alison: Yes, you may. 2.37

Malcolm: I've heard this, well we've all heard it, but it would be really good, just in a few sentences, just to say what this research is all about, and why you want them to do what it is that you've been talking to them about. 2.58

Alison: That's a very good point. No you're right. Exactly. 3.03

Malcolm: It's a little ritual, but a big help. 3.05

Alison: Of course, I should have already have done that. So to refresh our memories the working title of the project at the moment is 'Privileged, unique and temporary: interpreting the aesthetic experiences of the painter to painting relationship through an address to and from practice'. So obviously this looks back to Diderot writing in mid eighteenth century France. Fried's interpretation of what Diderot was writing about, and he was writing about the salons, and how Fried hypothesizes that one of the things Diderot was talking about is how artists act when they've been deep in their process. For instance Diderot talks about Greuze, taking on the character of the people he is painting, and I've got some Greuze paintings up on the looped powerpoint presentation. So if he was painting an old man he would come out of the studio acting the 'old man'. 4.22 (group laughter)

Alison: Yes, (laughter). Was that using himself as a tool, was he so absorbed he 'became' that person – I don't know? But then Fried hypothesized about the artist Chardin, he talks about whether Chardin uses his own absorption as a form of 'proleptic mirroring'. 4.38

Simon: Could you explain proleptic mirroring? 4.40

Alison: And that's one of those things that is not particularly clear, and we've discussed this before, and the way I understand it is a reflection of what I'm going through, is that what I would hope my audience could be going through. So tapping into the experience you might encounter during practice. 5.10

Gary: Do you know what Chardin's audience was? 5.14

Alison: He was showing in the Salons, and he was very much a favourite of the people. The Salons, actually something that Stuart was talking about was this public space, the theory of public space. 5.34

Stuart: Yes. The point where art criticism, and museum come together. 5.40

Alison: Yes, and Thomas Crow talks about that, he talks about the Salons almost becoming the first public space in a way. The everyday people were very much fans of Chardin's paintings. So both Diderot and Fried are hypothesizing about what is happening in practice, and the aim of this research is to examine that, to see if there is anything in that hypothesis, coming from practice today do we agree with that in any way shape or form? And that might involve looking at language and how we understand that today. So that it where the questions have been targeted. 6.30

Gary: Well I'm not sure Michael Fried ever knew what he was looking at because he always wore dark glasses. (laughter) How he ever worked it out. 6.58

Alison: Well he was also a poet, so with a creative spirit possibly? Potentially? But he was an interpreter. 7.02

Gary: Indeed. 7.03

Alison: And that is why I am suggesting it would be great to come at it from the perspective of practice, because Diderot was writing about this, and Fried came along and opened up that discussion. 7.17

Malcolm: Isn't that exactly what you're doing? Precisely because Fried was not a practitioner, you're saying does this actually work in practice? 7.28

Alison: Exactly. 7.29

Malcolm: Or is it untenable? 7.30

Alison: Yes. 7.31

Malcolm: And were you to find at the end of the PhD that it was untenable you still

have a valid PhD. 7.44

Alison: Yes. Exactly. There's no false positive being sort. So hopefully that lays the ground we are approaching. 7.47

Looking back to the summary of the interviews: Simon, one of the things we were talking about in the first question 'Would you describe how you feel during what could be called the genesis of a painting, perhaps recalling a painting you considered successful?' and you were talking about how paintings go through a process of being bad before they come good, but then you're suspicious, in terms of your own work, if they come easily to you. This interested me because Andrew Bick also talks about this suspicion, this mistrust. 8.53

Simon: Yeah, probably what's going to happen if you pick out bits like that, I probably will give you different answers. 8.59

Gary: Yes, that's understandable. Absolutely understandable. 9.03 Alison: Ok. 9.10

Simon: I think what I was trying to say then was kind of giving you some sort of clue of that what's important is my engagement in the work when I'm making it. So I do remember making some works and they kind of appear without me really being involved in them and as a result of that they seem to have no meaning. It's important that my engagement is part of the process of making the painting. If I'm not, then I don't expect anyone else to be. And also I suppose it's to do with the fact that when you make work, certainly in my point of view, is that it's a learning experience, and if I just go through this kind of making a product then I'm not engaged, and I've not learnt anything. So I suppose that's why I would say I'm suspicious of it, of the result. I don't understand its value, because I haven't been through a process with it. 10.19

Alison: Right. That makes sense. So have you ever had an external person come in and like work that you haven't liked, and part of it's to do with that? 10.31

Simon: Well generally the things that I don't like don't go anywhere. They get remade or they get changed and eventually you end up with something that you can say 'right, this is a work that I stand by'. There are other sorts of work, or bits of work that end up becoming something else. 10.55

Alison: Because you (Stuart) were talking about how having other people come into the studio can effect how you think about the work. 11.00

Stuart: Yeah, I mean there's an important difference in some respects, I agree with

everything that Simon is saying, where I maybe differ is I don't think about that question. The locus of that question for me is not the painting, or the making of this or that particular painting it is more of an idea of an ongoing practice. So on that level I would say that if I don't have a sense of engagement on that score then why would I expect anyone else too, however for me, because I'm pitching it at that level, that very much includes a possibility that might appear in a very light way or in a very straight forward way, and still be valuable. But I don't necessarily have to feel that for each particular work, the gravity of the work is not the autonomous painting as much for me. So there is that question about how you theorize what painting is. And this is perhaps my question about talking or relating an individual sense of absorption in making, to what Fried is talking about in absorption with painting more generally. Because actually he's talking about quite a philosophical level about how painting is in the world, what the nature of that structure is. And it's very different thing to my subjective experience, or one subjective experience being immersed in a task for instance. So there is a question there about whether or not they might be very different things. 12.25

Alison: Well that's one of the things you said 'engagement/absorption – there's 24 questions just there'. 12.45

Stuart: Why I said 24, it could be a lot more? (Laughter) 12.48

Alison: Yes, or less? Yes, you are right, because he uses this 'absorption' when he is talking about somebody standing in front of a painting and their relationship to that particular work, but then using that same term in practice, and how it might work in practice, does that translate, what about variations, and the different facets, and that then starts to get back to what Simon was talking about the lack in language for meeting the needs of how practice might be communicated outside of just seeing the work. What I'm trying to say I suppose is with the 24 questions with what is absorption, have you noticed many different facets as such? For instance Simon when you were talking about being absorbed in your work you talk about it in much more of a conscious, aware way in describing it, compared to other people who describe experiencing a more of traditional idea of being absorbed. How would you communicate differences? 14.25

Simon: Gary, do you want to say something about that? 14.35

Gary: Well, it's very complex. First for me, the eye, the eyes are really the life force. Your total energy comes through your eyes, and for me it's the awareness in the

eyes, being in the studio, or looking at paintings, or just everyday life is what's important. And in a sense the eyes are ahead of the mind, the central vision and peripheral vision, keen in both ways, and the sensitivity of the eyes to connect and make connections, which is what essentially it's about, or disconnections, is on such a plane that the mind is dragging behind most of the time. So that's what's important for me in looking at things and to remember like when you're using your eyes and when you're making your work, or looking at work its like you've got all of these layers that are sifting continuously, and you really don't have a lot of control over it, just like in dreams, where do the hell these things come from? Oh my God, these curious things. 16.22

Simon: Are you able to see without consciously analyzing or sort of dealing with that information? Can you just keep it as a visual experience, without anything else happening? 16.33

Gary: I see what I see, and what captures from one second, one minute, one hour, one day till the next is a question of linking up by looking, and so looking is the key thing. Whether I'm in the studio, or not in the studio it's the looking that's the important thing. That is the aspect of now that is gone now, that is the aspect of what is really important, whereas you start thinking, and putting ideas together and you're in the past all the time, I mean you're not kind of in the now. 17.15

Simon: Absolutely. I understand that. How do you keep that part of it at bay? 17.20

Gary: Well you can't, it's like with dreams, you go to bed and you don't know if you're going to dream or not, and sometimes you don't and sometimes 'Christ' things happen you know (laughter). And in the studio it's like that because of the many layers that are happening, it makes you up as a person, and this is how the day is, or the night is, dealing with looking and experiencing. As I say it's highly complex business, the mind is the tip of the iceberg, but the eyes are way ahead, to deal with situations. It's like you know you walk in the National Gallery, you just walk through and suddenly 'doing' (gesture suggesting being struck) you're not even looking at a painting and that just pulls you in, you're not even looking at it. These funny things are extraordinary, and Michael Fried he was very sharp, even though he wore dark glasses (laughter) I think they must have been like this (gesturing suggesting wide perspective) because he made very interesting comments about both Jules Olitski and Morris Louis. About the envelopment of the painting, how it actually wrapped around you optically, very much to do with optics, and it was very on the button about Olitski's edge and markings. 18.51

Simon: I've just seen one this morning. 18.53

Gary: At the Gagosian? 18.54

Simon: It was fantastic. 18.55

Gary: They are fantastic aren't they? Absolutely amazing, and they're not even the best, but fantastic. And he was completely into the Greenberg sort of ethic. 19.08 Hence Noland as well, very much talking about optical aspects, and remembering them, and how that stayed, and how it effected everything else after, leaving the paintings, leaving the exhibition, thinking about it. It's a completely different perspective from painting before Jackson Pollock. 19.38

Alison: Actually it's quite interesting the way you talk about the optical experience, because that reminds me a bit of what Simon was talking about how you try to understand your work and it's more about the bodily experience, less of the visual. Maybe you could describe that to us? 19.58

Simon: My argument is that it's very easy for things to be out of balance, and sometimes if things are too emphatically about the visual then we suppress other ways of understanding. So I think where as Gary, you were talking about the eye kind of leading, I understand that totally, but you immediately understand that is happening I'm aware of the other senses not leading, or not being a part of the equation. So part of what I'm interested in with painting is to try to go about finding a way to bring other senses back into it. For instance with that Olitski today (*SC viewed Olitski's works prior to the discussion*), one of the things for me that makes it really involving is the proportion, and the way that it makes you walk in front of it, and that's an experience that is not just visual, that's a bodily experience, and that's what for me is a really important part of that particular painting. 21.02

Gary: But if you close you eyes...? 21.16

Simon: But then there's nothing. 21.16

Gary: Then there's nothing. 21.17

Simon: I know. But I'm saying 21.17

Stuart: I just have to pick that up because I think, you know I can't help but feel as if we re-visit Fried or Greenberg in this kind of way we can't forget that there's 60 years of massive dismantling of their positions, because one of the main points you pick up

is that it's incredibly problematic to start talking about vision in this way, as if it's somehow trans-cultural, universal, a-historical. The eyes are configured seeing as historical, it's one of the big things about modernity in painting, right, you start having urban life, its like being able to see the world from positions in ways that were impossible before. Photography allows us to see on a scale or see things that are too fast for us to see before, are in total relationship to vision and the body is kind of located in all of these ways, and I totally agree with what you're saying Gary about walking through the National Gallery, I've definitely had that experience myself, Poussin, or Millet, but this deeply cultured experience depends on the apparatus of the museum, depends on the canon of western art history as a deeply political and social question, so my hackles rise a little bit in worry when we start talking about vision in this quite basic way, as if it's just vision, because it seems to me if you're going to re-visit Fried, now, surely his status is one of the most massively discredited thinkers about art, surely has to be taken into account because there's no shortage of picking over of bones, not least by feminists, critics, queer critics, post colonial critics, this kind of westernized universal idea of what culture is, of what experience is. I think Simon's point about the embodied nature of vision locates us in a really different way in relation to that. It's a can of worms in short is what I'm saying, and I think we need to be mindful of that otherwise it's very easy, isn't it, to talk about things in that general way, and in fact I'm not saying to do so is always a bad thing, I think there's lots of ways and levels on which we do it all the time that make sense like when you were in the studio with me you don't deal with everything all of the time, but in a situation like this I suppose when you're comparing different positions we are going to look at different paradigms, and what you're saying Gary about vision leading, I understand that too, but I'm also at the same time I'm thinking I don't feel nearly as confident in advancing something like that because I think that would entail ... I suppose I'm aware that there's other theories of consciousness and experience that would be immediately be alternatives to that and maybe antagonistic to that. So I may be a bit more circumspect in that way. 23.58

Ruth: I just wanted to ask Gary how you described it, you started off by saying seeing, so you were more kind of passive and then you switched into looking? 24.08

Gary: Have you ever read 'Carlos Castaneda'? 24.10

Stuart: No. 24.11

Gary: Talking about LSD. 24.14

Alison: Oh, you mentioned earlier. 24.19

Malcolm: Have you now heard of him? 24.25

Alison: No. 24.25

Gary: Oh well, that's something to discuss. (laughter) Well as a person one isn't segmented off here and there in different compartments, one is whole, and if you're open you allow yourself to be a part of what's around you, what's beneath you, what's above you, what's around you 360 degrees. For me awareness training is what painting is about, total awareness training which involves: listening: eyes everywhere, ears everywhere, feeling everywhere, so you are hooking up with things and that's one of the extraordinary things for me about making paintings is that I have made paintings that when I've concluded a painting after several years I find myself saying 'what on earth does this painting have to do with me, where did it come from, and then I find out later on that I hooked up to something that goes back a thousand years. 25.45

Alison and Gary: 1066. 25.49

Gary: About history. 25.55

Alison: Not everybody might have read that bit of the interview Gary. Basically Gary had an interest in the Bayeux tapestry, and you went and visited it. 26.07

Gary: I went to Normandy, to visit it, I took my family for a holiday. 26.09

Alison: And you were quite disappointed weren't you? 26.12

Gary: I was very disappointed with it, yes. This little thin thing running around the room, fantastic, but it wasn't at all how I imagined it. I'd completely distorted understanding the Bayeux tapestry. 26.25

Alison: You thought it was a large tapestry. 26.30

Gary: But we do have distortions in our minds, when we haven't seen anything we have expectations. And I just had a very strong will to make something from it, so I worked from a section of it of Harold being shot in the eye, and the way the horse was standing and I guess I was involved in the battle of Hastings suddenly, and then the painting took over and it increasingly became white. Any way to cut a long story short, I visited my sister who lives in High Wycombe and she said she'd just been to Somerset where she'd been delving into our ancestry, and the origins come from

1066. So this is a connection that suddenly you've linked up to something for whatever silly reason, not an important reason, or really decided, but it's integral to what one is, and to where you are going. That's what I mean by the layers that you don't see 27.52

Ruth: Maybe that's part of what you are looking for? There are parts of the brain that are still sending you eyes out to look for things, but you don't necessarily know what they are seeing, or what the signals are, what you're subconsciously looking for. 28.04

Gary: No, that's right. I mean I think the eye is picking up things all the time that you're really not aware of. It's just like this thing we've all experienced of somebody way, way in the distance, just a little red dot, or little black dot, you can't even say it's a shape, but you know exactly who that person is. We've all experienced that and it's the sensitivity of the eye. 28.27

Alison: This is something that came up a lot in the interviews was the process of not knowing, something that was unfolding through practice and whether it was a suspicion or something that you weren't expecting, the whole process of not knowing was something that everybody encountered and had different ways of organizing their practice to deal with it. Stuart, I think one of the things you talk about is how the work would need something that was not necessarily what you might think it needed? 29.06

Stuart: What the work sometimes wants is often not what I want? 29.07

Alison: Yes. 29.08

Stuart: And I'm aware that this is likely a very personal feature, one I want to spread out. In my case I find that's very often the way, or at least that's the sort of encounter in making paintings that I found desirable, that's maybe the most provocative, the most likely to resolve an outcome that makes me feel rewritten by the work in some way. 29.37

Simon: But it is what you want. It's just not...29.39 Stuart: Well wanting is complicated. (laughter) 29.43

Simon: It's not that complicated. Obviously it is what you want because you are driven to make those decisions, although they might not be comfortable - that's what you want. 29.53

Alison: Yes, I see what you mean. 29.55

Simon: I just want to make one point going back to what Gary was saying about looking. I think in a way we are all involved in something that is about educating our senses, that's what we do. Throughout your life as an artist you educate your senses, and actually that makes us different from people who don't do that. And so I suppose the thing that worries me is that sometimes we live in a world where one part of us is highly educated and other parts aren't educated at all. So that's something I'm very aware of. 30.30

Stuart: Do you have an example? What do you mean? 30.31

Simon: I just think we live in a world where we are immensely sophisticated in terms of processing and the way we deal with images.

Gary: And also incredibly ignorant. 30.41

Simon: Well we are able to deal with that material really well we might not need to unpick everything, but we live in a world where we're completely immersed in image, whereas I think actually maybe the other senses aren't as well educated, and they get educated. And what Stuart was saying was of course they are semi-educated within a culture that you're from, and then you work at it. And that's what we do. 31.14

Stuart: I suppose we might do that for lots of different reasons right? 31.18

Simon: But we have to go about doing it, it doesn't just happen. 31.22

Stuart: Of course, but the point I'm trying to get to is that you might do that for a reason, you might make a diagnosis of the world we live in, but pursue the kind of practice you're talking about in quite a nostalgic fashion, seeing our current condition as some sort of fall from grace. You might be trying to work and wanting to recover a curious state, or you could be orienting that quite differently, so I suppose the simple point about the differences between how each of these questions impact on different artists rather than... because I think there's plenty, anyone who makes paintings, that's one of the nice things about it actually, you meet someone else who does it and you can talk quite quickly about certain sorts of experiences that are very common, like what you were saying (to Simon) about seeing a painting on the side, obliquely, that's equal to this sort of frontal encounter. 32.27

Simon: I like them there (gesturing). 32.28

Stuart: Yeah, yeah. And you notice people in galleries often say 'Are you a painter' because you're probably looking at it from some funny angle, because you approach it like you do your own work. And one sort of wants to encompass it in some way, and I think all of these things, on a personal level are quite common, and really wonderful things, and there's wonderful things in my life I couldn't live without those things, but I suppose again I would maybe make that difference between that way of looking at it, and a broader way of looking at it. It's what I was saying about Fried, he's actually making a really specific argument that the experience of a successful modernist work of art is of a different order to ones everyday experience of an everyday object, and in some sense separate from the world. This is a real position that's actually been very powerful and quite a lot of that's been dismantled. So there are two different orders of discussion I think in that way, and I suppose it's very easy for there to be a slippage from one to the other, for those things to be conflated in a way. 33.27

Alison: Well I suppose Fried himself conflated that's them that's the point. 33.30

Stuart: Wants to perhaps? 33.31

Alison: Well possibly? 33.31

Stuart: In a sense that could be a strategy of naturalizing it? 33.37

Alison: Yes, perhaps. Another strategy? 33.38

Stuart: I don't want to be crude in characterizing some sort of manipulation. I think he's sincerely engaged with what he's doing. I think this is the ideological problem with what you're saying. 33.50

Malcolm: Can I just ask at this point because I was about to bring us to the point you have just brought us to, but could you say how you think Fried distinguishes between absorption and absorpction? If you know what I mean? 34.04

Alison: Yeah, well this is the thing, he doesn't talk so much about from the perspective practice. 34.12

Malcolm: No, but even leaving that aside because practice is a place where you're testing this, but what's Fried's distinction do you think? What's the essence of his distinction? 34.20

Alison: Well I suppose there's this thing where he has talked about absorptive

strategies through art history. He has talked about how different artists have encompassed or engaged with dealing with their work and the audience through developing different ways of analyzing the dramatic in work from Diderot talking about David and his shifting sensibilities. His idea of theatricality and the drama in his paintings started off quite small, and it got bigger and bigger and bigger the more you understood it. Yes and Greuze... (looking at Greuze painting 'La Piété filiale' on powerpoint presentation). 35.11

Malcolm: I mean this is good isn't it because you've explained to me quite clearly how Greuze is working with absorption. 35.17

Alison: All of the people are looking inward in this painting. They are focused in on the dying father even the pets on the right hand side are focused inwards (laughter). The whole theory was that if the subjects of the painting were absorbed in what they were doing that then encouraged the absorption of us the beholders, the audience. 35.39

Stuart: What does he say about Manet and 'Olympia' and the facingness of that, because there seems to be a moment we're testing, or Demoiselle d'Avignon, being looked at right? Rosalind Krauss said there was a shift, right, nineteenth century academic painting, which was more of a narrative quality, saying 'once upon a time ...', and to Demoiselle d'Avignon she said the rhetoric that painting was 'I'm looking at you'. 36.03

Alison: Absolutely. 36.04

Simon: And what about Titian? You get that in Titian. 36.04

Alison: Yes, basically Fried says that there was a particular moment in 18th century French painting where this concern came to the fore. He doesn't dispute that this wasn't addressed before in certain pockets, but it was this particular moment in time that a lot of people were looking at it in a similar light. So you were talking about how this tradition of understanding has changed, and this is something that Fried would describe as absorptive strategies. This includes shifting sensibility in the respect that when we see something and when we get used to something then you have to push it that little bit further each time to get the same reaction, and you get to the point where there is something like a tipping point, where somebody comes along with a new work and it changes everything. 36.57

Malcolm: How does he update it with Gordon and Parreno? 36.58

Alison: Well yes, the Zidane film where basically we're looking about a film, we're not talking about a painting. We are focused on a footballer who's 'in the zone' you might say. He isn't thinking about however many cameras are focused on him, the audience at the stadium, or in the cinema. Fried has transferred from a static painting to a new medium of today. So although the absorption is the core thing, the way we analyze it, see it or work with it, or work against it are the things that seem to be changing. Including artists like Manet. 37.47

Stuart: I think when he is talking about Manet it is a useful point because that's an example of Fried being very historically particular, which in fact a lot of his detractors don't realize about him, he does try to be quite careful. I think nonetheless he returns to universalizing a historical event again, and again, and again. I think he just keeps at it, but he does try, and in a very scholarly and thorough way, but still the question that was always in my mind reading him was 'what's so good about absorption?' because you know absorption after all is the thing that makes him not able to digest Judd for example, or to digest Carolee Schneemann. 38.29

Alison: Yes, well Judd saw his discussion, his ideas on minimalist art were part and parcel of what Fried was talking about, just different aspects, so really not a separate discussion, but one and the same from different perspectives. 38.47

Stuart: That's not what Fried thought though right? 38.50 Alison: No, absolutely, but it is what Judd thought. 38.52

Stuart: But what about say 'Valie Export' then? Or a performance artist, who is saying 'here I am, I'm a social polity, I'm in the room with you'. That's theatricality to Fried. That's the sphere of experience to the everyday. 39.08

Malcolm: The New Jersey Turnpike. 39.11 Stuart: Yeah, The New Jersey Turnpike. 39.12

Alison: Yes, Art and Objecthood. 39.14

Stuart: And that's the order of experience that art has somehow to defeat, or suspend right? But like I said when we were talking, how come that's not too high a price to pay? Arts sudden involvement with the real world that's here, and artists in New York in the 60's, you're involved in the civil rights movement and making art is all part of that, it's all part of that milieu. In Fried's scheme you can't have that, and how come that's not too much of a high price to pay for this thing called absorption, that I'm not clear about what's so good about it anyway, other some appeal to some

transcendence that is always possible to make? And you know it becomes a platitude, because it's transcendent, and transcendence is a good thing, and it's sort of you know... 40.01

Alison: But that's if like you were saying that's all there is in absorption, just transcendence? 40.06

Stuart: Well I don't know. That's why I'm saying I don't know. 40.07

Alison: Well the way I have encountered the understanding through these interviews are that everybody seems to have different levels or understandings, for example Simon seems very down to earth, and reasoning way of thinking about the painting, and other people that have been more 'carried away'. In your '24' questions maybe there are degrees, and it's not just one word that implies one thing, it has many different facets? 40.42

Stuart: But I knew you were talking about Fried. (laughter) 40.50

Alison: (laughter) Yes you did. Well there are lots of other hypothesis for instance we talked about 'flow' and Csikszentmihalyi, he talked about something very similar, and when I was looking and trying to understand what is absorption I looked at other beliefs and systems that might tap into this transcendence for example like mandala paintings, you know there are other... 41.12

Stuart: But I would say that's a different thing though, that's when you're talking about state of making or being and that's different to Fried's much more over arching theory of art. That's a different thing. 41.25

Alison: Yeah, well that's what I'm saying: is it a different thing or is it just different levels? 41.36

Malcolm: Well if I have understood it thus far Alison, and correct me if I'm wrong, but really you're talking about this in a way, which has been discussed as something that artists do, not something that the state you might be in, but something that artists like Greuze or Douglas Gordon maybe do in order to get to a place they want to be in relation to a potential spectator. Am I wrong? 42.04

Alison: No you're not wrong. 42.09

Malcolm: Whereas obviously one could file off into you know... 42.10

Alison: But when you're saying that's a thing artists do... 42.12

Malcolm: You know, because I mean going back to the LSD, you've got that whole thing, Huxley describing what it's like to take mescaline, and he in fact uses the image world thing, he says of course in medieval times when you went into a cathedral it was almost like taking LSD because everything else in the world was brown, and suddenly you went 'My God look' you know. There he is in Los Angeles I think it is and he's meditating on Van Gogh's chair and they're playing various kinds of music and he thinks some of it's great, and some of it's tinny, but in a way he's not an artist, he's simply a writer trying to describe a state of mind or a state of being or whatever it is. Whereas what you're saying, you're being quite specific, I want to talk to practitioners about something that an art historian thought they might be about. (laughter) 43.06

Alison: Yes, absolutely 43.07

Malcolm: And this is what has been tested with the interviews. 43.10

Alison: Yes, both Simon and Stuart and other people have said you know there are ways that you can be engaged whether it's you know looking at your Facebook page, or you're cooking. 42.20

Stuart: A lot of people mentioned cooking didn't they? 43.21

Alison: Yes, cooking came up quite a lot, and music came up quite a lot. Analogies where you could link those other experiences, but then like you say There is this particular point in painting practice, are we plugging into this experience in a way to navigate how we work? And I suppose those are the questions rather than... 43.47

Malcolm: And just to add to that thus far, Stuart mentioned the historical, the way that Fried could try and mount an argument against his detractors by saying that I do try to locate this in history, so you've done the historical anchoring bit by looking back at the origins of the term, but now you're testing it in practice and it maybe as I suggested, that you find that again as Stuart said that perhaps there is something called absorption in painting practice, but it's too high a price to pay for it, nobody will bother with it anymore, or there's no such thing in the first place, and Fried had simply trying to articulate a position that doesn't actually exist in practice, but all these things are still in play aren't they? 44.29

Alison: Well yes, I would definitely suggest there is something there because of the responses I have had from all of the collaborators. How we define that something, that's the problem, tying it to the right language, the right history so that it... 44.50

Stuart: There's something you said Simon I think about the point where you send the work out into the world, into culture and that's a really different thing and I guess you know... 45.02

Alison: Gary has said that as well. 45.03

Stuart: Yeah, and I think there are certainly these qualities of absorption in the making of the work, but I am very clear that that's not the content of the work. What that becomes for others is where the making of art meshes with it's experience and interpretation, and becomes something very collective and something gets made of it or not, or it becomes visible or it doesn't, or it gathers meaning or it doesn't, and all that's a very different learning in a way, isn't it? So I can say yes there are these configurations of experience that I might have as the artist, but as far as being transferable in any way, I'm not sure. 45.47

Alison: Well it could be looked at like something like where you reach for the brush or the paint, or the pigment that you then reach for an understanding within you, just like another tool? 46.02

Simon: Don't know what you mean? Say that again. 46.03

Alison: OK, so you were talking about how you like a bodily experience, it's not just the visual for you, so that in a way is a skill or an understanding that you have built up over your many years of practice. So you internalize, there is a certain point in your self where you go 'Is this working for me, does it do that?' that asking is kind of like a tool, a tapping into a well of thinking or experience or perception. 46.42

Simon: A gauge, some kind of gauge in the way if the work's going well or not. 46.43

Alison: Yes. 46.44

Simon: But the more you do it the quicker you're able to get to that point, you can make your judgments. I suppose the idea of making a judgment, and deciding whether you can call it successful or not, there's a kind of satisfaction in seeing someone not get your work, but also you imagine relating to what it was you were interested in, and that works in different ways. I imagine for all three of us that what it is would give us a sense of satisfaction, in other words someone else understanding something about what you're trying to do, would be manifest in different ways. For me, I can tell if someone is actually doing what the work is supposed meant to make them do by watching them walk around it. So it's actually the way they behave in

front of it, that to me is a sign, and I can go away and get on with the work. 47.42

Gary: That's very good, that's very good. 47.47

Simon: Is that something that you understand? 47.49

Gary: Absolutely, I mean what a painting does to you when you are standing in front of it tells you so much. There's one artist I know, I won't mention his name, but his favourite thing was to watch people looking at paintings, and to really make notes and register certain aspects about it. Similar to what I was saying about the Rembrandt in the National Gallery, I had a similar experience to a Rothko exhibition in '71. I think it was at the Hayward Gallery, and they were hung absolutely beautifully with about that much space between them (indicating a relatively small gap) similar size for all canvases, and being absorbed in the work, and looking around I felt my self being specifically moved, not just randomly, but I had to really, really move in on work from where I was standing and looking, and then changing. And then I found myself absolutely mesmerized by the spaces between the paintings that suddenly became charged like electric, and that was an extra aspect to the spectator viewing, or where it out you. And I find that looking at any painting is really a matter of where you are going to look at it and how long you look at it, and where you come back to it. It is a whole process of looking and how it effects you that's kind of ... 49.43

Simon: Bodily. 49.44

Gary: This live thing that happens, this huge thing, but it's very precise, there's nothing random about it. 49.50

Simon: The artist has created that. 49.51

Gary: Yes, exactly, and ... 49.56

Simon: Has built that in. 49.56

Gary: And it's an extraordinary thing, you cannot put your finger on it, you just know it's happening. 50.00

Stuart: There's a bit in one of David Lynch's films, it's a really terrifying moment, and it's like a dream where the character is looking down at the protagonist walking down past a wall and then turns a corner and sees this horrifying figure, but the way it's done, the camera is positioned in such a way that you feel like you're being slid

down this wall with your back against it and you're not able to control and you're not able to turn your head. You go past the end of the wall and then this figure just slides out in slow motion and it's actually horrifying, it's horrible. But it seems like a good film director seems to be able to grab your eyes and make you look in this particular way. But having said that I'm thinking about the National Gallery again and those Poussin's that I was talking about earlier, that experience was so sudden, and so just like this, and so intense, but it was also the point at which I realized, or became deeply suspicious of claims made for this kind of lightening bolt effect, because I'd seen those paintings (Poussins) a hundred times before and they'd done nothing. So something had happened to me, and I'd been conditioned or primed, or I acquired certain techniques of looking, or terms of understanding that somehow I'd been sensitized in a way. Next time I walk through the charged field of that room I will... you know something happened. 51.21

Gary: Charged field is right. 51.24

Stuart: But before I wasn't on the same wavelength, and I could get home on time. (laughter) 51.30

Alison: That kind of makes me think, you were talking earlier about how your work re-makes you. 51.44

Stuart: Receptacle, yeah. I make it and ...51.45

Alison: Yeah, and then something that you were in the presence of day-to-day, and then something else comes out of it like this process of every day encounter - it's a Poussin, it's a Poussin, then one day 'WOW, THAT POUSSIN' kind of thing. So for it to do that something has changed in you like you were saying, whether that's the shifting sensibility or your understanding, but something has changed and you were talking about how it's not always in front of the work that you become absorbed. 52.20

Stuart: Yes, that's true, because it's this thing Greenberg says which is absolutely rubbish where you can just tell a good work of art, you know it's just like salt or sour. 52.28

Malcolm: That's just taste isn't it? 52.29

Alison: Yeah. 52.30

Stuart: You know, it's just nonsense because you know one learns, and that was an

incredibly liberating experience of painting, to know that it was possible for me to one moment not have that experience, and another moment to have that experience. So that was extraordinary to me, that was part of the work and the collected work of culture and what's possible with it, that things can change, and that it can change you and that we can make something out of that which makes us. 52.56

Alison: Fried is always talking about change. 52.57

Stuart: This seems really kind of powerful, and it wasn't just like you can either see or you can't kind of thing. Which is all kind of patrician. 53.06

Alison: Did you say it doesn't work like that for you (to Simon)? 53.08

Simon: No, I was just thinking, I was just saying actually that's the way it does work, because of course you don't understand or like things at the beginning, it takes time, and we educate ourselves, and then we know why they are, interesting, we're more able to know. But also I was thinking about this idea of just going back a little bit about seeing shows and seeing when things don't work. I remember going to the Richter that was at the Tate last year, and the way that people want to be seen in front of the painting (laughter), it's being seen in front of a painting, and when the whole thing just totally falls apart and that is this thing of putting yourself in front of it, and not dealing with it. 53.56

Stuart: What the selfie thing? 53.57

Simon: Yeah. 53.58

Stuart: Yeah, well I've seen that. 54.00

Malcolm: Well it's the brand thing isn't it, I'd like to be in the same room as a 'Richter', I'd like to be in the same room as a 'Kiefer'? 54.06

Stuart: That's like buying books for how they look on your shelf, not for reading them, that happens. 54.09

Simon: Well that's got to be a sign it's not working surely? 54.12

Stuart: What's not working? 54.13

Simon: The work's not working. 54.14

Stuart: I disagree, I think there has been this interface between the work and the practices of looking and interpretation, it's not a passive thing. It's exactly what I'm

saying, you don't walk past and get struck by lightening, it's not like that. You can say that contemporary art as a kind of populist spectacle does not encourage the cultivation of rigorous practice of interpretation, and the people who are taking selfies in front of those paintings are not... it's not their fault. 54.56

Simon: Well you could say the works not doing its job, because it's not captivated them. 55.00

Stuart: The works not the agent. 55.00

Malcolm: Well you could look at it another way and say what Karsten Höller does is to say I'll make the right artwork for this museum, it will be a bunch of metal tubes where everyone has the same experience, and I'm processing the population, which is what they want me to do anyway in this big central hall? 55.17

Stuart: Yeah, and in a way I don't think you can say that the works not doing it's job, because cultures require maintenance, you know things go out if we don't keep them going, languages die, things become less significant, it has to be used. We have to use it, and if we don't use it we lose it right, so there's more at stake than just saying the works didn't work, it's a lot to put on a painting, that you've got to somehow defeat this spectacle. 55.45

Simon: With such a reputation. 55.45

Alison: But I suppose this all comes back to this constructing the spectator doesn't it? In your practice (aimed at Simon) you talk about a particular way you watch how the audience interact with the work, so you can see if it works, and you (aimed at Gary) were talking about the gaps between the works that held a particular charge, and Andrew Bick talks about how he doesn't really construct the spectator but when his works are hung, that's when he likes to engage with how they might be engaged with, and you do a similar thing as well don't you (aimed at Stuart) with your three's? 56.19

Stuart: Yes, I like what he said about that being a kind of architectural in a way. 56.24

Alison: Yes, so how much of making the work 'work' is constructing the spectator? 56.33

Simon: I would say quite a lot. I would say you need to have them in mind throughout the process if you want to address something to them, or sort of adopt a strategy that

draws them in. 56.52

Stuart: I don't know if I like to constructively be part of this, maybe it's... 57.00

Alison: Enabling, I don't know? 57.01

Stuart: Because I feel like what I want to do is make some sort of structured experience that can be encountered, but I'm fine with that being encountered or used in a perverse way that I could never have predicted. Ingres is a painter I am really interested in from this point of view because a lot of the most interesting things about his work are actually totally contrary to what he would have wanted, and it's their peculiarity with this sort of mix of contradictions that are deeply ironic things in that way. 57.40

Alison: Like what for example? 57.41

Stuart: So for instance, I didn't know this till recently when I read Adrian Rifkin's book I thought about Ingres and Delacroix, I thought Ingres was the posh boy, but it's Delacroix who's the posh boy and Ingres was the country bumpkin who taught and read over by himself, and his understanding of classical myth is slightly wonky apparently, and slightly eccentric, but he was nonetheless able to ... this was even though he was the son of a local respected artisan painter. He comes to Paris and there he is in the nineteenth century, but trying to make this pure classical gesture, but at the same time he is almost like a social realist painter, painting the dress, the architecture, the time, and these sort of two factors in the work are so oddly at odds in a way. In a lot of ways he is the archconservative painter, but there is something deeply radical about his work. 58.41

Malcolm: Was it Delacroix called him a Chinese painter who was lost in the ruins of Athens? (laughter) 58.45

Stuart: Isn't that great? 58.46

Simon: Yes, that's what they called him. (laughter) 58.51

Stuart: (laughter) I think that makes me feel that that time power meets this need to make up, which is I don't feel like I'm in a position of mastery at all, I feel actually deeply compromised, but there's something appealing about could I, or is there somehow that I could mobilize these conflicting forces in a way that can be held in balance, even if it's only temporarily? And often with that there's an object of attention that seems very exciting, it's not the only reason to make work, I suppose

that's the part of it that relates to the decision of going public, artists saying I'm an artist, rather than just I'm in my shed and I do it for myself, and everything else is a bonus. It's a decision saying I want to engage in the broader conversation. So that's why I suppose constructing the spectator maybe feels a bit too singular from my point of view, a bit too ... 59.48

Malcolm: But you've just described Lynch doing just exactly that? 59.51

Stuart: Well it feels like that, and that was a moment in a film and I sort of think that was a way of describing that intensity. I don't know if that is what he does? 1.00.06

Alison: I think he does. 1.00.06

Stuart: I think moments like that, this is not the same as saying well I just evolve you know to the spectator. You know the works got to do some of what it's supposed to do. 1.00.17

Alison: I mean Lynch is a mega manipulator. 1.00.18

Stuart: And it's really hard making paintings, and I've been doing it for a little while, and I feel the benefit for having done it for a little while, I can tell you because I know how to do certain things and you need to be able to construct... 1.00.32

Malcolm: I always feel that way about Cezanne that I feel the way you feel about Lynch, about Cezanne, and I'm looking at Cezanne and I think how does that bastard do it (laughter), because every time, every time you think he's completely rearranged my perception, and he's done it consistently, and it's like he's some kind of evil genius, it makes you both think you adore him and hate him at the same time. 1.00.54

Stuart: Well they are very uncomfortable paintings. 1.00.56

Gary: Well again Cezanne is such a great painter, again his work exists, and was made and evolved not just one or two levels, but 20, 30, 50 levels. You know they incorporate so much of being a person, and in a society that he lived in. 1.01.24

Simon: But for him to make those paintings there's no way you can possibly be working with all that, you can't have all that material in your head while you're making them. You've got to break it down into two things that were put together that creates the third, otherwise you couldn't do it. 1.01.38

Gary: Absolutely. 1.01.38

Simon: And that's the reason why he was good at what he did. 1.01.42

Gary: Again I think when he was standing in the landscape for his late watercolours and the slightest movement was so important, whether to move or not to move, you know it was a question of accuracy, it was a question of the relationship, with the connections. 1.10.58

Stuart: That's the great thing about painting though isn't it? It's such a carrier that it's such an extraordinary carrier of information, of sensation, and ideas and so on, and it's just so live, like it's radioactive. You know it can do more than you can, and in a way you're handling it ... 1.02.14

Alison: Quite a few people have said that, and almost talk about painting as in a living thing, it wants what it wants and ... 1.02.24

Stuart: I wouldn't personify. 1.02.26

Alison: No, but perhaps inadvertently people do. 1.02.28

Simon: Demands. 1.02.31

Alison: Things like that where you were talking about painting 'wanting what it wants' (aimed at Stuart) we don't realize we are saying those things about it, but we do in a way create this kind of understanding that there is... 1.02.45

Stuart: Yeah, it's funny. With Cezanne I'm always amazed he's so popular, because they are amazing paintings, but I think they are just so extraordinarily uncomfortable, and difficult paintings. 1.02.53

Malcolm: Yes, they are. 1.02.54

Stuart: I'm amazed that they are... 1.02.56

Malcolm: They're not pleasant, and sometimes they're actually unpleasant. 1.03 02

Gary: Well it's what people recognize. It's not whether they are good or bad, or unpleasant, it's just what they recognize, and there's that connection, and painting is about making connection isn't it? 1.03.10

Malcolm: Yes. The material, in a very direct way I think, it's funny but where I've discussed Cezanne before, this discussion had made me think about it, but in a very direct way he's, and this is perhaps a shift that was referred to earlier in the nineteenth century, his perception is what he is working with. That's the essence of

what his work is about, and all the things that might have mattered to someone like Ingres are what matters to him. What matters to him is the alteration or recreation of perception. 1.03.53

Pause for break

Alison: So the last thing we were talking about was constructing the spectator, we'd just started to kind of think about that, and we were talking about Cezanne, and the many layers and facets to his work. Something that Andrew was talking about was how he designed his studio space – I'll read it out 'the studio is very much designed to everything it possibly can to create the scenario where I am totally absorbed in my work while I am here' is that something you connect with? 1.21.56

Gary: Well I think organization is the key to success in what you do, you've got to be organized. You have to very organized in how you sort everything out, but organization is something that each person defines in their own way, I mean you can be messy as hell, but that's your way of doing it. 1.22.16

Simon: It's not mess. 1.22.17

Alison: Organized chaos? 1.22.21

Stuart: A compost of images Bacon would say wouldn't he with all those photographs? 1.22.23

Gary: Yeah, it's what makes you tick, it's different from somebody else, absolutely unique. 1.22.32

Stuart: It changes as your life changes. I've found the less time I have the more organized the space gets, because I need to be able to come in and suddenly produce something very focused and direct, and I can't do that if there's stuff everywhere. I have to just come in and do something quite singular, so my space is kind of against my temperament in a way, which I think if left you'd find would be more mess like Francis Bacon, or Frank Auerbach, which is how I started out. 1.22.55

Gary: The worst thing would be to have a cleaner come in and make everything tidy whoever we are talking about. 1.23.10

Simon: Of course, we don't realize that that tiny bit of shapeless wood is essential. (laughter) 1.23.14

Alison: That reminds me of Andrea, when her work isn't 'working' she will cut it up, and discard it. 1.24.07

Gary: How long does she give it? 1.24.08

Alison: She can give works a long period of time, but there's a breaking point and she will literally cut them up, but her process has evolved where the actual canvas material itself has become much more central to the work because of that process of cutting up, and the fringing and the things that result from that. So the detritus then becomes part of the next work, and that's something else that came to the fore was that nobody 'finished' work, for the majority it was a continual dialogue, an on going exploration into looking at a particular thing. 1.24.59

Gary: Yes, yes. 1.25.00

Alison: And I hadn't considered practice quite in that way before, or I suppose I was thinking about it too much from the perspective of a beholder in an exhibition space seeing final work. If work has gone out do you often re-work it once it's come back or do you leave it? 1.25.18

Gary: Well one thing that Simon said if you're happy with it you stand by it and stake your life by it. So then it can leave the studio whether it has faults, but maybe not in your opinion, it may be almost there, it's what I call the 'area of reality' when a painting 'clicks' whatever you do to it in a sense, it may be a mistake, or it may be over the top, but it's still real as opposed to a mess and it has to get the click to get into that area, and that makes all the difference. 1.26.04

Simon: Then if you're brave enough you walk away from it at that point. 1.26.07

Gary: Yeah, that's right. You know it's in that area and if you can, if you have a gut feeling, and it is a gut feeling that tells you 'ok'. 1.26.15

Simon: And that can be interesting, because sometimes it might not appear like work you recognise. 1.26.21

Gary: Exactly, absolutely. 1.26.21

Simon: What about with you Stuart. 1.26.23

Stuart: Yeah, there's been lots of times when I've put something to the side, thinking I'll leave that, not even indifferent to it, and then later realizing that that's actually quite important, and it just took longer for that painting to skin over in a way,

somehow. In a way I think about that being like a discomfort of new ideas. I heard a great quote by Terry Eagleton talking about neologisms and uncomfortable new terms and he was sort of saying that we have to remember that there was once a time when the word ego would have been a new fangled term that your editor would have probably crossed out if you were writing for a National paper, and so with sociology and evolution right? These things kind of come in and are actually unwieldy at first and we experience much bigger on that scale, but also in one's individual words sometimes things happen in the practice that are indigestible, and I've learnt to keep those around actually, even if they're facing the wall, because I've seen too many times where that actually has an affect, whether somehow it changes the climate in the studio or the ecosystem of the other works around. And sometimes it's bringing something into the practice that I feel at the moment I need to do this, there are certain things that have stabilized and in a lot of ways a lot of strength come from that, but there's also something, a new element needs to be brought in that I'm not sure of what..., that would be provocative in some way I suppose, I don't know immediately what to do with, and that could be a deliberate act of... 1.28.10

Simon: Isn't that moment also when an idea about who you are, audiences as different, suddenly you have a sense that I'm really doing this for myself. When you do something, you leave it, and you know it's the evidence of the work you are going to make, the first step into that, and you leave it because it's kind of heralding what's going to happen, and then I don't know, I suppose my sense is that actually this state this work isn't really for anyone else, it's really for me to try and figure out, and maybe later on you start to polish things, you start to involve other people, and that's where it gets dangerous. You can add one more marks to complete it on someone else's terms. 1.29.03

Stuart: I suppose it's when talking about the layers again that you mentioned earlier, it's like knowing when in the stack to intervene in that way, because I think sometimes... 1.29.15

Alison: Well you cheated that haven't you, because you've kind of separated your layers out? 1.29.18

Stuart: Well in one way, but in another way no, in that it's still quite simple things that sometimes a painting... I don't work anything in the paintings, so it either works or it doesn't. And in a way something can be very throwaway, but I'm very conscious of when that's put on a wall, there are certain quite standard formal things that need to have happened in a way for it to be coherent, and that doesn't have to be... I think

what you're talking about Simon where my problem is if you're doing that last layer and confecting something all the time to patch it up in some way. It's very complicated, because there's that eruption of something new and difficult in the work, but there's also the sense in which I guess you're partaking within the existing language, which everyone has to do in order to be intelligible and maybe not to just to be babbling. 1.30.17

Alison: Yeah, talking about the language thing in a way, for instance Stuart you were saying how you like to think about how the works are going to be hung because of this dialogue between two or three works, and how one might not be quite right, but in conjunction with the other two... 1.30.43

Stuart: They need each other. 1.30.44

Alison: And Gary, talking about sometimes when you exhibit work you might finish with something that's almost an 'and next'. 1.30.54

Gary: Yes it leads into the next series of paintings, and the first one comes from the last series. So you have a connection. Often I show that, but not always, but quite often. 1.31.05

Alison: And Simon, you were talking about terms and language, and you were saying that you kind of make the work because there aren't those terms out there. In the way the work becomes an exploration of the next term? 1.31.28

Simon: Well I think I was pushed into saying that a little bit. (laughter) 1.31.30

Alison: You, pushed? (laughter) 1.31.31

Simon: But something you can say is that you only make things which don't exist. The idea with putting up with the things you have to put up to make things, to make something that exists is ridiculous really, but you have to get to that point, and that doesn't happen straight away. So of course we make things that hopefully don't exist, but some times those things don't have terms. 1.31.57

Alison: So I suppose what I'm saying is that almost a building up of terms, of visual terms is like the body of work becomes it's own lexicon, it's own dictionary, it's own... 1.32.12

Simon: Vocabulary. 1.32.13

Alison: Yes. 1.32.14

Stuart: I think that's very true. There's the micro context of the artists own work. I think the people that come and go in one's audience, because lots of people come and go, but there's this sort of core, a very small number usually, that are interested in practice over time. They are actually interested in that lexicon. Then there are the people who come to say 'I like that one, but I don't like that one'. So the people who are interested in your project in some way, I think they are the people I'm going to be most interested in, and they're the hardest to get hold of, of course. 1.32.58

Ruth: I always liked the idea of the retrospective in your late career, imagining how that all came together. 1.33.05

Stuart: I've never imagined my retrospective. (laughter) 1.33.06

Alison: Well we could ask Gary? 1.33.09

Gary: Well yes, I've had several retrospectives. That's a big thing. You need some help with it. I was lucky to have Sam Cornish, who has a very good eye, and he knows the work inside out because he was the editor of the catalogue Raisonné. Then you have to think about the space, it happened to be at Clifford Chance, and the one many years before that was at the Herbert Gallery in Coventry, with three superb galleries, a long time ago. But how you do it I don't know. It's like a continuation of being in the studio itself. One work connects with another, and hanging any show you put things in, and take things out, and you have to look at the space hard and you look at the work hard and think about different contexts with other works, and gradually your dialogue happens, and you put it together. How you put it together God knows, and it's like how you arrive at painting - God knows. Nobody knows. But you do, you find your way, and you get there, you arrive there, that's what matters. And when you have a retrospective, it's putting all that together, you arrive there and you feel 'Yes', as opposed to 'I'm really not sure'. It's simple in a sense, but getting there that's hard. You have to look at the space hard, and really spend some time just sitting there, walking around, quite a few days. We actually made big cutout models of all the work we decided to show, and placed them around, and had an idea about where to put them, which was very helpful. 1.35.38

Alison: Is it in a way like you're inviting people into a form of conversation? 1.35.46

Gary: Well it is, but it's more in a sense, because when I'm working I have at least a dozen paintings on the go at the same time, and in the end putting a big show like that together, is the same as a small show, it's got to be by eye, it's absolutely got to

be that that speaks to that, put that one next to it, kills it, and it's such a delicate thing, and you've just got to feel your way around. Yes, it's intuitive, and whatever ideas you might have about it usually go out of the window, and something better happens, because your eye takes over and really links things up. 1.36.33

Simon: Is it much different from a show of new work in the sense that it's telling a story? Isn't a retrospective about telling a story? 1.43.42

Gary: Telling a story? 1.36.46

Simon: Because that would really make it quite different. 1.36.47

Gary: I always deny that there's a story. 1.36.54

Alison: I suppose if you were sort of through the decades or something, then it is, but if its... 1.36.59

Stuart: In a way its part of the demand of the retrospective, in the way people can seek a story whether one wants it. 1.37.07

Simon: They want to see the development, a narrative, a line. 1.37.09

Alison: Yes. 1.37.09

Stuart: Sure. 1.37.10

Gary: Yes. 1.37.11

Stuart: See I'd want to resist that in staging it all, I could understand that. 1.37.17

Simon: How could you undo that, to do a non-chronological retrospective? You could make it about experience. 1.37.27

Gary: What one can delve into is, for me, the essentials of how the paintings evolve, how they travel, and how they got to where they are. I don't know if it's a story? 1.37.48

Alison: Gary, how about where recently we were describing how there's this cyclic thing happening with your practice. Working on things now that might you might have worked on before. 1.37.58

Gary: Exactly. I've been working on some things since the 70's. It's a cyclic thing. So Matt Collings talked about my paintings at one point, and said he didn't know if it was from 1967 or 2011. The paintings were very close, and you can't tell them apart. It is

something you have to do, but it's to do with what I categorize as 'essential aspects' like full and empty, open and close, stillness and movement, hard and soft, these basic complimentary things that make up the work, and it's how you live with these things, and how they change, and how they evolve, If that makes sense? 1.39.03

Alison: Yes. And thinking about practice in relation to the practice of others, like how we were talking about how a body of work could be a lexicon or dictionary, how those lexicons then join up with other things that are going on in other practices reminds me of community of practice. You might remember us discussing this Stuart? 1.39.37

Stuart: I remember the phrase, but I can't remember what it's about. 1.39.39

Alison: It's an anthropological term describing where you have a group of people engaged with investigating similar things, but separately, they are disparate, that at times may come together, share their practice, then go their separate ways, could very much describe the practice of painting and the history of painting. And I suppose how that is encompassed in your practice, and your lexicon (aimed at Stuart), you were talking about those almost pivotal moments when there's a work you almost fight against. How do we know what that it is, is it just that gut feeling, it's uncomfortable, it's engaging in a different way? Is that to do with the context and what's happening in painting outside of our practice at that time, the milieu as you mentioned? 1.40.46

Stuart: Well for me it was. 1.40.47

Alison: Yes? 1.40.47

Stuart: Definitely. Going back to the public idea, there was this activity that had been going on for quite a long time, it was definitely part of the centre of my life, but there was a decision to move to London, I was working in Sussex for a long time, and there was a decision to move to London because I became aware that there is a serious conversation to be had about art and I decided that I wanted to be in it. And I like to have access to those forums, those people, those communities as well, but I remember quite distinctly the feeling that work that I was interested in, made at the time, and this was 2004/5 when I was doing a post-grad course which made up a territory that I didn't feel like I could do anything in, although there wasn't any need to do it, these people were doing a perfectly good job of that and I feel drawn to this, but I need to feel able to contribute. And what happened shortly after, happened on

several fronts, on several levels, the way you try to dig yourself out of that kind of impasse through what I think of as a burrowing out through the material, burrowing out through the activity, and I was always doing that, but without maybe linking that to other things, and that can be quite aimless in that way, and I guess that's the point where one needs examples, and there are those key examples that offered me a different way of thinking about the same terms, that made me think 'Ok, now I can see a way that there might be a space that I can occupy'. 1.42.35

Alison: Yeah. And with Simon, you had this change in your practice didn't you, from a more painterly approach to a more physical? 1.42.46

Simon: When being involved in lots of collaborative projects, working with archaeologists of course I look at their art, but also I'm interested in the experience of landscape, and all of that has been informed by working with archaeologists for a long time, and what I've found is that you start asking some serious questions, and artists have a lot in common with archaeologists in terms of what we're trying to do, how they carry it out, and how they present it to the world. There are similar things that art is not official, it's something that grew after really being in that uncomfortable position, being forced not to be able to make the work that I was able to make at the time, and having to make different things, so it came about through a kind of discomfort, but also as the result of serious questioning: why are you doing archaeology, why are you doing art, and how those things are carried out, and actually recognizing that I think probably things have significance they revert the way it's run for lots of disciplines, similar sorts of problems. But I think the problem we have is that in general we're not seen as a discipline, in the same way archaeology is, and it's awfully difficult for people from these established disciplines to understand art-making, and take it as seriously as we would like then to. 1.44.26

Gary: That's the general public? 1.44.27

Simon: Well also in university level. I mean for instance working with archaeology, their assumptions about what being an artist meant, or how we carry it out our work were so off, so totally off. 1.44.42

Stuart: What did they say? 1.44.43

Simon: Well you know things like inspiration, ideas that you're not part of a group, that you're an individual, all those kinds of romantic ideas, and not recognizing basic things that we make work because people have made work in the past, and we're

kind of drawn into it on those levels, and we grapple and struggle with those things and try and find our own way. We're trying to find our way as a group of people with a discussion like we are doing today. So part of the problem I think is that we're undone by the way art is presented, particularly by the commercial gallery system, that we're not seen as a really strong discipline, which we actually are, we're probably one of the oldest ones. 1.45.30

Gary: Yes. 1.45.30

Simon: And those things need to be overcome as an individual by making friendships with people from other disciplines, and working with them, and collaborating, you know properly. 1.45.40

Stuart: But that's also a large part of the appeal though isn't it, well for me it is, that it is somewhat a motley thing. 1.45.51

Alison: Motley? 1.45.52

Stuart: It's half in and half out of various institutions. I think that's a big draw. 1.45.57

Alison: It's a hard thing to pin down. 1.45.59

Simon: It's not true though. We're not motley. In what way are we motley? 1.46.03

Alison: Well we're disparate? 1.46.06

Stuart: Well we are motley in the way I can think of...1.46.07

Simon: Well we argue with each other all the time, but that's fine, that's what we do 1.46.07

Stuart: I'm teaching art students now, and some are doing painting, and some of them are doing things that are closer to political activism, and some of them making (sound not clear) that's pretty motley. And this is all in the name of art, right, all in some way in the name of art, in that territory, and that is part of it's appeal I think is that it can provide some sort of home for these disparate things that haven't somehow hardened yet, and it's up for grabs in some way. I recognize what you're saying at the same time, that there's a sort of sense of art as a kind of knowledge, practice, deep sort of... 1.46.43

Simon: I would say that group of artists who are discussing their making things in wildly different ways probably do have a lot of things in common. 1.46.50

Stuart: Absolutely they do, absolutely they do. 1.46.52

Alison: Does the term discipline suggest a kind of trodden path, doesn't it? 1.47.02

Simon: In archaeology they can study what came before, they base their knowledge on what came before, they don't try and disguise the fact that they've got influences, they don't pretend they didn't see so and so's work, which is what we all do...  
1.47.15

Stuart: We don't. 1.47.16

Alison: I don't. 1.47.16

Simon: It's like one of the worst questions you can ask someone is what's your influence. 1.47.22

Alison: I would say that not everybody is like that. 1.47.25

Simon: No one's going to actually admit it? 1.47.27

Alison: I don't know, I do. 1.47.29

Simon: Do we admit it? 1.47.29

Stuart: Well I do. 1.47.29

Alison: Yeah, I do. 1.47.30

Simon: Really? 1.47.31 (group laughter)

Gary: Sorry what was that? 1.47.32

Alison: Fessing up, admitting to influences. 1.47.34

Stuart: Who you've looked at or where your work comes from. 1.47.34

Gary: Oh yes. 1.47.36

Simon: I suppose I'm thinking about art students, possibly. 1.47.38

Gary: It's very important. 1.46.46

Malcolm: It's a bit like when Seamus Mahoney was asked 'Well what do you read' and he said ' My own poems' (laughter) 1.47.50

Simon: Yeah, but we can't do that can we, look at my own work? I think there is a

difference, or at least in terms of perception. 1.48.14

Stuart: But there's sort of in a discipline like archaeology there is a lot more, that I suppose this sense in which I use the term motley is that the level of methodology might have a lot in common, but there's not a kind of agreed sense of good practice, we do not have one. 1.48.29

Simon: Well they do have a sense of good practice, and they will stick up for each other, whereas we don't stick up for each other in the same way. 1.48.38

Stuart: So you're saying the market injects a sense of competitiveness that's actually at odds with this collegiate of doing? 1.48.46

Simon: I think that what the market does is presents the idea that we have individual geniuses, and that's what it's all about. 1.48.55

Alison: And that goes all the way back to the renaissance doesn't it. 1.48.55

Stuart: I would say there's a danger of the idealizing academia here, because I think that's as much a market as anything else, the market of what we're doing here right? (laughter) 1.49.05

Alison: Absolutely. Yeah. 1.49.07

Stuart: You know, it's the knowledge market. 1.49.08

Stuart: How much is archaeology is understood beyond the confines of its practice though, that's what I would question? 1.49.36

Alison: But possibly the thing with art is that this sort of links with something Stuart was saying about the producer. Is that now there's not so many people being just a beholder of the artwork, they're producing their own artwork, so this boundary of artist and non-artist is kind of diminished. 1.49.57

Stuart: I mean I would cement that in a broader way, not just about art, but there's a relationship between public and private that is being agitated in quite a particular way. 1.50.16

Alison: Yes, well you were talking about both declaring yourself as an artist kind of thing and I ... 1.50.22

Stuart: Well in a way, when you put it like that that sounds like quite an odd thing to say, and in a way I think it speaks to a more of a description of an impulse in me, but

I suppose it may be. 1.50.25

Alison: I think it's a common thing that a lot of artists go through. 1.50.30

Stuart: That was something on the horizon that maybe I was idealizing in that was exotic in a way. I always think of the Tony Hancock film 'The Rebel' and always felt a bit like that in a way (laughter), like Modern Art was this thing that I liked the look of and wanted to participate in, but maybe I just missed something. 1.50.49

Simon: I think there's this other thing, which is this sense that artists don't produce knowledge, and yet we all know it's utterly about producing knowledge, and that other people, certainly in other disciplines don't understand it in the same way, whereas an archaeologist produces knowledge, or an understanding. 1.51.07

Alison: So is it all about this accessibility of this knowledge? 1.51.09

Simon: This is about misconception, or how do you show someone an artwork and say actually this has so much understanding, and knowledge has gone into it's making, and how do we describe that. 1.51.21

Gary: Well there are examples in art history where the painting which is being made for instance, is aligned with everything that's happening at the time. Like at the turn of the twentieth century we have Schoenberg splitting up space, Einstein splitting up space, Picasso splitting up space, it was happening at every level, and that's continued, and it continues, and we're all part of it. And however other people perceive what we do, we just have to do what we have to do, because we are part of that flow. And we may not even be able to find what the hell it is, but we know that doing that is the only thing we can do. 1.52.11

Simon: Maybe that's the attractive side of it, it's actually not so cast in stone. 1.52.20

Stuart: It's an ambivalence what we're talking about. I mean I recognize in part what you are saying, but on the other hand I think well there's so much discourse on the scholarship of art, you some people will say there's an excess, there's more than you could ever engage with. So I don't believe it's not taken seriously, but on the other hand I do see that it's not organized in a formation in perhaps the same way like something like archaeology is. The question for me is why would we want that necessarily, I don't know? 1.52.47

Alison: The other thing that is about language, and how it might be accessible to others maybe outside of practice. Obviously places where new terms, and you might

think of new terms as a work, or something that might be exhibited, but if you're actually talking about a word that you come up with, for instance you use 'physical paintings' (directed at Simon) to describe your work don't you? Quite often a way of getting a new term across would be through academia, wouldn't it? It'd be through papers, or through publishing, through... 1.53.28

Simon: Education. 1.53.28

Alison: Yes. 1.53.33

Simon: You could set about thinking of which words you want to get rid of 1.53.35

Alison: But also what I was going to say is if you were wanting to bring new terms, and new ideologies to the table, how would you do that if you were outside of the academy? I mean it would be through this kind of setting, but on an informal outside, and then how would you get that across to the rest of your community as such, so that it then became a bigger and wider ranging dialogue? 1.54.07

Stuart: I mean there's a 'we' sort of floating around here... 1.54.09

Alison: Yes, I suppose there is. 1.54.09

Stuart: And I don't know, there's this one sense of there's sense of antagonism that could be reduced to anarchic competitiveness, sort of thing it's quite easy, most people would see that as undesirable, or objectionable, but there's other sorts of antagonism that are deeply important, deeply important in their political divisions, or their ideological differences and you need to hammer it out, and you need some sort of forum to do that. The academy is one, but the market is also another, it's not just this kind of horse trading, it's part of the culture that's made, it's where people are, and none of these things are kind of separate. They are actually, in quite a messy way bound up with one another. 1.54.48

Alison: I suppose what I was saying was there's the market, and the academy and the practitioner seems to be floating somewhere in between, and might have a toe in here and a toe in there, but there doesn't seem to be, like you might think a discipline has a kind of thing that brings it together that isn't the academy, that isn't the market. 1.55.08

Stuart: There's quite a generational difference here I think as well, probably all of our experience in this room is probably quite different in that our formative experiences were happening in quite different structures. The structure of art school sits in today

is quite familiar to me as I recognize it as one I went to, but I recognize it wasn't the same for you (directed to Gary). 1.55.35

Gary: Definitely not. 1.55.38

Malcolm: That's because the money has changed. When I went to art school the Government gave us grants, and the tutors therefore, how can I put it 'laissez faire' attitudes? (laughter) 1.55.52

Alison: Yeah, that's a good description. 1.55.53

Malcolm: It's a polite term for it. To bring it back to what we were saying earlier. I was interested in what Stuart you were saying earlier about the price you may or may not pay for absorption, or the high price you might pay for that, and in terms of what he has been discussing whether this arrangement of the studio, or who you talk to, or who you publish with, is, and this is a question I haven't thought about particularly in relation to your PhD, but is absorption something you can do through the apparatus, by that I mean through your connection with the gallery, or magazine, or the way you arrange your studio, or ... I hadn't thought about it, you introduced it (directed at Alison) so is this something you've been pursuing? Because you mentioned the studio and I thought this is new, I hadn't heard this before, and I wondered whether you thought the studio was a way of pursuing a strategy of absorption? 1.57.20

Stuart: I want to just chip in there because I was thinking earlier when that came up, I was really interested when the studio came up as a kind of apparatus, because I was thinking about... 1.57.28

Alison: It was Andrew who talked about setting up his studio space to enable... 1.57.33

Stuart: That's right, and I was thinking on Simon's comment in the interviews about the point in which you begin a work, where you can easily go right on an infinite regress with this, but there's a point where it does kind of make sense. 1.57.44

Alison: Because you also talk about painting practice not really just being the painting practice. 1.57.50

Stuart: Yeah, absolutely. 1.57.50

Alison: It's the lecturing, the reading, it's the whole combination. 1.57.53

Stuart: Well think of the Bowes Art life drawing room, because there's a certain

sense in which the architectural apparatus of that was naturalized where the action was happening in the pursuit of paper, in fact what is was, was this entire... like building a camera obscura, you make this whole room, and you array these individual points of vision around this point and it orients towards that way, and it's actually quite an elaborate structure evolved in producing these images, and I think it's interesting to think how you can configure the studio in that kind of a way. And that question of where the work begins, or what it's made of, it doesn't just stop at the tools one's immediately had to hand. There's always the caveat to that you enter the background of the facts for instance (following words unclear). But I think the question about absorption is that I don't know the price, of whether that's too high or not, well that's an important question it's not absorption as such it's the universalizing use of that term. I don't know there is a frustration I know that there maybe the lack of a 'we' or the lack of a cohesive you know, and then maybe the situations political and we're not there yet and we just have to deal with the differences and antagonisms. 1.58.53

Alison: But maybe, where you were talking about evolution of our understanding of the image, and how we communicate that through new technologies, maybe there is the potential now for more of a ... 1.59.26

Stuart: That's was what Walter Benjamin was hoping, you know the democratizing forced subliminal cinema for instance. 1.59.36

Alison: So the point of practice being sort of being setup, I don't know, whether it's more to do with the practice being part of a bigger ongoing discussion, which I suppose is probably how we see it, our practice anyway? 1.59.44

Malcolm: But I was quite struck with the way we began here with the eye (gesturing to Gary), the object (gesturing to Stuart) and the practice (gesturing to Simon), I mean these could be your new names. (laughter) 1.59.55

Stuart: We should get T-shirts. (laughter) 1.50.56

Malcolm: I'll find an allegory of some kind. But it was, because you were saying (gesturing to Simon) 'I've got to wrestle the individual right to the ground and decide whether or not it's good enough and then I'll let it out'. And you were saying (gesturing to Stuart) 'No there's a whole practice coming into play here and the objects have to be part of that ensemble'. 2.00.23

Stuart: Sort of a by-product. 2.00.23

Malcolm: And you were saying 'No it's the eye' and then I thought well actually is the common view of the, or simple view: yours is the most Friedian (directed at Gary) view which is well there has to be some sense here in which an aesthetic experience stands apart slightly from everyday life, whereas yours is (directed at Stuart) is the kind of idea of a milieu or a sense in which you're creating a practice as a kind of context within contexts that also has dialogue, a dialectic back and forth that's in dialogue with other contexts. And in a sense you're (directed at Simon) well in a sense it's all about sculptural, well I know some of your new work is that sculptural there's also this sense of well you've got to wrestle with the block, and then either you've got a good sculpture or you haven't. 2.01.22

Simon: It's painting. 2.01.23

Malcolm: Well I know it is, I know it is. 2.01.25 (group laughter)

Malcolm: I know it is, but some of it is in relief as well so I'm just extrapolating. But I just wondered whether in those terms one would be the most obviously Friedian, whether that actually mapped on or not? Or whether any of these could be points with which you could get to absorption, or into absorption, or get out of it, I don't know? 2.01.51

Alison: Yeah, because Fried has kind of looked at many kind of disparate practices, whether it's eighteenth century painting, or it's video art today, there's quite a range there that he is saying this term applies. It's to do with strategy. 2.02.14

Malcolm: Yes. 2.02.14

Alison: That is employed. 2.02.15

Stuart: Yes. 2.02.16

Alison: So that the intent... 2.02.17

Malcolm: And then he extends it to Douglas Gordon as I said earlier. 2.02.20

Alison: Yes. 2.02.21

Stuart: And he takes quite a lot from Chevrier, Jean-Paul right, the Tableau. I think that linguistic difference is really interesting. 2.02.28

Alison: Of the tableau? 2.02.28

Stuart: Yes, in French you've got the verb to paint: peinture, but you don't say 'a

painting', you say 'tableau', but that cuts across theatre, cinema, photography, and that's the sort of thing I meant earlier about seeing another way of re-describing the same thing that might allow one to relate differently. Perhaps it's a particularly Anglo/American way of looking at painting that sees it in terms of its material elements or its material format or formal qualities, whereas that's a really different idea about a mode of address, and that's something is a cultural difference or a historical difference. But new artists can go back and pick that up, and work with it like a bit of machinery, maybe a slightly obsolete bit of machinery that still works a bit. 2.03.18

Alison: But I think that's the whole point of absorptive strategy is that they evolve. 2.03.23

Stuart: Can a talk a bit about the theatrical though? 2.03.23

Alison: Yes, well this is... 2.03.25

Stuart: We've spent so long talking about absorption 2.03.26

Alison: Yes, absolutely. 2.03.26

Stuart: So what does it mean? 2.03.27

Alison: The binary. So the antithesis of absorption was meant to be theatricality. So we might see the Greuze painting (La Piété filiale) on the powerpoint slides where Diderot hypothesized that paintings that addressed the beholder were theatrical, and the result of that was that you couldn't become absorbed because you were reminded that you were standing in front of a painting, and this is where Fried linked to that. So there was this paradox where you are creating a painting to be viewed but you wouldn't create it or design it in such a way that it would address the beholder, hence the paradox. So the Fried, in 'Art and Objecthood' talks about this in relation to minimalist art, having to walk around a Judd work you're physically reminded of yourself in the space, and that will prevent you from being absorbed, and when we think back to Simon's previous comments about how the audience interact with the work, so you would obviously strongly contest... 2.04.45

Simon: I would, I would say actually the reality is that both of those things can be combined quite easily. 2.04.55

Alison: See the thing is... 2.04.57

Simon: Like actions, the terminology, but the actual action and how you respond are contained in both of those terms. 2.05.11

Stuart: Fried is quite equivocal himself. The most interesting...2.05.18

Alison: Well he has changed hasn't he? 2.05.13

Stuart: Well there's an essay of his 'Shape as form', there's a line in that that's really interesting to me, because it's one of those moments where someone says something that you think that's just three words in a sense, but it opens up this whole question, and he says 'objecthood', that's to say what he would call the theatrical mode of experience as opposed to the aesthetic experience of a modernist work of art, and that's what has got to be defeated, or suspended, and that... 2.05.50

Alison: Yes, suspension, a caveat. 2.05.50

Stuart: Suspension was seen to allow a kind of ambivalence or doubled presence of those terms rather than this specificity. 2.05.58

Alison: Yes, a gateway in. 2.05.58

Malcolm: Well suspension comes in with the likes of Carl Andre who says 'I use the things of the world the way the world doesn't use them' in other words I use bricks, but not in the way you think of using them. So it was kind of like, yes it's an object, you know it's an object, it's a brick, but actually you've never seen bricks done like this. 2.06.14

Stuart: Yes, and it's like that's the point where an artist you would do that and think that slippage in a way contains the real complexity of this, because as an artist myself I don't want that binary, I don't want those two terms for a start, I don't want only two terms. I want many more. If I had to choose I'd choose theatricality. 2.06.33

Alison: Well maybe it's a spectrum? 2.06.35

Stuart: No, because that's still binary logic. 2.06.39

Alison: Good point. A circular model? 2.06.41

Stuart: Still too planar. 2.06.42

Ruth: A constellation? 2.06.42

Stuart: Maybe we're getting somewhere. (laughter) 2.06.44

Alison: Yeah, you could think of the work that Fried does champion, for instance Gordon's video work of the elephant 'Play Dead; Real Time' where for most of the time you don't see the whole of the elephant and the camera moves around the elephant, but you see it perform playing dead, but there is this movement circling it so. Fried also talks about this movement around Serra's work. There are many facets where you think 'hang on', but Fried would argue that that's his concept where understanding is shifting, changing, adapting. I think that's the thing when it comes to absorptive strategies that Fried is trying to say is that it has this potential to grow, and change, and adapt, and reflect upon itself, and even eat itself possibly. So the theatrical entering into that it's a bit like saying what works on that day probably won't work on another day. 2.08.02

Stuart: There's a danger at that point surely that the terms lose their sort specificity. 2.08.05

Alison: Yeah, I agree. And it's like you were saying, pinning it down, why should there be only two terms, absorption or theatricality? I suppose thesis, antithesis, it works on that binary. 2.08.23

Stuart: Well his dialectic never resolves. (laughter) Into a third term right? 2.08.28

Alison: Yeah. 2.08.29

Malcolm: There's never a synthesis. 2.08.30

Stuart: It doesn't seem to have happened so far. Maybe in his next book, I don't know. 2.08.36

Alison: So how we encounter theatricality today is obviously entirely different to eighteenth century France and a public that were enamored by stained glass windows. 2.09.05

Stuart: I think quite a lot about painting and dealing with really old ornaments, and in a way that I guess for lots of us have to ask the same questions over and over again, it's not as if we've dealt with it, we know what being is now so we can get on with it. There's a curator Guo Jian, who says questions like that are like dirty dishes, they're never done, they keep coming back, and I've always felt that making work is quite immediate, it is for now anyway, and I might go on to do other things, but there's a sort of necessity doing it now is the way if I'm trying to figure something out, or put things together in a way that's quite a need to it, so there's not a kind of sense of

what it's called, the significance might be. There's not any appetite to do it. 2.09.57

Alison: I suppose the other thing that comes to mind with theatricality is how that is entered into by the audience, the beholder, because you were talking about you know this navigating your work and obviously in the 60's like with

Judd, a brand new way of understanding of how to be with an artwork, a fare amount of time ago so that understandings not just progressed in us as practitioners, but as in an audience, a beholder. 2.10.42

Simon: I think it's more urgent. The need for it is more urgent. 2.10.47

Alison: In what way? 2.10.47

Simon: Well what I was talking about earlier on; my sort of sense of an imbalance in the way we understand things, and that sort of trying to redress that balance a little bit through art making feels urgent to me, that's why I do it. 2.11.07

Stuart: I think if you look at, or the thing about using Fried is that the particular North American discussion about art at that time, and I always think it's really interesting when you look at Brazil at the same time, and you look at someone like Hélio Oiticica and what he's doing, and it's not so different on the surface to someone like Judd who starts with these monochrome paintings and then virtually turns into the room and spins into objects, and participation, and so on, but the reason for doing that is so totally different, they weren't part of this quite clearly institutionalized art historical discourse going back to Chardin, it was because in 1964 they had a military dictatorship and certain space or culture was highly controlled and certain Brazilian artists tried to use art as a way of breaking down social questions to the most elementary building blocks, like 'how do I relate to you?', or 'how does one relate to another objective?' and using art to work that through. But superficially there's a sense in which could call this a community of practice right, working through similar problems, and for very, very different reasons, and very different questions of urgency, like you say things pressing on those questions in a way now that maybe weren't in the 60's, and so on. And maybe that's what's at issue when you bring these questions to contemporary artists is that if we can identify them of working in any way at all then at all then the next thing is to say well what makes that matter? You've got a response to that, I'm just intrigued of what is it for you that about that, why are these questions origins? 2.12.45

Alison: Yes, context is everything, is key, and it's like whether the question of identity

comes into play here, possibly, whether that be of the artist or the setting. How the context possibly generates this urgency, this kind of need to communicate something through the work? You talk about this Gary. 2.13.19

Gary: Needs to communicate, but not to communicate. 2.13.22

Stuart: You know I've never been sure that communicating is what I do with the work, in the painting hopefully? 2.13.30

Gary: The situation. 2.13.31

Ruth: Simon, at the beginning you talked about responsibility towards the person looking at your painting, if you feel you haven't engaged with it, how can you expect them to engage? 2.13.46

Simon: Well actually I have a really strong sense that it is a form of communication. 2.13.54

Gary: I remember having this conversation with Bernard Cohen about 30 years, 40 years ago, and he said something very interesting, and he said 'Yes, it isn't communication, it's communion'. I thought that was very good. It's different from communication. It's being with, and being with is what are you communicating? Often with paintings, even with a retrospective of my own paintings I don't know what's that. I don't know what the hell I'm looking at. All I know is that I couldn't have done anything else, to the best of my ability and I remember sitting with De Kooning in his studio and looking at a recent painting, and saying 'Well, what is it, what's there?' and he said 'I don't know' and then went back to it. (group laughter) 2.14.49

Simon: Well that's the whole point, surely it's communication, if you could say what it was there would be no point in making it. 2.14.54

Gary: But you're with it, and that is the important thing, it's like a person, a person who is here, you're with them, and they're not here. 2.15.05

Simon: Yeah, a presence. 2.15.07

Gary: And that's everything, which you don't get from reproduction. You get an indication, and you get an indication in an article, or like in Fried or whoever. 2.15.20

Simon: I always had the idea that communication couldn't be misinterpreted and that's as important as any sort of correct interpretation. 2.15.31

Alison: Why whom? 2.15.31

Simon: By your spectator, your viewer, or whatever names you give to these people.  
2.15.39

Gary: I mean the very nature of being a human being wants you to connect. You want to be a part and it's not very secure, separate, but sometimes you want to get away from things. So it is that sort of coming together again in a way, but hopefully I would feel choice. 2.16.02

Stuart: To qualify what I was saying, it's not that it's not communication, it just that to me it seems something like an indication doesn't sound diffuse enough for me. Like there's something quiet about communication, which doesn't seem right for painting?  
2.16.19

Gary: For painting, yeah, I agree. 2.16.20

Alison: Well I see the word communication as lots of chance for miscommunication.  
2.16.28

Stuart: True, but... 2.16.28

Gary: That's what I get from the 10 o'clock news. 2.16.31

Alison: Miscommunication? 2.16.31

Gary: Well both. (group laughter) 2.16.33

Alison: Well probably. 2.16.36

Ruth: There is a media theory about where a story gets told, and re-told and becomes more diffuse as it spreads from the original source and becomes diffused, yes it's called diffusion of innovation. So the person at the end will end up with a very diluted version of the original thing, but it has somehow evolved. 2.17.20

Malcolm: There was a nice story about communication with Pollock and Lee Krasner which may be anecdotal, but I like it anyway, which is Pollock communicating with Leigh Krasner and bringing her into the studio and saying 'Is this a painting?' not 'Do you like it?', 'Is this a good one?', but 'Is this a painting?'. Which suggests two things to me, one is that the question artists often want to pose to someone 'What is to be made of this?' 'What can you make of this?'. The other is the one that you mentioned in relation to visual between Oiticica and Fried which is that what you're all

discussing in this room is very much in that Friedian western tradition, and you're all talking from that tradition, whereas in that moment... 2.18.20

Stuart: I don't feel like I'm talking from it as much, I'm talking to it today because of this event. 2.18.24

Malcolm: Well you're talking about it, and you're both in it and positioning yourself as a critical of it, your critical stance towards it... 2.18.33

Stuart: Yes. 2.18.33

Malcolm: But nonetheless it's the one you've grown up in, as it were. In the case of Oiticica, and you can talk to Michael Asbury about this, works here, who is the expert in all this, that it was as you say not just about communication, but saying how through art can we discuss what are the right social relationships to have in a situation where social relationships are alienated, violent and revolting. So it's a complete different kettle of fish. I suppose it's worth pointing out that even though, and this goes back to your point about Fried's concession to history, despite that concession to history it's still contained by that particular tradition. 2.19.22

Stuart: It's a very apolitical kind of art history I think in that sense. 2.19.28

Malcolm: And in a sense that doesn't take the power away from discussing absorption, it just puts it in the right place. 2.19.37

Stuart: He's asking brilliant questions and in 1967 I think, and I always give that essay to students to read because I think it's a brilliant teaching moment in that somebody can be asking the most perspicacious questions and really put their finger on something a key crisis moment that's happening. You don't have to agree with the value judgments, and as Fried put it himself, no one does anyway. (laughter) He said at the Tate right? 2.20.05

Alison: Yes I know. 2.20.06

Gary: It's like an orientation. 2.20.07

Stuart: Absolutely, and I think there's a lot to admire about the way he sets that out, and I think there's a richness there, so you know one doesn't have to go with him where he goes. I think that's probably key. 2.20.21

Gary: That's very good what you just said. 2.20.21

Stuart: And we as artists do it all the time don't we, we partly inhabit another's work in a way? But I might say I could work through something similar, but to very different ends. You know I could invest that with something quite different. 2.20.38

Gary: Hopefully. 2.20.38

Alison: Yes, hopefully. 2.20.38

Stuart: Hopefully. Well that's the trick isn't it? 2.20.39

Malcolm: It's not unproductive, but I'm getting a slight sense of the cat over the cliff (laughter), in a quite good way here. This might be the moment in which the cat of absorption has run over the cliff, but actually hasn't fallen down yet. (group laughter) 2.20.57

Stuart: What an image. 2.20.57

Malcolm: Well in fact you've got ... 2.21.02

Stuart: Well there's your title anyway. 2.21.02

Malcolm: Well you've got to let the cat out of the absorption. No, metaphors can die quite quickly (group laughter), but it's as if your focus on the lexicon suggests in a sense that what I see you as doing here today and elsewhere is saying the painter's right, there's this language and it might actually be old hat, but if I use it to try and ask you to talk about your practice what happens? And nobody so far has said that's the wrong word, there's another word you should be using... 2.21.35

Simon: I have. 2.21.35

Malcolm: What word did you use? I don't have a new word, but the work is it? 2.21.41

Alison: Yes, that's the thing. 2.21.41

Stuart: Well I mean I feel like I have as well. (group laughter) I mean but making more of that in a thorough going way, not that that's not the right word, but it's more that personally I wouldn't even frame it in this way. I don't think the moment of all the construction of experience that's being advanced is the most salient point around which to array all these other things. I would deeply question that, so that's been my position I suppose, so I wouldn't even say there was another word for the thing because it's the thing that I'm bothered by in a way. At the same time that throws up

lots of valuable tangents and filaments, and so on. 2.22.25

Alison: But even though you still engage with some of the potential results of the thing, like absorption in practice? 2.22.36

Stuart: Well no, because that reinstates it again as soon as you put it like that. In order to answer that question I would have to accept, you sort of position it prior to the answer and I can't you know... 2.22.47

Alison: So chicken and egg kind of? 2.22.47

Stuart: Well. 2.22.48

Malcolm: That beggars another question which is, is the art world right now at the moment organized in such a way, in an absorption friendly way Alison? 2.22.58

Alison: Well I kind of think possibly emerging out of that, in the way that images are conveyed through electronic media, and experience that is got from a jpeg as opposed to looking at a work or walking around a work is at completely different ends of the spectrum, and more and more people are understanding art through the jpeg, a digital understanding as opposed to a physical understanding so there's a danger there isn't there, and maybe that's the urgency that kind of ... 2.23.38

Malcolm: But it seems as if what has been my reading so far is that people have said yes there is this button you can press, but it's a button that carries a great loading, or rather it's a button that has to connect, you can't just press it, it's connected. 2.23.55

Alison: Yeah, it's got a long, long wire. 2.23.55

Malcolm: Not just with the historical apparatus, but with a present apparatus, and in order to press it and make it work you have to assume that the whole apparatus is also functioning, that makes absorption possible for a way to occur, and it may be that that's what I meant by the cat over the cliff thing, that the apparatus itself is rusty and ... 2.24.18

Alison: Dysfunctional? 2.24.18

Malcolm: Dysfunctional. 2.24.20

Stuart: I mean the prime question for me with Fried it would be like in the sphere of say literary studies. It would be an equivalent of saying let's look at a kind of liberal humanist idea of literature to look at to allow them a kind of reading just rather than

the highly sort of particular modes of reading that have come since then. So you're always reading from someone rather than this universalized relationship to it. 2.24.48

Malcolm: Like Leavis or something? 2.24.47

Stuart: Yeah, exactly, so you would kind of have to deal with all that first before you could say pick that up. 2.24.56

Alison: You've actually described how I came about to look at this subject matter. I didn't come about it through looking at Fried and Diderot. My understanding of aesthetics and aesthetic absorption has changed as I have learnt more about Diderot and Fried. And so yeah it would be interesting to be separate from that, you can't because you know no person's an island and what has already gone before is a laying of the land. You can't have one without the other, so engaging in this kind of thing cannot be done without relating it to that history. 2.25.40

Stuart: That's exactly what someone like Jacques Derrida would have said. Work through tradition. He's often seen really crudely as some sort of rejector of classical scholars, and a lot of these guys were. But exactly what that entails I suppose is the complex bit and maybe it's akin to what we were just saying about how you invest it in something new, that's the trick in a way isn't it? To animate it in some way. It's unwieldy and particular because as artists we all know the experience of producing things in the studio that exist already and that seem inert in a way. That it's certainly not a simple matter, even though sometimes the making of something might turn out to have a simplicity about it. Putting those things together is delicate in other ways. 2.26.43

Alison: Yes. 2.26.43

Stuart: It does involve a large degree of self-reflection in a way doesn't it? And positioning oneself, I think seeing it all relative to other things, to know the difference maybe even if you're asking the same question of somebody else, the difference between what matters about it, what matters about certain qualities reacting to the painting for one of us, we might be invested in those same things, but probably for different reasons. 2.27.13

Malcolm: Well I think about what's good about what you're doing is that instead of saying it's abstract painting you said well how in contemporary abstract painting, the abstract painting being done now, is or is not that bit of kit (if we can call it that) still functioning? And it's interesting that because in a sense I wouldn't be able to say as

an observer of today whether or not it was functioning. I think the question of whether or not it might be said to function, or is assumed to function, is quite interesting. 2.27.57

Stuart: It would be interesting to go around and say are we interested in abstraction? I don't know if I am, because I know you resisted the term (directed at Simon). 2.28.04

Simon: Yes, I don't like it (unclear words). 2.28.10

Gary: I didn't mean division. I mean division doesn't interest me, and style doesn't interest me, it's what's possible and what people actually make out of it regardless of whatever, and just make something happen you know, and why do you do what you do, because you can't see it anywhere, so you make it happen, you do your best to make it happen, and that overwrites showing in galleries or whatever, it's just doing it that is the empirical thing. 2.29.02

Alison: Taking it back to the very basic. 2.29.02

Gary: And that's what's important to the very day we die, that's what's important, and not making it, not showing it in the best galleries, you know – wanting to be recognized, and all that rubbish. 2.29.14

Stuart: Think of every gallery owner you've shown with that didn't exist ten years ago, or no longer exists now, you know so that whole thing is just a... 2.29.22

Gary: Yes, that's true. 2.29.22

Malcolm: What intrigues me a lot about what has happened so far is the question of what you can call upon, because in '67 Fried obviously felt that he could call upon it, a bit like calling for God, he calls on absorption and absorption was there. Without him having to recourse to say 'and by the way discover it in the practice of so and so', whereas the very fact that you're having to do the British empirical thing, well I'd say well where's the evidence? (laughter) 2.30.26

Stuart: I guess you're not using the word grace like he did? 2.30.28 (laughter)

Alison: (laughter) Yeah. 2.30.32

Stuart: Well you know that is what he talks about 'presentness is grace', so you know. 2.30.36

Alison: Yes, he does. 2.30.36

Malcolm: So you were about to say as a caveat to what I just said, on the calling upon the absorption. 2.30.42

Alison: Well yes, Fried didn't know about Diderot at that point, of when he wrote 'Art and Objecthood' he has said I was a Diderotian without knowing it. 2.31.19

Malcolm: Without knowing it. 2.31.19

Alison: Yes, so yes it was only on, well you could say he wasn't a good researcher at that point because he didn't know about Diderot. 2.31.28

Malcolm: But in a sense the god he was calling upon was Greenberg.

2.31.30 Alison: Yes, very much so. 2.31.31

Gary: That's right. 2.31.31

Malcolm: And it was Greenberg who guaranteed that he, Fried could think and write in that way. Whereas you can't call to the god of Greenberg now, and I'm not even sure you can call on the god of Fried. In a sense what you have done is you've empirically looked at, which I think is really interesting because what you're doing is say well the people who matter here are the artists that create the works that may or may not be said to cause or bring about absorption, and when I talk to them then might I find the words to not be in common use, or perhaps surrounded by problems, or refer to other things. Well maybe you don't, maybe I'm assuming. 2.32.22

Alison: No, no there are artists that engage with Fried's theories, and work in such a way to try to produce absorptive type works. 2.32.32

Malcolm: Who? 2.32.22

Alison: Jeff. 2.32.42

Gary: Coombs? 2.32.42

Alison: No, no. 2.32.42

Malcolm: Not Jeff Wall? 2.32.42

Alison: Yes, Jeff Wall. 2.32.42

Malcolm: No, his Friedian, but he comes from T.J. Clark. 2.32.55

Alison: But yes, he particularly engages with Fried's, yeah. 2.32.52

Malcolm: Oh, he engages with. 2.32.53

Alison: Yes. He creates these photographic works, we think they're real, but they're completely staged. 2.33.02

Malcolm: Yes, of course. 2.33.02

Alison: So this is one of his absorptive strategies. So there are artists out there who are trying to... 2.33.11

Malcolm: But he comes out of T.J. Clark and the debate on realism much more than... I know he probably in a sense he does try and reproduce nineteenth century history paintings with a zombie thrown in, and it is intriguing for your project to see someone being so consciously retro as Wall is a good point of reference. 2.33.39

Alison: Absolutely. 2.34.01

Stuart: Have you been in touch with Fried? 2.34.01

Alison: No. (laughter) 2.34.03

Stuart: You should email him. 2.34.03

Malcolm: You've seen him speak though haven't you? 2.34.05

Alison: Yes, at the Tate Tableau symposium. I did try to see him, but he was surrounded at that point. Mick has obviously been in contact with him. 2.34.20

Stuart: Yeah, he organized that symposium, so he got to hang out with Fried for a couple of days. 2.34.26

Alison: I remember him talking about Fried not rating Lucien Freud's paintings.

Stuart: Remember I asked him a question. 2.34.39

Alison: Did you, I don't remember that. 2.34.40

Stuart: Well it's interesting, because he does have a reputation for being, you know? 2.34.49

Alison: What? 2.34.50

Malcolm: Blunt? 2.34.50

Stuart: No, having a..., I suppose being egotistical. 2.34.54

Malcolm: Oh right, yeah. 2.34.54

Stuart: And I'd asked him about an essay at the same time Leo Steinberg's 'Flatbed Picture Plane', and I thought I wonder what he thought of that? And so I said 'What did you think of Leo Steinberg's essay?' 'I was never really interested in that'.  
2.35.11

Alison: Ah, yes, he has a particular way of... 2.35.15

Malcolm: But that's a good question though, it was a short question where you said 'Tell me what you think'? 2.35.17

Stuart: Because there seems to be somebody talking about the same things at the same time, but having a really different take on it. 2.35.23

Alison: He has this 'I'm not talking about that. I'm not engaged with that'. 2.35.30

Malcolm: Because you can (word unclear) trap. (words unclear) Poor old [X...] saw Derrida speak at the Architecture Association, and [X...] must have been sitting on this question for years, and this question had many layers, and many rooms to it, and then at the end of the question we're all hanging on to see what Derrida would say and Derrida said 'I think you're taking me too seriously' (group laughter) 2.35.58

Alison: There you are, it's this displacement, 'I'm not going to engage with that, I'm not even going to go there, I'm going to talk about what I want to talk about'. 2.36.06

Malcolm: Yeah, never ask questions if they're very famous, it's a bad idea. 2.36.11

Alison: I suppose there's too much at risk? 2.36.14

Stuart: Philip Armstrong said to me after that 'Well done, you were never going to get an answers'. (group laughter) 2.36.17

Malcolm: Sometimes even when they're well known and very friendly it doesn't work. I said to Patrick Keiller, who I met at the Tate, and I said 'I think London's a great film', and he said 'Thanks', and I thought I haven't got anything else to say. (laughter)  
2.36.36

Alison: Oh no. Oh dear. (laughter) 2.36.37

Malcolm: In terms of what you've got here, in terms of the interviews and these guys

here, do the people you've interviewed Alison, in terms of the response you got, how do you see, generally speaking, people deploying, not deploying, avoiding, running a mile from, embracing, hugging the term? 2.37.22

Alison: There's definitely an embracing, as the beholder of somebody else's work. 2.37.32

Malcolm: Oh I see. 2.37.32

Alison: Very much so. Everybody across the board, it's a constant. If you talk about being absorbed in, not necessarily having a lightening moment, but something where you have this relationship with an artwork, everybody has described something that likens to that. 2.37.49

Malcolm: And do the artists differentiate between being a beholder of their own artwork and being the beholder of someone else's? 2.37.53

Alison: There is no constant there. There's a break, some people do very much step outside that moment of being the artist, and become the artist- beholder. You kind of coped out of that (directed at Stuart) question I think? 2.38.12

Stuart: They were my very words, and I think it's because, the other part of what I said is that for me to answer that would mean that I would have had to answer earlier questions differently, because I was not maybe happy to inhabit that frame. I don't think of it in that way, so it would be a confection, you know tell you what you want to hear kind of thing and I didn't want to do that. And I guess even the question of being absorbed in front of another painting, it could cover such a range of things and something else, this idea of engagement or absorption, being clear on what that is. I don't think we are, I think that covers as one of those terms that can cover a whole panoply of things. 2.39.02

Alison: It does make me wonder about the whole neuroaesthetics thing, you know when they finally plug us in and Semir Zeki has figured out that there's I don't know a gauge, a scale, a sliding scale? 2.39.16

Stuart: The thing that bothers me about that stuff, they never seem to have read Donna Haraway about situated knowledge and how science gets constructed discursively. How to take that as empirical data and say 'We have discovered...' What happens when someone looks at a painting, I can't believe how much that hoary, sort of old position lives on. And I don't think it's an accident actually in a way

in the sense that Donna Haraway's in the 80's talking about cybernetics and biology from a feminist position, that it is a feminist critique of the objective, and that's why it hasn't caught on right? So I'm very suspicious of all that stuff, enlightening though it is in lots of other ways. But again invested in it that question: what insights does that give us? 2.40.11

Alison: Well I suppose there are different pockets of research happening with things like eye tracking. 2.40.19

Stuart: Beth Harland's done that. 2.40.21

Alison: Yes that's right, has she done it now?

Stuart: I'm not sure she's published. I think she might have done. Have a look. 2.40.34

Alison: Yes, I new she was working on something, but I didn't know it'd come to fruition. I have met Beth through Paint Club events, journal launches, but nothing more than that. 2.40.50

Stuart: Ok, because I could put you in touch. 2.40.55

Alison: Well I would very much like to know more about her research. 2.40.56

Stuart: I'm sure she'd be happy to share. 2.40.59

Malcolm: I think that's a very important thing to know, that artists are talking about it as beholders. I mean you gave a wonderful talk about Rothko (directed at Gary), a description of exactly that, of how you engage with Rothko, you remember the paintings. 2.41.16

Gary: Exactly, yes. 2.41.17

Malcolm: But then you actually, and I wondered if you'd do this, you describe your own retrospective, but no way did you say, and of course this constructed a perfect absorptive experience, you didn't exactly give yourself the same gift that you allowed Rothko to give you, as it were, but maybe that's just being modest, I don't know. 2.41.44

Ruth: Maybe there's a trace of humility there for artists after all? 2.41.44 (group laughter)

Stuart: After all. (laughter) 2.41.44

Gary: Have you spoken to Fried? 2.41.53

Alison: No. 2.41.55

Gary: Will you? 2.41.56

Alison: Will I? 2.41.56

Stuart: You should. 2.41.56

Alison: Yes, I should... 2.41.59

Gary: You should ask him what he wrote in the 70's and how does he see those painters now like Olitski, Noland, Larry Poons and so on. 2.42.10

Malcolm: Because the paintings are still with us and they are still being responded too. 2.42.15

Gary: Absolutely, yes, they are. We were talking about the Olitski and they still have an impact. 2.42.24

Stuart: And for me that's the first time, I hadn't seen them. 2.42.25

Gary: You hadn't? 2.42.25

Stuart: Very few of those... 2.42.26

Gary: Well they're not the best ones. 2.42.28

Stuart: Well you don't see them much in this country. 2.42.28

Gary: You don't. 2.42.30

Stuart: And this is one of the things, the experiences I've been able to have. 2.42.37

Gary: It's a much-needed exhibition, of Olitski's work. 2.42.39

Stuart: It is isn't it? 2.42.41

Gary: It really, really is. 2.42.41

Malcolm: And there's the Agnes Martin at the Tate. 2.42.44

Alison: Yes, there is. 2.42.44

Gary: It had a big impact on people here at the time, on John Hoyland for instance, you know because John Hoyland hadn't started to use the edge until after Olitski so

Fried started really highlighting it in his articles, in what was the magazine 'Art Forum'. 2.43.00

Malcolm: So in that respect I think it's important to see the context this has come from for your... I was also meant to mention that Dan Sturgis, who is the other supervisor that can't be here today, he's very much engaged with that particular sensing which we can talk about, use, curate, look at abstraction, and that tradition nowadays, but the other thing that struck me was that you've been working also in Paint Club and that question of artists conversations, and artists dialogues, and I think the strength of this for me isn't just - well I've got some, and in a sense this is where I think I was making a bit of a provocative point and saying you've got empirical data from artists, it isn't about that, it's about, as it were, the strength of conversations, and what artists can call upon in a conversation, and what they can call upon in a conversation when discussing their own work, and others work, and whether Fried is call-able upon, or whether, as is suggested, you can call upon Fried, ring him up? 2.45.07

Stuart: Yeah, literally. (laughter) 2.45.06

Malcolm: Ring up the absent god. (laughter) That strikes me as the real potency of this, which is about dialogue, not just through words, but through practice. 2.45.20

Alison: Yes. It is about enabling and articulation that possibly, like I say, I always see this as an opening of a dialogue, it's not like an end, where you come to an end and say 'This is the word, x means y' it will come to some understandings, but it will possibly be things that point in a certain direction. It probably won't be a definitive full stop. It will be the opening of something, so I see it very much as this articulation. 2.45.52

Malcolm: A good PhD is not solving the problem, it's moving into the house of the problem and living there, and then re-presenting the problem in a new way at the end of the PhD. Well this is the problem, we all know it this way, and here it is shown to you in a new light. 2.46.10

Simon: I'm interested if you come up with new terms. 2.46.15

Alison: Well this is the thing. That's what you guys are here to kind of... 2.46.16

Simon: If you re-wrote the questions how would you write them? 2.46.20

Stuart: That's a good way of putting it. 2.46.21

Malcolm: That's a very good point. 2.46.23

Alison: I'm going to hold another round table discussion with the people who weren't here today, hopefully. I say hopefully, because it's not easy to get everybody together, especially at this time of year, holidays and what have you. So obviously I shall write up this discussion, transcribe it so it'll then be on the wiki page to access, and I'll do the same thing for part two, and then who knows what will come from that? Ideally I envisage the wiki space as being a... 2.47.00

Simon: Will you let them see what we said? 2.47.00

Alison: No, I won't, because I don't want to taint a conversation. It needs to be the same conditions as much as is possible. 2.47.13

Ruth: But you'll have that knowledge? 2.47.13

Alison: I will. 2.47.14

Malcolm: Well that can't be helped. You'll have sinned, but everybody else will be innocent. (laughter) 2.47.15

Alison: Malcolm won't be there, but Dan will. 2.47.25

Stuart: Alison, can I just ask why you asked everybody the same questions verbatim? 2.47.31

Alison: Because, well obviously there were moments when I have to ask further questions, and ask for extrapolations, for more understanding, to clarify certain answers, but it's to set a constant, because otherwise there's no level point to start from, it becomes too much of a... 2.47.56

Gary: You have a thread. 2.47.56

Alison: Yes. 2.47.58

Simon: You can't compare. 2.48.00

Alison: There is that, and comparison is a good place to start the research. It might not be where the final results end up, but it's a very good position to start from, does that make sense? 2.48.14

Malcolm: Yeah, you're right Alison. 2.48.16

Stuart: I suppose the reason why I asked, is because I thought, and I can see that

rationale, can see that that does work, but maybe the issue I have with it is that what it can make you do is standardize the questions in a way that it was so clear to me what you were looking for, and in a sense what you wanted there was a sense that I knew you were asking me about a Friedian kind of paradigm, I knew that, and it was very clear, and actually I wasn't maybe invited to produce my own term would have told you more, in a sense. If I hadn't been asked to speak to the term absorption  
2.48.55

Malcolm: For a set of follow up questions when you do part two, and see what happens with part two, you might get a completely different character, or you might not, but it might be worthwhile saying 'Well I've asked these Friedian questions, and given that we're testing the limits of dialogue, is there now a different term you would use? Again that's a good point, but I think in a sense what you've been doing it's a bit like saying 'you know a certain kind of slang, do you use this word?' 'Do you still use this term'? People may go 'No, I never really use that'. 2.49.32

Alison: It's like I could not enter into this dialogue without there being the Fried/Diderot facet. 2.49.37

Malcolm: Yeah, so you've tested out this. 2.49.38

Stuart: What I'm saying wouldn't exclude that it's just that that is very to the fore. It reminds me of a quote from Adorno about when he was talking with, I forget who the other sociologist on a radio listening project, and they were asking people 'What's your reaction to this?' and they were doing it in a very empirical way, and Adorno said that the problem with that is A, people are very likely to tell you what you want, and B, you're not looking at the ways in which what people are saying they like and identify with being constructed by bigger things, you're taking them on face value. I think it's a methodological thing, and it's a very good cautionary tale about the empirical approach, it doesn't blow it out of the woods, and it doesn't negate it, but it calls for perhaps for it's need to be supplemented, or disrupted at times. 2.50.27

Alison: I understand that. I suppose the way the questions were formulated in that particular way was because sometimes we don't think of practice in those ways. Quite often I would ask a question and you would say that's an interesting way to put it, because I wouldn't have thought of it that way. I think I was asking 'Do you try to recreate an experience?' 2.50.48

Stuart: That's right. 2.50.40

Alison: I was trying to ask questions that we don't potentially ask in that way, so that's why there was a build up in that respect, through those questions. We spent a long time trying to work that out, and the other thing is that not everybody is so steeped in Fried as you might be, so you kind of have to... 2.51.14

Stuart: I don't know why I am. I didn't want to be. (laughter) 2.51.18

Simon: Too late. (group laughter) 2.51.19

Alison: There you are, too late. (laughter) 2.51.19

Stuart: I think it's because of arguing. I think it's because there's a sort of... 2.51.25

Malcolm: But then it introduces a moment of agonism doesn't it, because he's mentally wound up and you sort of solve it as a historical divide? 2.51.32

Stuart: Yes, absolutely. 2.51.33

Malcolm: So you're in one sense I think if you left it there you'd say 'Well I wouldn't do anything about Fried, they're all ignoramuses', that would be a bad view, but instead you say 'Well actually here's what happens when I test out this paradigm on people, they react this way to it', and this, and this is your point Simon, is do we need a new term or are there different terms, or is there a different route, or a different way to talk about this? 2.51.59

Stuart: What you were saying about Picasso and Einstein (*to GW*), the same questions coming up in different disciplines, and different practices, there's a sort of commonality, because things where there's a historical urgency to asking that in some way, and in a way I don't think that's problematic. You could say it's more like a symptom of certain forces you know kind of bubbling up. It's as much of what we consciously think matters, but there's plenty that happens in the world that we don't predict and that's more than felicity or chance, or serendipity. And a great thing about being an artist is that you can take frameworks, or ways of looking at things from other disciplines where I might take, I'm putting a psychoanalytic cast on this description of what I'm saying. I'm not saying that's the truth of it, but I'm saying that as a reading may reveal something that there's a way of looking at that renders it something other than like I could say, chance, or the coming together of something unpredictable in a formal way. There might be big things working for each individual, that are tied to bigger structures, and one of the ways in which they manifest themselves in terms of what we do, what we say. So arts particular way of

intensifying has a kind of publicness to it as well. It takes some way of making the personal social in a way, and it's very powerful, without necessarily being straight forward biographical. This to me is part of what's interesting about working with these materials is that they're deeply historical, yet they're very much public in my immediate relationship to them is very intimate. 2.54.17

Alison: Yeah. 2.54.19

Stuart: Idiosyncratic. 2.54.20

Alison: Yes. I like the idea of commonality as a symptom there, kind of you know this bigger thing. 2.54.31

Stuart: Possible reoccurrence? You know it's interesting how... 2.54.35

Malcolm: Of course from a psychoanalytic point of view, Alison's response to your saying 'Well I don't like Fried' would be 'Yes, but what are you actually saying?' (laughter) 2.54.41

Stuart: But you can't really do that. Psychoanalytic meaning in the end is so - if you like Deleuze and say I actually want to reject the entire paradigm of psychoanalysis and the psychoanalyst goes 'That's very interesting'. (laughter) 2.54.51

Alison: You two could keep exchanging the psychoanalytic jokes. 2.55.00

Malcolm: 'Mummy ruined my life' 'Yes, but what do you mean'? 2.55.00

Stuart: Michael Asbury's mum was a gallery owner. 2.55.06

Malcolm: Really? 2.55.07

Stuart: Isn't that funny? From a psychoanalytic frame? (group laughter) So it's good to be a bit Woody Allen about it. 2.55.15

Malcolm: Yeah. But it's funny because we initially had a conversation about psychoanalysis. 2.55.20

Alison: We did, yes. 2.55.21

Malcolm: But it kind of faded away, but for necessary reasons, but I think what's stayed is this notion of dialogue and conversation, and exchange. It's not, I can't think of parallel examples of a PhD project that's testing out artists dialogue in this way. You know it's particularly, in a sense it is about absorption, but it's also about a

question of or testing out how artists talk about their practice. 2.56.01

Alison: Yes. Well one of the things I've obviously been trying to gather answers together for one event, on one day, in the same room, juggling all the different diaries, it made me think about opening a dialogue. If you can't get all of the artists in to a room at some point to have the dialogue how would you perpetuate... 2.56.24

Malcolm: Is it a mathematical equation; how many artists can you get in to one room at one point? 2.56.27 (laughter)

Alison: Yes, an equation. 2.56.28

Malcolm: It's a finite number I'm sure. 2.56.30 (laughter)

Alison: Yes. 2.56.30

Stuart: That has to extend, doesn't it over time and place and as part of making dialogue in some way. You know, record it, you write it down, you publish it in a limited sphere, make it durable so that it doesn't have to depend on the near impossible task of getting six people to be in the same place at the same time, because it's not always doable. 2.56.53

Alison: Yes. 2.56.53

Malcolm: That's why you've got the wiki isn't it, to kind of support the dialogue in an on-going way. 2.56.58

Alison: Yes, although I'm not so sure how that will work, because obviously when people are very busy, and there are 56,000 words of material to access, how accessible that is? That's why I created the summary, because it's like a little door in. 2.57.16

Stuart: I'll check it out over the summer. 2.57.20

Alison: You'll check it out, that's good. 2.57.20

Stuart: I want to know what everyone said. 2.57.22

Alison: I want comments. Elliot I want comments. (laughter) 2.57.24

Stuart: Well I'll see if I get through it. I told you it's very hot in my studio. (laughter) 2.57.30

Malcolm: Well there's a few ways to look at it, you've got all those words of the

interviews, and that's data and you're not going to comment on every single darn word, but that's data that you now have for people who will read this when it's finished, so they can scan, and read, and delve into in other ways. So there's that and there's the equal focus on absorption, which is what you're looking at as a point of articulation of practice, spectatorship, the emperors of art, relationships, the history, so it embodies quite a few things. 2.58.04

Alison: And I suppose the other thing is that I've talked about is a group exhibition that enters into those dialogues, and I would like very much to curate a show that works with the dialogical material so that it would be a bit like your setting up of a series of three (directed at Stuart)... 2.58.26

Stuart: Yes. 2.58.27

Alison: Or your last painting at the end (directed at Gary). It's an opening, or again a way of showing an on going dialogue, so it's not just about finished artwork. 2.58.37

Malcolm: It's your salon. 2.58.42

Alison: It's *our* salon. 2.58.42

Malcolm: It's Madame Goodyear's Salon. 2.58.45 (group laughter)

Alison: (laughter) *OUR* salon, don't start Quinn, don't start. (laughter) 2.58.49

Malcolm: I should have called it that from the start. (group laughter) 2.58.53

Alison: No, it's *OUR* platform. (laughter) 2.58.55

Simon: Is that the title of the show then? (group laughter) 2.58.56

Alison: Stop it. (group laughter) 2.58.58

Stuart: You could get a nice engraving. (group laughter) 2.59.00

Malcolm: You could wear the dress and the mobcap. (laughter) 2.59.08

Alison: (laughter) Yes. So... 2.59.12

Malcolm: Are we done? 2.59.13

Alison: I think we are. I'd like to say thank you, apart from the last bit obviously (laughter). Thank you all. 2.59.15

Malcolm: On behalf of CCW, if that doesn't sound too formal, many thanks for

coming. 2.59.31

Alison: There we are, the official thanks. 2.59.31

Malcolm: It's much appreciated. 2.59.32

Stuart: Thanks for asking. 2.59.34

Alison: Thank you very much for your time. I will keep you updated as to how things work out, and any terms that emerge. 2.59.40

Simon: Ok. 2.59.41

Alison: I do want to encourage people to access the wiki page. 2.59.48

Malcolm: And in a few months you'll get a list of words you can or cannot use (laughter). 2.59.51

Alison: (laughter) Yes. 2.59.51

Stuart: That would be so helpful. (group laughter) Make my life easier. 3.00.01

Alison: So yes, please feedback any thoughts you have had, or about the next step, and I'll let you know when the transcription goes online. 3.00.16

Simon: When are you seeing the next group? 3.00.16

Alison: In two weeks time. It was unfortunate that they couldn't make this date. 3.00.34

Malcolm: I wouldn't worry about the difference. It will be very different, because there will be Dan and you, and different people, but I think the standard questions will just give you a bit of a hook, you know it's good to have more than one point of continuity, although it'll be a completely different event I'm sure. 3.00.55

Alison: Yes, but I will still use the summary as a point to kick off from. It would have been very interesting to have had them here, and who knows, some point in the future? But like I said it's only the start of a conversation, of a dialogue, so thank you all very much for playing a part in it. 3.01.23

## Round Table Discussion 2

### 16th July 2015

Present: Alison Goodyear (researcher), Dr Dan Sturgis (2nd supervisor), Ruth Solomons (assistant), Andrew Bick (artist collaborator), and Katie Pratt (artist collaborator).

Alison: The working title of the research is: Privileged, unique and temporary: interpreting aesthetic experiences of the painter to painting relationship through an address to and from practice. So I'll briefly summaries what that means. This research engages with the legacy of debates around aesthetic absorption, and that goes back to Denis Diderot and eighteenth century France. Diderot wrote about what he thought was happening for the audience in front of a painting. Diderot's absorption was very much one where, for instance here we have a Chardin painting 'Soap Bubble' (pointing to a looped powerpoint slideshow running in the background) where the subjects in the painting were portrayed to be so absorbed in what they were doing, and their absorption was meant to encourage the absorption of the audience, the beholder. Greuze and Chardin were two artists that Diderot championed. Then Michael Fried comes along in the 1960's, in 1967 he writes 'Art and Objecthood' where he starts to talk about his ideas on absorption, how it works or doesn't work in contemporary art at that time, and this is where he has this big discussion on minimalism. At that particular point Fried talks about absorption, but as he himself has said, he was a Diderotian without knowing it. So he was talking about theories that Diderot discussed, but he wasn't aware of them. It wasn't until his book 'Absorption and Theatricality' that he actually started to engage with Diderot. So both Fried and Diderot hypothesized what was happening for the artist, so there are many facets to absorption, but one of the things, Diderot hypothesized that for the artist Greuze, he would come out of the studio, so if he had been painting an old man, he would come out as the old man, totally acting out that individual, so absorbed in his subject matter. And Fried also hypothesizes on Chardin's process suggesting that he use his own absorption for 'proleptic mirroring' in other words does he use his own absorption as a tool. So if he himself is absorbed he hopes that it will encourage that too in the beholder of his work. So basically the premise of this research is to look at those hypotheses, to see whether that is what is really happening in practice, because obviously both Fried and Diderot weren't practicing painters, they are writers, they are critics, and I'm saying well lets ask painters to find out if that is the case and see what they say. That is where all of those questions that I asked you have arisen.

So I realize there is a lot of material on the wiki page, the interviews so far have produced over 56,000 words, 96 pages. So obviously I wouldn't have expected you to read all of that, which is why I created the summary doc, as an easier way in to that material. 7.11

Katie: I only got it yesterday afternoon I'm afraid I was at work, so I haven't had a chance to look at it. 7.16

Alison: Well I have a copy here. The questions that will be coming from it will relate to yours and Andrew's interviews. 7.30

Katie: Ok.7.30

Alison: So also on the wiki page, there's the 'Lexicon of Aesthetic Absorption' doc and the 'History of Engagement' doc which I gave you all when we had the interviews, as well as the questions and this powerpoint show will also be up there as well. So all of that material is accessible, and the Lexicon and the History docs are editable, so if you the collaborators feel there's something wrong, or something you want to add to them then that's all editable. So if you have any problems or queries with the wiki page please ask and I will resolve them.

So we held the first round table event on the 1st of July with Simon Callery, Stuart Elliot, and Gary Wragg, with Professor Malcolm Quinn my Director of Studies, as well as myself and Ruth Solomons assisting also present. It was a very interesting discussion, it would have been so great to have you all together, but obviously these things happen, and I know how hard it is to get very busy people together in the same room on the same day, I appreciate that. Once I've transcribed that and this event (I am still in the process of doing that, it is pretty slow going too) I will let you know when it is uploaded onto the wiki page, and it might bring up something else you want to add perhaps.

Ruth: When I met Andrew and Katie downstairs they had already observed there might be more of an academic context in this round table than last time. 9.14

Alison: Yes, that is a very good point .9.20

Andrew: Except that Stuart obviously is full time, and we made the distinction, as we were slightly confused thinking Dan was part of it too. All three of us here have got families as well. 9.31

Alison: Yes. 9.31

Katie: I have worked with Simon Callery. He was AHRC Fellow at Wimbledon. 9.42

Andrew: Yes, and some of us probably have very different positions. 10.01

Alison: Yes, and you'll probably see that as well in the transcriptions, and even in that last round table there are different positions taken by all three actually. 10.11

Katie: Well we don't make the same work. 10.13

Alison: Yes, absolutely, but also theoretical underpinning I would say was quite different, but then you'd be aware of that. 10.30

Katie: So is Malcolm a Diderot expert?

Alison: No, he isn't, but Mick Finch is on board as well as an unofficial guide. 10.41

Katie: Yes, he would be. 10.41

Andrew: You know Ian Kier did a lot of reading of Diderot for his PhD? 10.47

Alison: Did he? I didn't know that, no. Thank you for that. 10.49

Katie: Were you on his supervisory team? 10.50

Andrew: No, I just know. 10.54

Katie: It's a famous PhD isn't it? 10.54

Andrew: It is, but he came to talk about it with some of our PhD students at Chelsea. He was talking about Hubermann more than Diderot, but he was talking about Diderot as well. He'd certainly be worth talking to. 11.12

Alison: Yes, he was at a Paint Club symposium a couple of years ago wasn't he? 11.20

Dan: Yes he was, yeah. 11.22

Alison: Yes, so I'll definitely look into that, thank you.

So I have the questions that I asked here as well, just in case you need to refer to them. So basically there are certain questions that came to light, that I have thought about from all of the interviews, and one of them, it's a very simple question: is absorption something that artists do? And how that ties into what Stuart Elliot has said, that he suggests that there are 24 questions on what absorption is. So we use the term engaged and one thing that has come across from the interviews is that

there are possibly many facets to this concept, many levels of understanding on how it may or may not operate. And Stuart thinks that Fried's binary system, absorption and theatricality doesn't do it for him, and I wondered how you might feel about that?  
12.47

Andrew: I think it was interesting looking at what Stuart had to say in the summary parts that I've had the time to read through, and that is that of his generation, and I think the same is true of my own, people are much more aware of every position that they take, having caveats. And even the moment you say 'Stuart said there are 24 possible categories for absorption' and I'm thinking why 24 you know?  
13.26

Alison: Well yeah, it was just a number plucked out of his mind, and he did say that.  
13.29

Andrew: Exactly, so in a sense, to me what he's really saying is that the capacities for there to be absorption are actually indefinable, and I would agree that taking a binary position that Michael Fried does, is almost impossible now, and the difference between a couple of generations older and probably my own, is that sense of caution as to how and what exactly we can claim about what we are doing, and a very clear realization that some of the *real* forms of engagement, which making, painters in the studio, give back to us are the things that people notice before we notice them ourselves. They're things, which actually seem to elude any conventional form of control.  
14.43

Alison: Yes, yes, although we try to, not necessarily control, but try and work with those situations through our work, possibly?  
14.54

Andrew: Yeah.  
14.55

Alison: So control I suppose is a strong term, but how we might engage with it?  
15.03

Andrew: Adjust?  
15.05

Alison: Yes.  
15.05

Ruth: Are you talking about the studio as being open, it's not necessarily purely a private place? Working in the studio you're aware of other people coming in and out during the process of making a painting.  
15.16

Andrew: As the studio as a place of exchange? So part of that exchange also

involves conversations with the people who come into the studio may point out when something is functioning in an interesting way in pieces of work, which the artist themselves may not have spotted quite so quickly. So it's a sort of de-privileging of the artists studio, the arduous occupation position, which is then resolved. Meaning that what franchised the artist to say to the audience 'This has been a long, difficult, ferocious form of concentration, therefore I expect of you certain things', it's very much saying you can't make those claims anymore. 16.24

Ruth: So the compromise the authorship? 16.24

Andrew: It shifts the authorship, doesn't compromise it. It kind of puts it in a less exalted, or falsely exalted position. Puts it in a more utilitarian position in relation to the other kinds of thought and engagement, which feed into making and looking at works of art. 16.53

Alison: Yes, and Katie, how do you feel about that? 16.55

Katie: Well, do I do absorption? 17.04

Alison: Well yes I suppose... 17.04

Katie: Well I'm not familiar with Stuart's practice. I know who he is, but I'm not an expert on his practice at all, and as I said I haven't had a chance to look at the things. I was driving last night. If I'd been on a train it would have been a different matter. And I've read 'Art and Objecthood', but I haven't read the later Fried texts. I mean I suppose what I'd say is I'm against binary positions in general. Kind of what I investigate in the studio is exactly that dilemma, where you think you can specify a position, but it's actually much more complex than one would expect. So the idea of a binary position is something that I would challenge. Then coming on from what Andrew was saying about the studio as a kind of forum, and certainly for me practice is discursive, that's the whole point, that's why we came today. 18.25

Alison: Absolutely, yes. 18.25

Katie: And I don't know where that process occurs, and I don't know what I expect exactly of the audience, but at some level you're challenging and advancing thoughts, and you're using a visual language to do that. Yes so I don't have any particular expectation as Andrew was saying about expecting the viewer to invest in interpreting, is that pretty much what you were saying (directed at Andrew)? Is that what you meant? 18.58

Andrew: How I don't expect it, but how in a traditional binary view of a slowly produced practice, that would be the expectation/ 19.11

Katie: Yeah. I mean I don't think you've got any right to expect anything of anyone, you just have to hope you've engaged them, and also the other thing I would say about it is that the responses can be kind of visual responses, it's not necessarily a discursive response, you know, it can be working with the knowledge of a text, or the knowledge of someone else's practice. 19.39

Alison: Yeah, that's also something that Stuart said, that Fried's idea of absorption happening in front of the painting right in the time of eighteenth century France when painting was quite a novel thing to the people, but today he said it's more likely to happen away from the work, you're thinking about it in a different light, so that's what he thought. 20.06

Andrew: Yeah, that's an idea about displacement, I mean I had a bizarre experience of a kind of displaced experience of painting, a couple of days ago I was in Manchester, I went to the newly done up Whitworth and they have the Gerhard Richter/Arvo Pärt' exhibition. Have you seen it (directed to Dan)? 20.25

Dan: No. I've realized I'm not going to see it. 20.29

Andrew: Well the freakiest thing about it was that on one wall there are these paintings, which are not paintings, but photographs of paintings, and they're printed and hung as if they were. So your classic, smeary Richter painting, but as an immaculately printed photograph, so everything you expect of engaging with a Richter of that sort has been removed. What makes it even more confusing is that on the walls opposite, at either end of the room are these grey monochromes, which are reverse painting on glass, made with a digital print on the back of glass, but they're something he's been doing with glass and mirroring for as long as he's been making art almost. But the kind of re- print of the painting was just totally bizarre, because to me it felt like people going into museums to see a Richter, and then being given a catalogue of Richter. 21.36

Dan: So what was the status of the reprint? 21.39 Andrew: Well they were hung as paintings. 21.41

Dan: Really, they were works? 21.42

Andrew: They were works. They were intended fully to be works, and I just looked at

them and got completely cynical and thought 'Well you know this is an old man, who's sanity level is low and they're squeezing it out in any way they can'. And you wouldn't have been able to tell the difference in an installation shot. I certainly was expecting to see from the installation shots, the real painting, but the fact that I should even be asking questions about whether I was seeing the real painting or not felt like being put into a primitive situation about what's real and what isn't real simply because of the rhetoric that surrounds Richter's painting. Very, very odd. 22.32

Alison: Did you feel manipulated? 22.32

Andrew: I didn't feel manipulated at all, I felt completely nonplussed and bored, and in a sense wanting to like Arvo Pärt's music in relation to looking at Richter's work, you know I felt like sort of being told I was being offered something and then it just wasn't really there. 23.08

Alison: Robbed? Robbed of an experience? 23.09

Andrew: Not robbed, not cheated, just... 23.11

Katie: It was inauthentic. 23.13

Andrew: Well you see this is where I have to be careful what I say you know. It didn't even touch on issues of authentic or not, it just lacked any criticality. 23.27

Dan: I don't know if you've read in the current issue of Art Forum there's a discussion around the Harvard murals of Rothko, which were those murals, which were paintings he did that got terribly bleached by the sun. So all the colours completely changed, and they always thought they were completely unrestorable, but they got restored once and it wasn't very good. Did you read this Katie? 23.54

Katie: No I haven't. 23.55

Dan: So what they've done is that they've hung them, and then through very careful projection, a digital projection, they've altered all the colours back to how they would look on some ektachromes and drawings of them. So they've changed the current purple which was originally green, they've managed to change it all through this projection. And then the round table discussion about what are we all looking at, and all around was this question of authenticity, because you know you can still see the brush stroke, you can still see the hand of the artist supposedly. 24.41

Andrew: It's a very similar problem isn't it? 24.42

Dan: Yes, and you know people come out wildly on different sides about whether this is a good thing to do, or not a good thing to do. It's quite intriguing. 24.51

Katie: Well I think for me as well there's a real problem about why we hold onto these objects if they no longer are what they used to be. You know you have this hallowed space, and the world is filling up with it, this stuff. 25.23

Andrew: But there's something else isn't there? There's a point in if you like the trajectory with certain artists, in this case Richter and Rothko, where what they produced is deemed to be more, so whether it's more authentic, or more significant, or more acutely focused on the issues of the day, or more timelessly beautiful, or all of those things, but there's a point (and I think we've all experienced this going into museums) where we look at an artist of that stature, and we just think stop. Stop producing. Enough. Retire. I was very excited to go to the Whitworth because it's up for the Stirling Prize, it's won the Museum of the Year, you know it's a beautiful refurbishment, and then they put this in it, and it's almost like somebody buying the most amazing hifi system in the world, and you go to their house, and they give you a cocktail and say listen to this and they put Phil Collins on. (group laughter) 26.26

Katie You should hear what he listens to in the car when he's driving to work, so I don't know. 26.27

Andrew: Yeah, but the analogy worked. 26.32

Ruth: Well there's this whole thing now of exhibitions being done just for the documentation. I've got friends who work at some of these quite big galleries, and she said that the buyers aren't actually coming to show, but you need to say the show happened. 26.49

Katie: In Richter's defence, I know this is not a great kind of position, but I do think there's something to be said about what seduces us to a surface of a painting, what is it about the surface that's so seductive? 27.03

Andrew: But when for example the Frankfurt Paintings of the Baader-Meinhof, again I forget their names, when they came to the ICA, and at that point they weren't supposed to be sold, they were meant to remain in the public domain, and they'd been in Frankfurt. And everyone I spoke to who went, and we all went, they were incredible. 27.27

Katie: No, I saw them in Frankfurt. 27.29

Andrew: You saw them in Frankfurt? Extra points there. (laughter) 27.30

Katie: Baader-Meinhof they're called 'The Baader-Meinhof's. 27.34

Andrew: Yes, they were called 'May the something or other' after the date when they... 27.39

Dan: Yes. 27.42

Andrew: Anyway, whatever, but the point there was the making of them, and the process of transcription from police documentary photographs is to what those paintings actually were was a kind of reassertion of something that's to do with what your whole research seems to be about, and it was almost that old cliché 'you had to be there, you had to of seen it'. Similarly, around the same time the ICA had a show of Luc Tuymans. It was the first time his work had been seen in the UK, and there is something of the moment perhaps, the point where work gets presented in an exhibition context where people need to have seen it, who were aware it was happening. 28.46

Alison: Right. Is it like the work becomes a type of celebrity in a way? 28.46

Andrew: More than that, it's more like a historical moment, that can then be re-interpreted many times over, and there's a difference between that and a form of exhibition, or a form of looking at art, where it seems to be more like going through the motions. And every form of production becomes more kind of institutionalized, and commodified on many levels. 29.28

Alison: Yeah, it's interesting that Richter has come up here in discussion, because he came up last time. It was Simon, if I remember rightly who was talking about how the show last year, it might have been at the Tate, he was talking about the 'selfie' phenomena, how the majority of the people he was watching in front of the works weren't sort of being absorbed, or you know interacting, or looking at the surface, they were back turned, you know camera poised taking shots. So Simon was arguing that the work just wasn't working, it's not doing it's job. 30.11

Katie: Well I think there's always certain works with a celebrity status, I don't know when you last went to see the Mona Lisa for example, but it's got two rails, one in front of it as a crowd control mechanism, and there's a channel for wheel chairs, but everyone just wants... it's like Madame Tussauds. It's nothing to do with art and absorption for these people, that's not why they're there, they're there to witness the

phenomenon, to have some sense of interaction with a star. So the work has a kind of celebrity status, because Richter's obviously acquired that now. 30.54

Dan: There also might be something which actually goes back to the salons that you're talking about, either or Diderot it certainly is which is in fact that their... so you know the audience then actually wanted to be seen themselves, so were they actually engaging with these artworks in the way that the critic was? 31.14

Alison: That's a very good point. 31.14

Dan: I think they would have been engaging with them in the way the people do in Tate Modern engage. 31.19

Andrew: It's a social phenomenon. 31.23

Dan: What you were talking about those rather refined showings of work where everything seems to come together with a historical moment as well, because if you go to see the Baader-Meinhof paintings and the Richter show it's a completely different experience to the original experience, but the paintings haven't changed, they might have changed a little bit, but you know. 31.41

Katie: I think that point about temporality you know in your title that really interests me, the idea that we are looking at moments rather than you know artefacts. So to take the Baader-Meinhof out of Frankfurt and bring them to the ICA, well you know the act of painting as Andrew was saying, the act of painting those was a political stance in a moment. And it was thoroughly brutal, the police were brutal, but the Baader-Meinhof were also brutal, and it changes over time, it's not static, and the idea of a painting, or painting in general being a static thing so those Chardin's where there's this kind of sustained moment, we also see it in Vermeer, and it's kind of totally meaningless to the selfie generation, it's totally meaningless to people who have seen a photograph. Being able to break a second into a fraction of a second, and print that scene. 32.59

Alison: Simon Callery was saying that it was the work not working, and Stuart was saying well actually it's more about a symptom of the work in it's context today. 33.13

Andrew: Exactly, but in a way when you talked about the discursive nature of painting as a practice, inevitably there is social engagement within the way that painting functions. I mean the paradigm, the most useful paradigm of a kind of Richter Baader-Meinhof important political event, then reiterating the imagery

through painting creates a form of social engagement, and we tend to divide everything and professionalize everything. So we have social engaged practice almost as an entity in it's own right, and the danger in all these nomenclature is that you forget that need to think across the different paradigms, and say 'Well, what am I doing with what this kind of practice at this point in time?' And inevitably what enables us is we continue to make paintings at any point is a combination of things. First what we give ourselves permission to do, but then also what is permitted by this society we're in. How we might challenge that, but also how we might address that discursively, as most of us are involved in working in art schools as well, because that's very much, as you were saying, a discursive commitment. So somehow the studio activity carries all these things. Even if it's only as an unconsciously kind of critical aspect. So when for example we had Bermondsey Art Trail a weekend ago when we had groups coming through Tannery Arts, there was this one Australian, although it doesn't make any difference that he was Australian, and he came and piped up 'I like Renaissance art', and I felt like saying 'Well what the fuck are you doing in my studio?' (group laughter) 'I like Renaissance art, why should I look at this when I can't see what it is?', he said to me 'You sound quite calculating and cerebral, therefore what is it in what you're doing here that I need to engage with?' and I thought 'Oh shit'. (laughter) 35.59

Katie: I don't think it's our responsibility. 36.00

Andrew: It isn't, and I felt like saying 'Look you come from the same country as Rupert Murdoch, you know, tell Rupert Murdoch to shut the fuck up and then we can start talking'. (group laughter) But what I actually said to him was 'Look, we have a culture of anti-intellectualism, and we also tend to assume that if something is intellectual then it's not physical, and of course...' 36.26

Katie: Well I know people who don't think that, anyway go on. 26.26

Andrew: ...that's a whole other story. (laughter) But the point is you can't have one without the other, and in a sense saying just looking is important, but then once you've got through that there are more interesting things to extract from it. He didn't come back to the second visit. (group laughter) 36.49

Katie: I think that relating to your very first question about absorption, I think things aren't the same at the time, so things come in and out of context or relevance and this idea of a kind of experience of waiting to wash over you and you've either got it or you haven't, or right properly immersed in it, you know the different associations

and references and experiences can be engaged in different contexts, or over a period of time. So what you take from something at any one moment is in flux. 37.39

Alison: Fried talks about a shifting sensibilities, and in a way part of his art historical project is looking at that. For instance you see with Greuze and Chardin, a way of working that starts to shift as people become more aware of what's happening, then the artists have to push it further and further to make it work each time. David talks about that on the drama in his paintings, and to the point where the theatrical then starts to become so much part of the actual painting that it starts to change. How Manet addressed this is an example. So this kind of shifting of ways of looking at things, they start to become like strategies, like absorptive strategies that... 38.28

Katie: Yeah, I think David is very different from the kind of time you see in Chardin, or Vermeer that you didn't mention - that's my reference, because you're seeing something that is a death scene or a frozen, you know it's a painting about eternity. I mean yes, it's in flux, it's in a different kind of flux, whereas blowing a bubble or pouring milk, or a cat, these things are things you probably don't really see ever, it's a kind of fiction. And it's certainly a fiction in terms of an artist painting it, because you wouldn't have had a photograph to paint from, or anything, you know you can't observe a bubble long enough to paint it. So it's, as all work is, it's a description of time that is totally experiential, and not at all actual, because that's what time is anyway. You know we have notions of time, but we don't have any... there is no such thing as actual, you know you have clocks and things but physicists tell us that this is a human... 40.01

Alison: Construct. 40.01

Katie: Yes construct, thank you. Very inarticulate. 39.59

Alison: No, it's a hard one to articulate full stop. 40.05

Katie: Now I understand why the text that you sent me was incomprehensible. (group laughter) 40.09

Alison: No, and I had the benefit of listening to the audio, so when you have the audio it probably makes it clearer. 40.19

Katie: Yeah, I just couldn't get through it, partly because it's the mirror I didn't want. 40.24

Alison: No. I'm sick of hearing my voice over all those interviews. 40.32

Katie: It's bizarre though, because the interview was only an hour and a half, and it took me about 3 hours to hear 30% of it. 40.48

Alison: Yeah, it's again it's a time thing, well you can imagine how long it took to transcribe all of them. 40.57

Katie: I would have paid someone to do it. 40.57

Alison: I wish I could, but it would have been very expensive. 41.02

Ruth: It's not that cheap. (group laughter) 41.03

Alison: No, it isn't. So lots of material there, I understand. 41.08

Andrew: But it's interesting how you must be starting to notice patterns in what people say? 41.18

Alison: Absolutely, and that brings me to... 41.23

Andrew: In terms of, because I hadn't read the whole of the summary, but in terms of the bits I have been able to read I can sort of see... 41.36

Alison: Commonalities. 41.36

Andrew: Commonalities more with certain artists, than with others, and I wasn't surprised, I wasn't at all surprised, and I think that idea of shifting positions with the context, and the generations within which people work, and the issues which they find themselves addressing, some people work in more isolated in ways than others, so for example, well two examples come to mind, a recent one is Peter Joseph. 42.20

Katie: Did you get that catalogue from David, did you see that catalogue? 42.23

Andrew: I saw your pdf. David sent me the announcement, but he didn't send me the pdf. I must email him. David Saunders systems painter had an exhibition with Mummery Schnell, and I was talking to Andrew Mummery about it and I suggested, because I knew David and Peter Joseph were friends, that they did an 'in conversation', and it was terribly disappointing. And I'm a huge admirer of Peter Joseph's painting, as I am of David's, but one of the main reasons I think it was disappointing was all Peter Joseph did was really talk about himself in a grumpy way, talk about the Third Programme not being how it was a few years ago, and it did sound like someone who led a solitary life in their studio, you know didn't get out

much to be completely rude. 43.21

Katie: He's taken that stance though, he's deliberately hermetic. 43.27

Andrew: Yes he is, and it doesn't come across well in discursive terms. You know the paintings speak better than he does. 43.34

Katie: I was going to say a lot of artists are resolutely resistant to discussion and intellectualization, and that's probably because they don't want to be caught out, and also not everyone is generous. There is a kind of generosity wanting to get engaged. 43.55

Andrew: But it does come also with those who are involved and committed in kind of big ways to the academic world I think. But the other example that came to mind was Bernard Frize. There is a catalogue of his work, which is still one of my favourites from Nime, and it's called 'Size Matters' and it's from the mid 90's, but it basically contains little paragraphs of his commentary on a series of paintings he made, and they're very deadpan, and they're very simple. He's saying for example 'I made these paintings because one didn't go well, and I scraped it all off and discovered by accident that although it was blank, when you looked at it straight on, when you looked at it at a very oblique angle it had very bright and intense colour, because of the residues of colour left in the kind of compression of that angle' so he the says 'I made a whole series of them' that's it, that's the whole description. But somehow in his deadpanning, and in the fact that at that point lots of the sort of movers and shakers in the art world were saying... I remember for example Chris Dirkon saying at the time Bernard Frize is where it's at with painting at the moment. And it was to do with that point in time where there wasn't very much space unlike now, for a discussion on painting within the main kind of museum forums. And Frize was one of the few people who found a way through, and it was with this hilarious deadpanning account of what're actually very astute paintings. 45.55

Alison: I'll definitely look into that, that's really bringing dialogue straight into the gallery. 45.57

Andrew: It just struck me that it's almost kind of easier to talk about that with those two artists who are completely outside than it would be to talk about what we've picked up from artists in terms of this frame, because there are different positions, and it could easily turn into the other thing that goes on when you get a bunch of artists together or not on a panel, that is that they start attacking each other.

(laughter) 46.25

Katie: Yeah, I was just building up to a major argument with Andrew Bick. (group laughter) or Daniel Sturgis. 46.40

Alison: I suppose that's another reason I wanted to interview the artists first, and with everybody having the same questions, so that nobody knew what everybody else was saying, so it wasn't until we got together that... 46.51

Andrew: Yes, so there's obviously a methodology that you've used which is quite clear. 46.59

Alison: Because obviously through coming together, not necessarily change, but certain things come to light that might not if you're just hearing one voice at a time sort of thing. 47.14

Katie: Coming back to the question of absorption and intuition, and some people kind of, as artists I guess, and I am absolutely, resolutely not one of them, are able to get absorbed in a kind of intuitive process and have a kind of vision. I suppose if you're talking about intuition, an example might be Varda Civano talks about it, about seeing something in the beginning and being so involved in the moment, and in yourself, in your studio, and the conversation with the work, that you're able to construct something. And I would have thought that that kind of approach kind of closes down discussion I say rudely. So for me I don't know if I've got anything else to say about that at the moment. I was going to posit a dichotomy between that kind of absorption in the studio, which is introspective, and absorption, which is consuming you. So if after this I nip into the Tate and go and see Christina Mackie, and take something away to think about over a period of time, and then over successive moments, years, or hours, or weeks, it infiltrates something I subsequently do, whether it's a conversation, or something in my practice, just a personal interpretation of something I read. So I'm comparing this kind of absorption in the making process to the absorption in the audience. 49.47

Alison: Yes, and I suppose that's what Stuart was talking about, there being these multi levels, and how can we engage with them if we don't know, or can't describe them more clearly? So there was this discussion about language and how it fails to meet the needs in this respect. You know the one term he kind of says it isn't really fit for purpose. It doesn't really describe the interaction that possibly is going on. For instance when Stuart was talking about that moment when you're absorbed by a

painting, there was an example he used I think it was the Poussin's in the National Gallery. He said he'd walked past these paintings on many occasions, and then one time he walks past and he has that lightening bolt moment kind of thing. So he says there obviously is something that has happened that's changed in me, or allowed me to be more receptive in a certain way that didn't happen the other times I saw that painting. 50.52

Katie: Well I think also what that's not taking account of is that passing, that walking past and ignoring, you're actually consuming something even though it's not a direct gaze, a kind of sideways glance. 51.08

Alison: Askance, yeah, you're always taking in, but it's interesting... 51.13

Katie: And processing. 51.14

Alison: Yes, absorbing (laughter) 51.18

Andrew: I think that's a very important point. There's a great interview you can access through Hyperallergic the online magazine, between David Reed and Mary Heilmann, who've currently got this show. And the reason I noticed that, I mean I get announcements from them anyway, but before I saw that, our dear friends at Abstract Critical had tweeted an image from the exhibition, because they've hung their works almost touching, tweeted an image of a Mary Heilmann and a David Reed, and the Mary Heilmann is almost square and the Reed's kind of tall and thin, they're butted up against each other, and with a comment from Abstract Critical about something sort of like 'Is this an anti-hang?' and I thought Ah, this has annoyed them, so I'm probably going to find it interesting. (laughter) And what in it, that you've just reminded me of Katie, was David Reed saying that when he first saw Mary Heilmann's work he absolutely hated it, and the reason he hated it was because he was looking at it through a critical prism, which wasn't what it was addressing, to do with the fact that she was using the colours that in his terms she wasn't supposed to be using in that way. And it's something that we all do, you know, I do it as much as the next person in that because we think we know what we're doing, and because we can articulate a framework around the things which we want to pay attention too, certain things which don't subscribe to that take longer to get through to us if they're interesting. And that process of adjustment happens, as far as I'm concerned, it happens for me with my own work as much as it happens with the work of artists who I consider to be interesting, or who I learn against what I thought was my better judgment are very interesting, in other words having to revise

an opinion. 53.56

Alison: Yes, because you talk about having lots of works on the go at the same time for that reason, and actually that is another common thing that's come out through the interviews this need for... 54.07

Katie: It's also pragmatic that. 54.09

Andrew: It's a pragmatic thing, it's not about hedging your bets, it's about trying to have a very wide kind of web to capture things and not trusting yourself too deeply that you know how to come up with the decisive moment.54.29

Katie: And also if you're making work for an exhibition you want to have a sense of unity so that there's some kind of conversation that you're positing, rather than a stream of disparate objects. 54.45

Ruth: Does it come back to the time thing again if you're working on 10 paintings at the same time you can spend more time. So even while you're working between a few of them in particular you're still engaging with the others because they're in your field of vision? 54.55

Katie: Well for me it comes back to the idea of the Poussin, and not knowing what to do, and leaving it, but actually you are nonetheless absorbing and thinking, but at the back of your brain, as opposed to... it's not something in your foreground. 55.16

Break

Ruth: What about the phrase the artists' artist? Could you have said to this guy there's sort of a conversation maybe with other artists as well as... 1.04.59

Andrew: Possibly, but it's more interesting, what makes an artists' artist, what makes certain artists ones that other artists talk about a lot, or find ways to talk about, it's usually because there's something quite complicated that isn't immediately obvious. It's not like a private club, it's more... 1.05.39

Ruth: It's like recently Rich Tuttle has been talked about as this artists' artist who's been under the radar. 1.05.42

Andrew: Yeah, but I found the whole approach of the Whitechapel exhibition kind of quite offensive. I'm going to sound like a curmudgeon now, but yes there was a point where in the 90's, the disarmed nature of those works was brilliant and provocative, but once it gets put into that... it's like that whole photograph redone Richter thing –

once it gets put into that sort of... I don't know, what am I saying? I tell you what I'm saying I'm saying that the Whitechapel, every time they do a show with a major, they fuck it up. (group laughter) 1.06.28

Katie: The Whitechapel is an incredibly annoying institution isn't it? 1.06.31

Andrew: I know what you mean about Richard Tuttle, I suppose it's gone too far the other way in terms of turning him into a legend in that slight sleight of hand approach needs a lot of respect, but it also needs a certain amount of not being paid attention to in order for it to breath. Once it becomes like the headline act on the main stage it loses a bit of it's magic perhaps. 1.07.06

Katie: James Hyde as well. I think the idea of an artists' artist is problematic in any case, because you know not everyone is absorbed by the same stimuli, so you might consume him indirectly through Andrew's work for example, or James Hyde as referenced. 1.07.33

Andrew: James Hyde, yes scaled up in some ways, but there was a point in the 1990's when he was really motoring. Do you know his work? 1.07.51

Alison: No I don't. 1.07.51

Katie: He's an American. 1.07.53

Andrew: Brooklyn based. 1.07.56

Katie: Hyde with a Y. 1.07.56

Andrew: Yes, as in Jekyll and... (laughter) 1.08.02

Alison: Going back to something you mentioned earlier on the commonalities that started to come through from the interviews, and like you were saying yes, there were certain things that you thought 'Yes I expected this to happen'. I suppose talking about absorption, it being the experience you have in front of a work, but also the experience you might have during practice, those were the divides that were showing. For instance something that was a constant was that everybody had had that moment in front of a painting, in front of somebody else's work. Not always a lightening bolt, but an absorptive, engaging moment, but when it came to looking at their own work in a similar light, not during practice, but once completed, there was quite a divide between people that said 'Yes, I can act as a beholder in front of my work' and others saying 'Well no, that doesn't ever happen for me'. 1.09.16

Katie: What did you say? (aimed at Andrew) 1.09.16

Andrew: I can't remember exactly what I said, but I think I might have cunningly hedged my bets. (laughter) 1.09.31

Alison: (laughter) Very cunningly. 1.09.33

Katie: Sounds like my experience of you. (group laughter) 1.09.37

Alison: Shall I read it back to you? 1.09.38

Andrew: Go on then. (laughter) 1.09.38

Alison: So I asked 'At any point in your painting practice do you act as the beholder of your own artwork, and is this beholder absorbed in the sense that Fried describes?' and you replied 'In playing the tension between those different physical properties what I'm not doing is coming up with a recipe to say to the beholder 'Ok guys, these are complicated, you have to look hard, because these are elaborately made as there are all these different components which are very tricky to put together. Rather than that I am using these different processes to distract myself so that I am consistently put in a position where the attentiveness I pay to the playing out of work making is as important as the time I necessarily have to spend in the making process. It then becomes a dynamic of taking responsibility for looking at something in order to not rely becoming some sort of technical virtuoso. It also becomes a process where I'm willingly aware that there is no guarantee that anyone else will want to do the same thing, and that's very important to me in that I think I have to be disarmed from all kinds of ideas of my status, or grandeur, or any kind of pomposity that might come from making claims that all the attention that I've given my work in the studio means that other people should also give it a commensurate amount of time'. 1.11.06

Andrew: So I didn't answer the question. (laughter) 1.11.07

Alison: (laughter) No. 1.11.08

Andrew: I mean in terms of looking at my own work afterwards I didn't answer the question. 1.11.15

Alison: So now's your chance. (laughter) 1.11.16

Andrew: I'm just trying to think why I didn't answer the question to start with? 1.11.26

Katie: Do you look at work that's been in storage or out of your studio for a while and then you come to it? 1.11.34

Dan: That's a really good question. 1.11.34

Andrew: There's a distinction there. Yes, it's a really good question isn't it? Yes, when I take work out of storage I look at it first and foremost, and consider if it needs reworking. 1.11.45

Katie: Yeah, I do that. 1.11.46

Andrew: So that's kind of normal, so there's a sense which you don't privilege your own work from the past. I don't, because that somehow becomes your arteries clogging up. You know it seems to prevent there being any flux, so you can become burdened by your old work. On the other hand, if you see your work, which is in a collection, it's no longer yours in a different sense, so certainly from my point of view with my work then, I look at it very carefully, but it's a very different process to the process where I might look at a work by an artist who I love and admire their work where I might go say to a collection and see a wonderful painting by Mondrian and I'm simply into that feeling of looking at it that's quite familiar. My own work I'm actually just checking, measuring it, you know in a very neutral way, just to see how much I can remember of what I intended and how much it achieves that. 1.13.14

Katie: But any kind of sense from looking say at old work you know you go and see it in a collection do you get any sense of re-triggering the thoughts that prompted you to kind of re-engage with an earlier dialogue you had? 1.13.36

Andrew: Yeah, it depends though, because it depends on the context. If I'm there on my own then yes, but it could be a social situation. 1.13.49

Katie: Ok. So if you have a glass of bubbly – then no. 1.13.50

Andrew: Precisely. You know it you're in somebody's apartment, and you don't necessarily like their taste in interior decoration, but you've got a very nice glass of champagne in your hand – that's very different to seeing something in a collection of a very good friend. 1.14.12

Katie: Yeah, I know I said to you that I never have that experience (directed to Alison), but I think possibly with old work, you know when you get out some works that's been..., well you've been to my studio and you have seen how certain works can't be looked at, then you might for a minute... it's like seeing a photograph of

yourself from an angle you can never see in the mirror, or something like that.

1.14.48

Alison: So there's less criticality and it's more about the kind of 'ah'? 1.14.50

Katie: Well I don't know. I think that sometimes I can have that kind of critical engagement retrospectively, but what I tend to find is that I see it and think 'Ah, my position has changed' so I wouldn't paint that now. That was naive or I no longer feel that, or I no longer have that position or view. They're not really emotive, people always assume they are, they're not. I think it's because I'm a girl. 1.15.29

Andrew: It's perhaps easier to look at really earlier work, you know work where you were sort of... well I certainly feel that for myself, work that was maybe a couple of years out of my MA or something, than the need to look from five/eight years ago, because somehow things from much further back there's no longer such a sort of feeling that it might be corrected. That it was almost there, but not quite. In fact it is an entity which is completely separate, because certainly if you're talking 20 years it's from a totally different point in time two decades ago, when things which we would all have been discussing and getting excited about have gone. So in a strange way what can remain is perhaps certainly from my point of view of my work from that long ago I envisage stubbornness, because it wasn't really fitting in with a lot of the predominant things that were occurring at that point in time in London where I was then working. So even if I don't like the work much I kinda quite like the stubbornness, but only because it's been superseded by a lot more reflective engagement and hopefully generosity towards other artists, peer groups, forms of exchange involving curating exhibitions, and all of those other things which again feed into how a practice might evolve. 1.17.38

Alison: Because one of the things you talk about is that you're really interested in post-production... 1.17.43

Andrew: Yes. 1.17.43

Alison: And I was wondering what gap, you know the longest gap between finishing a work and it coming back from a show and you reworking it because you were just saying 20 years is a long time, and not working on that because it was a different time? 1.18.01

Andrew: I couldn't put a figure to it. 1.18.04

Katie: I also think with your practice you don't just paint, you're increasingly not just painting, and when you say post-production I think 'Oh yeah, that makes a whole lot of sense' because some of your projects are all about that, you know, the activity that goes on in the studio, the invention, and then it gets passed over, and to the manufacturers, to the architects, and then as a user rather than a... 1.18.35

Andrew: Yeah, I mean I didn't ever feel I fitted into painting you know, when I was doing my BA at Reading Uni it was split between Studio B which was where people were using oil paint, canvas and turps, and Studio A, which was the people using anything. 1.19.00

Katie: So you said I'm AB. (laughter) That's his blood group. 1.19.01

Andrew: No, no I was in A, I was with all the anal retentives that was called the anal studio. (laughter) It was based on Chelsea, I think it was the third floor coming out of constructivism originally, so everything was near to the workshops and involved relief construction involved with all those things, and then up on the sky lit top (unclear words), there were the people kind of splashing paint around and doing all of those unrestrained, gestural things. 1.19.40

Katie: Yeah, which riles me so much, that's why I do it and then control it. 1.19.47

Andrew: Yeah, but it's absolutely true in a way in terms of what you're doing with your work, and that whole thing which emerges, you know earlier I mentioned Bernard Frize, in terms of calculation in relation to spontaneity, the kind of tension between those two being endlessly played out. 1.20.16

Katie: Well also Bernard Frize as we know has worked with collaborators and orchestrated what's almost a dance. 1.20.21

Andrew: Yes. I remember that famous/infamous in Abstract Critical discussion that you were on the panel with Alexis Harding, and... 1.20.37

Alison: Oh yeah. 1.20.37

Andrew: Were you there? 1.20.37

Alison: No. I've seen it online. 1.20.40

Andrew: Were you there? (to Dan)

Dan: No, I wasn't there. 1.20.40

Katie: With Mel Gooding and Barry Schwabsky, and I was heckled by Alan Gouk.  
1.20.54

Andrew: He heckled Barry as well. Barry just mentioned Clement Greenberg and Alan Gouk said 'I don't want a lecture on Clement Greenberg from you', or 'I don't need a lecture on Clement Greenberg from you', and it was... 1.21.09

Katie: Normally when people do that they're a bit pissed I think. 1.21.10

Andrew: He was just... I don't know. The point that also came out, and I'm not sure if it's what you were heckled on, was this idea that there might be a strategy, and a strategy is actually useful and important, because it seemed to me that that kind of very narrow and prescriptive set of viewpoints coming from people like Alan Gouk, are to do with an almost eternally extended moment of improvisations and that there can't be anything strategic, because somehow if you're strategic you're calculating, you're manipulative, you're not directly committing yourself. 1.21.53

Katie: But it's also a bit like saying I'm just a cipher, I'm not responsible for it, you know the muse visits me and makes my arm do this (group laughter), and then I look round and there's a painting. That's what I mean about a rejection of intellectualization, using intuition as an excuse for not really analyzing, and I suppose as any educators, the whole reason why teaching is interesting is because you're forcing people to do that, and when you get... you'd never get to PhD if you were like that, but sometimes you battle with undergraduates, or postgraduate students where you say 'You really have to look at this', it's not good enough to say it just happens, that's what I do or I always seem to like that' you have to have a look and work out why you like it, why you're absorbed in that situation or engaged, and that's where your subject matter lies, but without answering those questions, which are difficult, you're limiting yourself. 1.23.12

Alison: That reminds me of a quote that you mentioned - Roger Hilton? 1.23.19

Andrew: Oh yeah. I don't know if I even got the quote completely right. He was basically saying that sometimes his paintings are completed when his back is turned.  
1.23.28

Katie: Yeah, yeah, that's interesting, I feel like that sometimes. 1.23.30

Andrew: But it's a disarming attitude, because he is not saying there's some amazing intuitive sensibility, which I have developed over years, which means I know when to

leave off and I know when to go into it. He's saying it happens because I'm not paying attention. 1.23.53

Katie: Yeah, exactly. I think it's metaphorical as well isn't it? It's about attention, not about you know look too hard and not see. He's not saying I'm not looking, he's ... 1.24.10

Dan: It seems to go back to that temporal point about time doesn't it? It's to do when your back is turned and you're not paying attention you know, and you're actually not engaged really, you then read later. 1.24.19

Andrew: And the need for unproductive time, or time that's not actually possible to define in terms of productivity, because that's actually quite a political thing in a world we're in now where art students are paying £9000 per year and ringing up debts of £45 - £50k to do a degree, how do you teach unproductive time? Or how do you disseminate the idea of how unproductive time might be incredibly valuable and important when it's all being marketized in that way? 1.25.02

Ruth: Also even if you manage it at college, it's very hard to sustain it afterwards because the cost of studio, so the compromises people make to try and stay in London means they haven't got time. 1.25.14

Katie: You need a support network, and I said it flippantly earlier about being a girl, and deliberately used that derogatory terminology, because these things are very gendered. I definitely get interpretations of my work imposed upon me because I'm a woman, and I was listening to the tennis commentary on 5 live, a very interesting commentator, a man was talking about Federer, and he said he gets to stay at the top of his game because he has a very supportive network behind him. You know he's got money, he's got kids that he doesn't look after because he's flying around the world earning bucket loads of cash to be able to train and invest, and I'm obviously making analogies to practice as well, but if you've got a support network, if you've got the money to pay someone to do your admin, clean your house, pick your kids up from school, all the things you might want to do then that opens possibilities for whilst someone is cleaning my house I will go and have a gallery day, you know those kind of trade offs, or I will read another book. 1.26.39

Ruth: It's not just how women artists are talked about, but there's often that kind of sort of volunteering that information of pre-empting the judgment, so 'I have children, but I still get to the studio'. 1.26.56

Katie: Yeah, well these guys have children too, but it's not just gender, it's also money and education, it's all the kind of privileges that set people up. 1.27.14

Andrew: But it is political in the sense that if you have to measure the use value of an education in the arts, and I was, for my sins, at a conference on Impact case studies in the Research Excellence Framework. (group laughter) 1.27.42

Katie: Yes, you haven't shared your learning on that. (laughter) 1.27.42

Andrew: I'm not going to share it with you now, what I will say is that the jelly beans that you got in the complimentary pack were very, very good, by the end of it I'd munched through them all. (group laughter) But what 's going on is to do with metrics, so education is very adept with justifying itself in metrical terms. In terms of what you're doing with this research, there is no way you can come up with a metric for the value of unproductive time in the studio. We all know that studios for artists in London are increasingly a luxury and a privilege, because of the way property is getting marketized. We also know, because everyone moans about it that these huge developments, which have no lights on in them, or culture because they've all been bought by investors from China so they're kind of sucking the life out of the city, what we're not allowed to do is make a rationale, which isn't purely using metrics as to why certain forms of un-productivity, which might generate attentiveness, a powerful social force, which we need in order to create the communities and environments are useful for the future. You know we've got... I'm not sure how old your kids are, I mean I know Katie's are a bit younger than my daughter, but she's stressed out of her skull at 14 years old, because of what they're doing with exams all the time, not knowing just how to be kind of idle. 1.29.29

Katie: Also the exams are nothing to do with education they are to do with the school, and the schools image and in a sense it comes to the mission of acquiring knowledge, and not everything is measurable. You do a PhD, it helps further your career, but also who is the person who didn't do this research, and discipline it into a dissertation and a practice led element, and what will your future contribution be? There's so many immeasurables, and everything has to be quantified because everything has a price tag. 1.30.15

Alison: Yes, the money has changed that's what Malcolm was saying, how education has changed because of it. 1.30.20

Dan: I mean even that point Andrew was making about space I think is interesting,

and about the way artists work, and if one thinks going back to those ideas just at the beginning around Fried and Minimalism and all of that there was an idea then because of the physical nature of the city of New York, which was bankrupt at the time, the huge swathes of horizontal space was sort of to do with freedom and were completely, readily accessible, now that is just completely the opposite. 1.30.53

Andrew: Yes, there's an economic imperative environment in which enables those artists to work in that way. 1.31.01

Dan: I mean that was completely luxurious to think that you could fill a warehouse. 1.31.04

Alison: Don't you think it's also to do with the demands on our time as well like you were saying earlier? Are we busier today? It's always implied that we are because of technology and the constant demands on our time. 1.31.23

Dan: Yeah, well I think technology, and there are certain relationships with technology, but I don't know if we are. 1.31.29

Andrew: We're expected to justify or quantify our time in a way that perhaps people weren't. You know there are certainly always somebody somewhere with a spreadsheet who wants to know when you're taking leave, and when you're in your office. 1.31.50

Katie: We could bicker about this, and there is a kind of pragmatic where someone has to staff the course. (group laughter) Yeah, I think that accountability in itself isn't a bad thing, but you have to have... first of all there's a cross over between leisure and function that I enjoy some of the things I do as an employee, even some of the procedural things of being an artist, maybe I enjoy washing my brushes, and going to art openings which is very difficult to do as you get older, and you have other obligations, it's expected of you, but it's social, you go there, and depending on what the opening is, either I'm there with old mates, or you realize there's a bunch of your students, or if it's recent graduates they'll come up to you and ask for references (he knows what I'm talking about – directed at Andrew) or career advice, you know they want to talk about themselves, so there's crossover and it's unfair to say everything needs to be quantified, because of peoples generosity. 1.33.47

Andrew: There's all of these factors, which invade the time, which we have to pay attention, and that means whether it's paying attention to what we do with our own practice, or paying attention to our practice as a matter of principle. I learnt more in

the afternoon at Whitworth looking at the stuff in the collection there than I did in the morning at the Impact conference unsurprisingly, no surprise there, however somehow the way I might have paid attention to some things that were in the Whitworth that were very, very early Ian Davenport paintings, was made all better by the fact that I had to sort of go through professional academic stuff in the morning, and in a sense there's an aphorism about that somewhere in Ad Reinhart's art writing about taking responsibilities towards your kind of domestic kind of obligations, and getting them done, so that you can then do that thing that you want you do with your work. And for me he's an amazing model of someone who manages to do that, to have a formidable academic career, to be a provocateur, and to make these extremely unreachable and demanding paintings, many of which have disintegrated.

Katie: I think that that Whitworth day is an incredibly good example, because Andrew did this thing that the University made him do in the morning, that he didn't want to do, and you work for two universities so they both benefitted that, but whether or not he should have stayed and networked, but he has shared his learning with us, he's enriched the conversation by his example of the Richter, and I was thinking the thing I hadn't said when he was talking about Richter as well, I don't know how relevant it is to the conversation, but the way in which knowledge activates other aspects of existence, and the way that knowledge is disseminated isn't necessarily directly accountable. I was thinking about Peter Lamb's paintings for example, I was thinking 'Oh yes I remember what the 1980's were like in the art world', is it there or not, thinking about Allan McCollum, then I was thinking about cynicism and I was thinking about commercial galleries. Yes, so the idea of cause and effect, of expecting a direct application from any activity is rather futile. 1.37.42

Alison: Yes, I suppose that slightly taps into that question I was talking about embodied experience after a painting day, and you were talking about it the other way round, so that the painting having an effect on life outside of the studio, so that you're so absorbed in what you're doing, you referred to if you went from the studio home and you were slicing onions and you were seeing the repetitive patterns, so... 1.38.12

Katie: Yes, that's what happened in the summer term. Yes, I'd forgotten about that. 1.38.20

Alison: So what I'm saying is it's a two way thing, it's not so much just what we bring to the studio, it's also what we take away from it. 1.38.27

Katie: Well also the university keeps me out of the studio, they pay me half the salary and keep me out of the studio seven days a week, but that said, I really like structures and organizations and I like visualizing, so that is material for me, I mean even exam boards, even quality and assessment I really like all those sort of structures, and then I go and do these diddy diagrams of them in the studio, so you're absorbing information all the time. 1.39.11

Pause for coffee break

Katie: Andrew was commenting on Anthony Hill and pure mathematics (I'm interested in pure mathematics). I think that, just simply, artists influence these kind of thinkers, and the pure arts has this immeasurable impact in furthering possibilities for abstract thinkers in other fields generally, and that's what interests me about abstract painting, that's why I do it. If it was just nerdy abstract painting then, as I said earlier, I wouldn't be involved in it. It's introspective, but just with a wider community, and I've encountered communities like that, for example the forum for Concrete Art in Erfurt, they had a very closed idea of what Concrete Art was, so my work couldn't be concrete even though it is about structures and ideas. 1.41.14

Andrew: But there is a huge irony in that when Theo Van Doesburg wrote the manifesto of Concrete Art, he had to take in severity with a pinch of salt, because he was also the creator of an alter ego 'I.K. Bonset' who wrote scurrilous insulting texts about other artists, and he was a provocateur, so it was a strategic and positional document, but it could easily, if he hadn't done it so young, he moved off into something else within four or five years. What tends to happen when you have followers is that they lack the... what we were talking about this earlier morning, the kind of mental flexibility to step outside the position that they are taking, and look at it from another angle and therefore have to hang on to it rigidly. Anthony Hill also has a Dadaist alter ego, as well as his skill in mathematics. 1.42.27

Katie: So does Brian Chalkey. (group laughter) 1.42.34

Andrew: Yes, not quite the same thing as we're talking about here, but I must say I admire Brian's son immensely for setting up that shop called 'Look Mum, no hands'. You know that's his son that is involved the cycling café, where you can go with a bike having forgotten your lock, and they will let you lock your bike up with a lock. 1.42.59

Katie: Decathlon do that too. 1.43.03

Andrew: Yeah but Decathlon is part of the axis of evil. (group laughter) 1.43.06

Katie: Yeah, but they also sell very nice bikes. 1.43.10

Andrew: Sorry, how did we get onto that, Brian Chalkey – alter egos. Anthony Hill, yes.

Katie: What is his alter ego. You were going to tell us, until I said... 1.43.40

Andrew: His alter ego is called Achill Redo, that's his A.C. Hill, Achill as a first name and R E D O, which is kind of like re-do thread like re-work, and he started in the 70's the same time he was writing a lot for Art Monthly, and there's this whole slew of polemics that he wrote, which are kind of petulant, angry, irritated, but really having a go at the emerging YBA scene at the time. And you can kind of see his frustration, but it's not the frustration of someone who feels outmoded, it's the frustration of someone who feels that there isn't enough thought in what's going on, and he's therefore objecting. That's a form of conscientious objecting. And some of the writing is actually brilliantly funny in the phraseology, the rhetorical turns and everything very entertaining, but he is bi-polar, so as he's got older he's increasingly fragile, and he's deaf as well, and it's easier to talk to him on the phone, than it is to talk to him face to face, because you say something and he's miss heard it and answers with something else, so you just have to go with the slightly random direction the conversation's taking as a result. They're all so incredibly interesting and I have pages and pages of notes with little gems in, but in a sense for me that engagement is actually a very important part of what I believe we're all doing, because these are artists that have been regarded as almost redundant, they've been overlooked.

1.45.45

Alison: So do you think this alter ego, this other voice is a strategy? 1.45.50

Andrew: Completely, a recognition that the fact that the very measured, mathematically driven, orthogonal relief construction using plastic, aluminum, steel, Perspex, kind of is a complete oeuvre, but there is something else that he wants to say, there's another energy that cannot be carried in that work, and it doesn't devalue that work, but inherently recognizing the contradiction is a like a pendulum, which keeps everything going between different positions, it's not even just a polarity, or dialectic, it's many positions. 1.46.49

Alison: So the alter ego voice gives space to pursue those other facets? 1.46.55

Andrew: Yes, and for me it's what a lot of my research has actually been about, you know going right back to people like Van Doesburg and beyond, there are these, right at the heart of modernism, these sort of contradictory positions, and the contradiction is what keeps them interesting now as opposed to the perfectly laid out position, which fades over time. So going back to what your research is dealing with when you think in a way what Michael Fried was doing as a fully trained up art historian, he was rationalizing Greenberg's more poetic and more polemic kind of idea of sort of having a papal decree on what was authentic and it's very difficult to talk about Greenberg without either belittling him, or being kind of barracked by all those kind of metaphorical Alan Gouk's out there. There's a sense in which... 1.48.06

Ruth: He's become an adjective now basically. 1.48.05

Andrew: Yes. 1.48.07

Ruth: You're immediately in or out of the Greenbergian camp. 1.48.13

Katie: Once again I don't think you can be completely in or completely out of anything. Andrew's made me think of a potential idea of when you think of modes, and movements, and something being in focus, it's new so everyone's interested, because it's something that we didn't see before, and some things have legs, and some things don't and are entropic and are no longer current or aren't that good in the first place, so he was talking about what made Anthony Hill angry, but I think if you look at someone like Phyllidia Barlow, who's had a very late acclaim in her career, you know she was always kind of there, we all knew who she was, and the suddenly she has this huge success, I think that there might be such of a thing as communal absorption, where it occurs to a critical mass of people how significant someone is. So I'd thought I'd flag that up. 1.49.24

Alison: Yes. 1.49.26

Katie: Is that what you'd been thinking of? 1.49.27

Alison: Well kind of in a way because you hinted about this when you and your husband go to shows, or get engaged with the same painting at the same time. So that made me think about this group thing. 1.49.46

Katie: Critical mass, people talk about it in terms of epidemics or vaccinations and things like that. There's a certain kind of ratio where everything changes, the chemistry changes. 1.50.10

Alison: Yeah, like a tipping point. 1.50.11

Katie: A tipping point and that kind of stuff yes, and our esteemed colleague Brandon Taylor, who we both have worked with independently and since together, and one of the reasons I took the job at the University of Gloucestershire, because I knew we had these connections, but Brandon's an art historian and latterly a painter, and Andrew was one of the examiners in his second PhD in practice, he writes art historical essays about this kind of phenomenon, about how things build up and you get to a point where something is or something changes as a result of community. So it can result in recognition or... I'm just positing that recognition is an aspect of this because this is my research. And the other thing I was going to say, when people like Michael Fried talk about artists intentions it has the same... and not just Michael Fried, Jeremy Gilbert Roth paints but who else have I felt this about – Lyotard, so it assumes that everything has a kind of cause and effect, everything is rational, and I was going to ask you Alison, are you looking for something that is totally analyzable, are you looking for a pure intention in artists, or is it ok for artists who bridge, or shift from one camp to another? 1.52.29

Alison: I would say I'm not actually looking for anything in that respect, that it's more what I encounter through the research, so that might formulate ideas, but I'm not actually looking for something through my research. You cannot pin it down, and I'd be looking for a false positive if that was the case. So I suppose I'm researching the hypothesis of Fried and Diderot, and from that seeing where the dialogue is taking me, so seeing what commonalities arise, what constants, what variables, where the conversation is different through these interviews and round tables, they are the points from which I can compare, and obviously it's on a very small scale, but like I have always said I see this as a start of a dialogue, it's not like A plus B equals absorption. 1.53.40

Katie: When you read Fried, do you find he is quite dogmatic, where perhaps the position... 1.53.50

Alison: Well it's a love/hate thing totally. There are some points where I can see moments of clarity and very clever connections, and then other times I totally disagree, and I think that's quite common as well, something I've come across, people might be intrigued with the idea of absorption, but his kind of binary with his concept of theatricality/authenticity, that's the one that usually pushes people totally against him. And Stuart Elliot was saying why is theatricality not a price too high to pay, kind of this concept with all these things you're cutting off because of this

particular theory, and like you were saying... 1.54.42

Andrew: Not all theatre is the same. 1.54.43

Alison: Yeah, very much so. 1.54.45

Andrew: You know, whenever we're using linguistic constructs to argue a point they run out of room. 1.55.00

Alison: Yes, and that's something that also comes across is the lack in language, and how easy is it to establish it for artists, especially artists outside of the academy, if they're outside of the market then how does that language evolve? 15.19

Andrew: There are so many different markets, and there are so many different layers of endorsement that go on, so my studio is very near to White Cube, Bermondsey, and it's a great big shiny factory ship, that's kind of sucking up art and spitting it out fish fingers, you know which are sized according to the wallet of the person going in, and it almost seems to have no relationship at all to discourse about contemporary art, except for the fact that some very smart people that I know, some of whom I admire, and some of whom are personal friends end up getting paid much more reasonable fees than they might get for a public institution to write about some of their artists in that context. I also know some artists who exhibit there and they say the strange thing that artists whom I admire or may not know who've exhibited there end up looking banal in a way that they don't look in other contexts. 1.56.32

Katie: Like the Keefer show, it just looked plain ostentatious. It's like Anish Kapoor in the Turbine Hall, or anyone in the Turbine Hall, it just looks ostentatious, because it's about filling a space, and it's not. 1.56.50

Andrew: There's a huge problem, which is the social and economic problem of our age that everyone knows that care and attention, such as the small producer, you know the person with their free-range chickens on the side of a mountain somewhere in Wales or wherever, if they can't get a contract with a supplier that takes care of them and they end up having to sell their stuff to Tesco's Asda and Morrison's then it's very difficult for them to sustain what they're doing. 1.57.31

Katie: It changes the product. 1.57.30

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. In terms of art practice we're in a world where we're mirroring of those problems exactly. You can find a little ledge on the cliff you can somehow survive on, or you get sucked into that and you become something else. 1.57.49

Katie: Yes, you take on assistants, and you're not engaged in practice in the same way, you're more a kind of director. 1.57.57

Andrew: So in terms of what I've understood of the core interests that you have to do with absorption, and the word that we've been using a lot is attention and attentiveness. What triggers that has to be to do with not just contradiction, but also a constant need to disrupt, so in other words when things are going smoothly down that sort of path, and once things are in a position where one of any of the group of artists you've interviewed says 'Ok, well I'm really busy because I've got my first show at White Cube,

Bermondsey in nine months time so please send this to my new assistant' you know things are being taken into another world, which actually doesn't care, because it doesn't need to. 1.58.57

Alison: Yeah, so it then comes back down to the artist and their attentiveness and what route they're allowing their voice to be taken. 1.59.09

Andrew: Yeah, and also the last show was Theaster Gates, and obviously one of the things that he's doing, which is incredibly laudable is he's using the money he's making from the art world, the high end art world to channel back into projects in Chicago, which are very community based, and that's incredibly serious and you have to respect that, but it's still a shit show. So what's going on there? I don't quite know how to work it out. One thing I would say is that within that exhibition there was a video of some gospel singing in a large community church, which was un-credited, but it was there playing and it was incredibly beautiful and the people making that music were obviously very absorbed, because it was a moment when they were all worshipping. Now I would have probably been deeply annoyed if I'd had to sit through the whole service of the worship thing that was going on, but transmitted through this video it was the most absorbing thing about the whole exhibition, simply because those people believed in what they were doing, and the sound that they were making musically was actually very good. 2.00.26

Alison: It's a bit like Gordon and Parreno's 'Zidane' film. The footballer Zidane was filmed during one of his matches, he knows that he is being filmed, there are something like 24 different cameras focused on him, he is surrounded by the football crowds, he knows it's... 2.00.50

Andrew: And it's just focusing on him when he's standing around... 2.00.51

Alison: Yes. 2.00.51

Andrew: And he's not necessarily active. 2.00.52

Alison: But thinking about his next move, so it's very much about someone being absorbed, but also being very aware that they're being watched. 2.01.03

Andrew: Used to it. 2.01.04

Alison: Yes, but he knows he is being filmed for them as well as, so it's kind of that moment when... 2.01.15

Andrew: So he didn't head butt one of the opposing players that time? (laughter) 2.01.17

Alison: Obviously not, or it was edited. But yeah, so it's this moment of the authentic and the theatrical, and how we understand that. 2.01.27

Andrew: But in a way the goal posts have moved so much since Michael Fried's time... 2.01.36

Alison: Absolutely. 2.01.37

Andrew: And the kind of... 2.01.39

Alison: But Fried talks about Gordon and Parreno, it's one of the examples he uses. 2.01.44

Andrew: Well like Katie I haven't read that or his recent work, but there are all sorts of other problems just in terms of the area that all of the artists in this piece of research cover things like 'Zombie formalism', you know this new phrase, and 'Crapstraction', you know these things which are occurring within a territory which... 2.02.16

Ruth: I've not heard that. 2.02.16

Andrew: Have you not heard that before? 2.02.17

Ruth: No. 2.02.17

Katie: What was the other phrase you said? 2.02.17

Andrew: Zombie formalism? 2.02.19

Katie: Zombie formalism? 2.02.20

Andrew: Yes. 2.02.21

Katie: No. 2.02.21

Andrew: It refers specifically to people like Jacob Kassay, and me (laughter), no, Oscar Murillo, and that area. 2.02.37

Alison: Do you know how that term first arose, just out of curiosity? 2.02.39

Andrew: It's been re-quoted by a lot of people, but I forget who came up with it. 2.02.50

Dan: Jerry Saltz popularized it, but there was somebody else before. 2.02.53

Andrew: I won't look at it now, but it's another New York critic who came up with it and Jerry Saltz kind of popularized it. 2.02.59

Alison: I'm very intrigued how these new terms arise and how we as artists use them or is it something that is external to our practice, so you know a critic, or a review, or a paper that kind of... 2.03.15

Andrew: They're useful, because someone's, you know they're not just plucked out of the air, someone has initially said it and then someone, Jerry Saltz in this instance has reiterated it, because it seems to capture something that's going on, which in general terms is the opposite of what people who intelligently engage want to be happening. So it's a way of saying 'Ok this phrase actually puts all of our doubts into a kind of categorizable expression', and then you have to think about why and what we might do in order to not to find ourselves still in that sort of... 2.04.01

Ruth: They're both very judgmental terms. I'm looking at ethics, like language ethics, they're both very... because the word good is very kind of crapp. 2.04.11

Andrew: But in a sense going right back to Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg, it was all about judgment, in a sense there's this point that abstraction if you like has always felt (word unclear), or always felt like it's had to justify itself so a lot of Greenberg's effort is to do with saying 'This rests on the shoulders of history, this engages with the whole of human being, this actually has all these very powerful reasons for existing'. And it's almost like we're in the opposite situation now where it's not like we need to justify, because we know everything can be commodified and fetch high prices, although the obvious high prices for people like Picasso, just as equally an abstract painting by Gerhard Richter ends up going for huge amounts of

money, so we're in a different situation where those different phrases are probably judgmental, because they have to say look it needs to be more fractured than Zombie Formalism presents it, it needs to be more cultured, it needs to be harder to pin down. 2.05.45

Alison: I think there's also something about maybe something on a grass roots sort of level that the dialogue, for instance things like this where artists get together, whether it be an artists talk at a show or even a talk in front of work at a Private View, those kind of things, enabling that kind of dialogue to emerge, and see how that sort of brings in the new terms, rather than such a high end show, a paid writer, that route. I'm intrigued to how things might enter into common usage. 2.06.27

Andrew: That route of sort of Jerry Saltz, he's a sort of salon, you know, nothings changed in those terms. It would be fare to say that everybody knows that the real conversations go on elsewhere, quite where is going to shift all the time, I also think that sometimes conversations where we really don't know what we're really talking about are really boring, and at times they're incredibly interesting, because they seem to bounce from one territory to another. To go back to the idea of Zombie Formalism, you know the living dead, doing something again and again, which was maybe done when they were alive, that's the insulting aspect of it, the utterly unaware. I got into huge trouble writing my research for the last REF, because I used the expression 'cultural amnesia', and one of the main Professors of design at Kingston took exception to it, and I think well why? It's for the same reason, because it is actually part of the problem that when people say they don't like something, or don't think something is relevant it's usually because they haven't paid attention to it, or don't know about it, or don't understand what the roots of it might be keep using it. I'm going to keep using it, even if it's just because it annoys certain academics, in this sense you have a fairly... 2.08.32

Alison: But what was their problem with it, I don't understand? 2.08.32

Andrew: I don't know exactly, I'd love to know. 2.08.35

Katie: I think that sometimes when you tread on, especially with Professors, if your research traverses theirs, so if he takes the opposite position he might completely understand, but it happens. 2.08.57

Alison: Surely that's a healthy thing? 2.08.56

Andrew: It ought to be. I mean in this case this is the Professor of Design History, but

in a sense because one of the things I found myself doing is looking into art history. There's a sense in which we as artists move in all sorts of areas of thought which are not our own, we colonize them and we get it wrong, because we're not trained in that area, so I would be the first to admit that I'm not in the correct sense of the usage of not doing art history, however... 2.09.31

Katie: You're making art history. (group laughter) I don't know why you're all laughing? (laughter) I mean you're certainly interpreting it. I mean your practice is so reliant on... I mean all our practices are reliant on... you can't read abstract painting without history, because otherwise if it's isolated, or it doesn't have a heritage, then it's a decoration, but you specifically take references, and I do too. I take Pollock and these lyrical abstractionists, and criticize through placing something else on top of it. 2.10.25

Andrew: I mean in a way going right back to that Abstract Critical launch event, that was the conversation which really should have happened between the four of you, the panelists what you've just described, the idea of implicit criticism of certain areas of lyrical abstraction, but criticism as a form of dialogue and conversation. So conversing with that without subscribing to it's set of kind of tropes, and that is what is also offensive to the old guard who were there, who'd invested in Abstract Critical as an organization in order to sort of rebuild their reputations and put them in their rightful place in the cannon. And this is what's so extraordinary looking at it from the outside as an audience member, and seeing the potential for something very interesting to happen, but also knowing at the same time that because of the overriding pressures of the people who had set it up, those (use full? - words unclear) were never going to happen. 2.11.42

Katie: Well Barry and Alexis are fine, but if you have Mel Gooding in the Chair... because he subscribes to those dogmas. 2.11.53

Andrew: Yes, and no. He subscribes to a lot of other things. I think people like Robin Greenwood are a bit scared of him because he knows a lot more about it than they do, and of course because he has written monographs on John Hoyland, and that's a weird one. I'm looking forward to this John Hoyland show that Damien Hirst has put together. Newport Street, his new gallery, but the interesting thing is Damien Hirst represents everything that annoys me in terms of his own art practice, but he's very shrewd, and he's actually done a good thing I'm sure, and I'm very curious to see what the exhibition is like, because someone like John Hoyland needs reconsidering, needs reinvestigation, needs re-presenting. 2.13.11

Katie: I know what he's absorbed. (laughter) 2.13.14

Dan: We might know what the John Hoyland show's like, I mean it's going to be very good to begin with, and ... 2.13.22

Andrew: Then it's going to fade out. 2.13.23

Dan: And then it's going to fade out. 2.13.24

Andrew: Exactly. 2.13.27

Katie: But John Hoyland stands, for me (I've seen him talk when he was alive, and he was drunk) I find his work deeply uncritical. I was bringing up this idea that the kind of impulses, the intuitive, the idea that you're absorbed by a force that takes you over, and you just go and make your stuff, I would say he pretty much embodies that approach. And yet they do look quite formulaic, they're kind of predictable, there's a splashed bit and... 2.14.22

Dan: Squirts paint in this corner. 2.14.25

Andrew: But the earlier work, which we all agree is much better, works because it has some sort of structure. 2.14.36

Katie: Yeah, ok. 2.14.36

Dan: And there's a quality to those very early ones, which was antagonistic actually to see on that scale, that's what I would say. 2.14.47

Katie: Especially if you put it into context of the time. 2.14.48

Dan: Yeah. 2.14.48

Andrew: It's to do with situation, the exhibition and all the things that were being set up at that point in time. Therefore that does actually need a more sustained area of research than will support the Damien Hirst exhibition I've no doubt, but it's quite interesting, I was talking to J.J. Charlesworth, who has a PhD, but it's parked at the moment I think to do with research and critical writing in the 1970's. So what is the writing that surrounds that movement, and that time, and similarly I don't know if any of you saw a really wonderful exhibition at Raven Row, which Jo Melvin put together, about those five, did you see that? 2.15.45

Dan: Yeah, yeah. 2.15.45

Andrew: It was about five editions of Studio International, and it involved Barry Flanagan of course, Anthony Hill and Gillian Wise, and John Ernest the constructivist who I've been looking at, and Daniel Buren. It was putting their work in context of what Studio International was doing at the time. And the interesting thing about this was the detailed art historical research, but it was also very alive as an exhibition in terms of its aesthetic and Raven Row is a beautiful space any way, but from my point of view as a viewer it allowed me to sort of re-absorb myself into what those works were. So early Barry Flanagan's before the bronze works. That idea is very important now, that things get re-explored, we investigate them and re-contextualize, otherwise everything operates on so many assumptions, so people think they know what a Newman is without even maybe revisiting a Barnett Newman painting, or seeing an exhibition, or they might think they know what any one of them... 2.18.33

Ruth: Are you in touch with Anna Mazinska? I saw you on a panel with her, and she was talking about this trend to re-canonize, or for the first time canonizing artists from South America who haven't been canonized before. 2.18.55

Andrew: Yes, I am very much in touch with her, but it's interesting because with the South American artists it's happened an awful lot. Again there are economic factors driving that, I mean Patricia Phelps de Cisneros is on the board of Modern Art, New York, as well as being hugely wealthy and building up this collection, so suddenly, I remember going to MOMA in 2011, and there were these Waldemar Cordero works hung in those rooms near the Jackson Pollocks' and the rest of it. Suddenly you've got these Brazilian artists, they can stand shoulder to shoulder with the giants, and inevitably, on a cynical level, marketizes their work. At the same time, in terms of the British equivalent of the Brazilian Concrete, Neo-Concrete artists, they've not been re-valued in that way, so the Tate isn't presenting Constructive or Systems art, and saying 'Look, we were doing this in the 70's in the same way as Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape and Lygia Clark were'. So therefore there's this 'Well maybe the Brits just weren't as good at it'. 2.20.23

Katie: I think that re-canonization is constant, it's what curators do, that's what it is. I know we're in Andrew's field of expertise, I don't propose to be an expert in the same area as Andrew, but I am incredibly conscious, we all are, that the art world has been very Eurocentric, or American like our politics and our economics, we import Americana. Its only been very recent, this century looking at Latin America, South America, Asia, Australasia for import, it's always been an export, it's always been one way traffic before, so I think that curators like to uncover what's been under our

noses all of the time, and re- expose it, Phyllidia Barlow being an example. The idea of David Saunders getting an exhibition at Mummery Schnelle, through the 90's he used to drive me absolutely bonkers with his bitter ranting about how he'd been overlooked, how no one took him seriously, and all these young upstarts coming up, and I used to say to him 'Well use your experience' I dictated letters for him, and he would just rant. 2.22.19

Andrew: Yeah, that sort of simple human thing of going right back to this idea of how we might absorb ourselves, or how to absorb other people in the studio, if you get really bitter you can't do it anymore. 2.22.37

Katie: I was thinking about that when you were talking earlier, and I think that bitterness is another aspect of that kind of wanting to engage, being discursive and generosity, and when you were talking about Anthony Hill you were saying 'No, he wasn't bitter, he had an argument' but bitterness is definitely a kind of mid career... and you do find it in early careers, people get really envious to the point where they cease to put out, and they just object, and it's not very constructive. To be really inventive and creative, and make new stuff happen you have to give and take, otherwise it's not going to, you can't expect to be just a kind of megaphone, and put out stuff out that doesn't consume other peoples work, allow people access to the mechanisms. 2.23.37

Alison: It's actually very interesting to hear you talk about the studio as a place for absorption, because this brings me back to something you said Andrew about organizing your studio as a space to be absorbed in. I'll just read out the exact extract. 2.24.06

Katie: Is that why you have that chintzy wallpaper? (group laughter) 2.24.06

Andrew: Plush carpet, velvet banquette. (group laughter) 2.24.08

Alison: So 'So far as my studio practice, the studio is very much designed to do everything it possibly can to create the scenario where I am critically absorbed in my work while I am here', and that kind of makes me raise the question: is absorption something that you can do through an apparatus such as the studio, the gallery? 2.24.38

Andrew: I'd have to put that in context that because I'm Chair at Tannery Arts, and therefore within the studio as the Drawing Room's principle tenant, there are always issues to deal with, voluntary. It's a form of engagement, which I am happy to take a

lead in, but for that reason my studio is behind two doors at the end of very dark corridors. So that's what I was talking about, that people really need to want to knock on the door, and I need to really know that there are kind of two doors, an a dark corridor, so all these layers. 2.25.19

Ruth: That's really similar to Guston's curtain. That people would come into the studio, he would allow them in, but only when he was really ready would he pull the curtain so they could actually come in. 2.25.30

Andrew: That sounds a bit more theatrical, but I'm not going to compare myself to Guston. (group laughter) 2.25.36

Alison: Well it's interesting all these layers, kind of like your work is. 2.25.41

Andrew: But it's a tool, so I think everyone attunes to the space they have, and at the moment, until September I've got a very nice studio I'm very lucky to have, but whatever space you have, even if it's a bedroom at home you attune it to what you want to do, and that's normal, you know it's just a instrument. 2.26.14

Alison: I suppose it's the way you made it sound like it enabled you, to reach that.

Andrew: Yeah. 2.26.22

Katie: Well everything is arranged. When you saw my studio in particular disarray because I realized I had an infestation and brought everything out, and it's much more ordered now, but there is something about your studio that looks very like you know your interest in architecture in your practice as well, and you've also selected a studio that has this lift shaft wall, that supporting wall that's in the corner? 46.56

Andrew: I built that. 2.26.57

Katie: You built that? 2.26.58

Andrew: Yeah. 2.26.59

Katie: Oh, well I don't know why that surprises me (group laughter), having seen you hang exhibitions. 2.27.05

Alison: He's put his architect hat on. 2.27.06

Katie: Yes. And also he had one built at work as well for the students to use in the gallery. 2.27.11

Andrew: Yeah, building walls is a favourite occupation, it took me about six months. Yeah, it's probably to do with a particular type of practice. Not everyone needs that in the same way. I mean some people can work on a table in their kitchen, and their work is absolutely amazing, and that's what they do and how they do it. But it can't be anything prescriptive I think. 2.27.34

Alison: Because you do have a particular relationship to architecture especially in the hang don't you? We were talking about constructing the spectator, and how you might consider the spectator through practice. 2.27.47

Andrew: Yes, in a sense there will be hidden geometries in the way work is hung, which are disruptive geometries, so things are not based on a lateral line, but based on a very specific way outside that. 2.28.05

Katie: Are you talking about your own work, or work generally? 2.28.06

Andrew: Well how I hang my own work, but how I might hang a group show as well. 2.28.12

Alison: Because the shows that you have spoken about in a negative way, it's been very much about the space as well, so like Raven Row – a beautiful space, whereas White Cube... so it sounds like it really influences. 2.28.23

Andrew: But that show also, I don't know who Jo Melvin worked with, or if she entirely hung it herself, but it was magnificently installed. Sometimes you can see exhibitions, a lot of exhibitions at Tate Modern for example where the conventions of museum hanging, the need for security distance, all of these things plus something I only learnt when I worked with Leeds Art Gallery about four years ago, and that is when you've arranged loans from important collections, if you suddenly find that you don't have enough room you still have to hang them because it's highly embarrassing having arranged an important work on loan. So it's almost like you've invited those valuable people you've got to accommodate them, so all of these things kind of stultify, and the Tate Modern is a case in point with that, but to actually articulate work in a space is very complicated thing, because there's all these different imperatives. 2.29.42

Katie: Because I've worked with you doing it, and you have an alchemical ability, and in a sense what happens in your paintings is that space gets compressed into a distillation, it's a flat projection of a 3D mode, and you have a spatial awareness that is quite rare in painters. I mean I think a lot of people including myself, and one of the

reasons I'm a painter is because I have absolutely no spatial sensibility at all, and when I used to make sculpture in early art school I saw everything as facets, you know 2D arrangements, everything was a surface, so it was a series of surfaces. Whereas Andrew is very clear when you see him putting work in space, he has this kind of 3D, maybe in 4D awareness. 2.30.50

Andrew: But it's possibly because I can't make paintings you know in a way, I mean that seriously, but it's also possibly because you have this implication if you like from the regressive old guard that I've worked with in art schools, obviously meaning none of the present company, who sort of say that if a painting is good all you need is a plumb line, and you just put them in a line on the wall with a convenient amount of space between them, and that's all you need to do to make an exhibition. And if somehow you manipulate by putting paintings at different heights, or different intervals, if that makes a painting look good it inherently implies the painting is not good enough. In other words it's like saying someone looks good because they've had a spray tan, or bought a nice suit, or... 2.31.52

Katie: That's what's so interesting about Mary Heilmann and David Reed. I've only seen the one image on Hyperallergic. 2.32.01

Alison: The 'anti' hang? 2.32.01

Katie: Yeah, the 'anti' hang, and it's an assertion, it's not an anti anything, it's a collaboration, it's a deliberate statement and it's a re-making. So we've got these two autonomous practices represented in these two objects, and the artists have opted to make something new. You've got the ingredients, but you've also got this new thing and it brings us back to temporality, a moment in time, particularly because however open minded they are, other projects they may have done, these works will be taken apart again, and won't belong together for eternity, it's just for the duration of the exhibition. 2.32.54

Andrew: And something exists in the tension between them, and the way that they're not being installed in an accommodating manner, and I think in a sense it's something in your work operates on a level of disruption, where you might start a painting where you disrupt it with a technique such as drawing (word unclear) lines to join things up, and then because you've then come up with this 'solution', you follow it. 2.33.41

Katie: Sometimes I follow it and sometimes I contradict it. 2.33.44

Andrew: And then you contradict. There's always the sense that there are things needing to be tripped up. There isn't a finite methodology. 2.34.00

Katie: It's what Dan was saying when we were having coffee about how change is always good, that even if you make a mistake, it's always good to put yourself in a position of questioning any practice, any dogma, any value. 2.34.19

Alison: It's healthy. 2.34.19

Katie: It's healthy, and then you can always revert. If you've rediscovered the necessity of a practice then great, or you might discover something new and you might extend knowledge or acquire new knowledge. 2.34.41

Alison: There's this thing that came up about the innovative and the new being uncomfortable, unwieldy, indigestible. I suppose does that tap into your unknowing, or not knowing, suspicion, all these things that the way you disrupt? So a discomfort to you? If something happens that you're not expecting, then it's indigestible. 55.02

Katie: Oh I see what you mean. 2.35.21

Alison: Once you encounter that, you embrace it in a way? 2.35.25

Katie: Well I suppose, and more to the point, you get an entropy, it's almost the inverse, there's an entropy from looking at the same thing again and again, and in terms of absorption, the opposite of perhaps Stuart Elliot's experience of disregard, and suddenly having your head turned, you know you can have your head turned like John Hoyland hypothesis, that engagement can dissipate slowly, it can bleed, and you end up with apathy, and I guess the one thing you really want to avoid as an artist is apathy, unless you're really going to use the quotidian repetition as a kind of meditative strategy. You don't want to have intellectual apathy, you've always got to be turning over. 2.36.34

Alison: So that really could be the antithesis of absorption? Not theatricality, but... 2.36.41

Andrew: Indifference. 2.36.41

Katie: You're right, I throw paint at the canvas because it's not there and suddenly it's there, or I disrupt what I do so I have to challenge what I do, but I think that many, many artists, and others, writers, deliberately engage in very work-like activities like doing lots of layers of dotted lines, whatever it happens to be to get into a meditative

state to force themselves into a field where they can empty their heads and really start contemplating. So it looks very quotidian, very jobby, but at the same time it is a form of this kind of absorption, that by doing something absolutely you wouldn't expect, you know it might be something like sanding or removing. 2.37.43

Andrew: Yeah it's that idea of preparation. 2.37.51

Katie: I talked to Tom Chamberlain about this a lot. 2.37.53

Andrew: Yeah, he would really be a good example in that instance, as an artist who's working method is quite meticulous, involves a lot of sanding, and rubbing away. I can also remember there was also a Barry Schwabsky essay on Thomas Nozkowski somewhere if I have remembered rightly he talks about painters' obsession in preparing the surface, and because his wife is an artist he talked to her about preparing things in those terms, because his work is almost the opposite of that. It's so full of deletions, and corrections, and sort of false starts, and moves in other directions, but that over time has become the process that enables him to work. It's another example of an artist who, until he was over 60, his career suddenly took off. 2.39.11

Katie: Well he did deflect it like the Belgian abstract painter whose name I forgotten.

Andrew: Raoul De Keyser? 2.39.15

Katie: Yeah, he also deflected it, but Nozkowski is another example of surprise, well hey I don't know about that but he has this kind of Zelig-like capacity to, you know you can tell it's a Nozkowski, but there is in some ways it's very difficult to describe what the constant thread is in his works. So he totally reinvents himself, him and Charlene Von Heyl as another example of that, you know this ability to abandon handwriting or signature in its conventional forms. 2.40.03

Andrew: But it's interesting that similarly David Reed in that interview talking to Mary Heilmann about her using the wrong colours in the wrong way in terms of the paradigm he was involved with at that moment. 2.40.22

Katie: She's older than him isn't she? 2.40.22

Andrew: She is yeah, but he was talking about when he saw her work in the 90's I think. 2.40.43

Dan: Presumably that quote that you're talking about is to do with expectations, so

he's expecting one thing, and it's not doing it, therefore it's dismissed until he looks longer. 2.40.54

Andrew: Exactly, until he comes back to it later. 2.41.00

Katie: But it also insinuates some kind of orthodoxy, you know, this is how we do things. 2.41.05

Andrew: Exactly. 2.41.05

Dan: And that 's the actual apathy isn't it? The apathy is to actually re-do what's been done. 2.41.12

Andrew: Yes. 2.41.14

Dan: You know, whether it was once ground breaking, or seemed exciting to you then re-do it as you know... 2.41.20

Andrew: Thank you both, I completely lost that (group laughter). Heilmann come to Camberwell to do that rather marvelous lecture when her show was on at the South London Gallery, did you organize that as well? 2.41.32

Dan: I did indeed. 2.41.34

Katie: Yeah. It's not the first time I've seen Mary Heilmann talk, I saw her in the Starr Auditorium at the Tate, and the talk she did for you was much more interesting. She gave away much more. 2.41.51

Dan: She's very generous like that. 2.41.51

Katie: Yes she was, and one of the things that was really great was that she told her about her sources, but also that she might be quite likely to do something, and I suppose it's quite implicit in her work, on a found site as much as a found object, and I thought that was quite... I don't know why I'm saying that in relation to... just because we were talking about Mary Heilmann 2.42.20

Andrew: It's a very outward looking approach to what her paintings are, rather than her sort of internalizing things for herself, but then coming to an audience and saying my process is a secret that I'm prepared to talk about a bit, but only so much, but it's much more... extravert would be the wrong word, but it's... 2.42.46

Katie: More generous. 2.42.46

Andrew: Yeah. 2.42.47

Katie: But I think over time she has changed her stance, because her Starr auditorium lecture... I don't know if either of you were there? 2.42.56

Andrew: No 2.42.56

Katie: It was much less generous, you know. 2.43.02

Dan: Because she does play music or something? 2.43.02

Katie: She played music and... 2.43.08

Andrew: Shows slides, plays music and doesn't do anything? 2.43.08

Dan: Well yes she doesn't really say anything. If I remember that one correctly, she just – it's a soundtrack. 2.43.17

Andrew: I'd love to see that. (laughter) 2.43.22

Katie: I thought someone have patented that when I saw her talk as well, and it just said 'I'm an airhead' (laughter), but when Mary Heilmann did it, it had some gravitas. But I think there is this thing with abstraction, with abstract painting, I never betray any visual sources, just because I don't want to have a misinterpretation, or risk misinterpretation of my work, so if I decide to go and make a painting about this colour and this colour together, with that bowl of biscuits (referring to objects on the table) because I've seen it, I would never take a photograph and show it in a lecture, because people would make associations, you've always got some lummoX in the front row who says 'Abstraction means that you are taking real life and pulling it apart' so you don't want to have those kinds of associations pinned on you. I think we all do it, there are certain things you would never tell a journalist. There are certain things I would never tell students, that I'd be very happy to tell Andrew anything about my sources. I trust him to contextualize it, and use it appropriately. 2.45.01

Andrew: But it's interesting because Thomas Nozkowski is always very guarded of the fact that there are biographical moments that trigger his work. You know it sounds like yours are more pragmatic than that in terms of visual stimuli in general. 2.45.22

Katie: I'll give you an example. My younger daughter, when she was a baby, we were in the Museum of childhood, and she put on a Hiawatha wig, and looked in the

mirror (she was a tiny baby, she was only a few months old and she was tiny anyway), and it was utterly ridiculous. I had this photo and then the hard drive died and I lost all her baby photos, but I have this memory of the photo, and I did a painting that wasn't inspired by that, it's always very slight, these visual inspirations, but having finished the painting I looked at it and I thought it reminded me of this photographic portrait that no longer existed of her, and I named the painting 'Miminwig'. I think the point is because these moments are incidental for me that it isn't really subject matter. I wouldn't want anyone to... because it's easy to latch onto and assume that it is subject matter, and the reason why I said journalist is because they're always looking for a story and there might not be one there. 2.46.34

Dan: But it's not the work, I mean that's the point isn't it? It's a stimulus like... 2.46.45

Alison: So far removed. 2.46.45

Dan: Yeah, so far removed. It might be absolutely crucial, but that's not it. 2.46.52

Ruth: It's not the headline. 2.46.53

Katie: I prefer that it's not in the work. 2.46.59

Ruth: I was thinking of Mikey Cuddihy and the James in Limbo' paintings, which are about her friends son who I think was not sure what to do at University, so they're very mundane. 2.47.12

Dan: I know Mickey's paintings well. 2.47.13

Ruth: But because the work was about that it's ok that the story emerges, it sort of represents that conversation. It's kind of ok when the work's about that. 2.47.23

Katie: Yes, it's not really about James, it's about limbo. 2.47.27

Ruth: Well it's about the telephone conversation with a friend. 2.47.31

Katie: But isn't it also an analogy for the kind of limbo that we all experience, I mean it's that abstraction? 2.47.42

Andrew: But limbo is like liminality, it is between that isn't it? 2.47.46

Katie: It's between heaven and hell Andrew, you should know that. (laughter) 2.47.50

Andrew: Yes, yes, absolutely. There's an amazing painting in Albi, has anyone been to Albi Cathedral? 2.48.04

Dan: Yes, I've been there. I'm trying to think what is this painting? 2.48.05

Andrew: It's on the west wall. It's a painting of judgment of heaven and hell, and hell is incredibly graphic. It's a bit like paradise lost in Milton, as opposed to paradise regained. Hell always makes a better subject matter. Don't know where we were going with that? 2.48.29

Ruth: Limbo.2.48.33

Andrew: Limbo. Yes, but suspended, when something's suspended between things, I think that that happens a lot. 2.48.48

Alison: That reminds me of a quote in 'Shape as Form' where Fried talks about objecthood, having to defeat objecthood or suspend it, and Stuart was talking about this and saying does it allow a space for us to work with theatricality and the opposite to absorption if this suspension... 2.49.26

Katie: Well one thing that really strikes me is that what could be more theatrical than painting? I mean even if I'm not in Dan's studio, or Andrew's studio, or your studios when you're making your work, you know it's implicit, the gesture is implicit. 1.09.40

Alison: Well Fried and Diderot talk about that paradox: yes we're painting for a beholder, but don't ever acknowledge them. 2.49.47

Katie: Not even that, I mean that all this activity that we do to absorb ourselves is theatre, so it's theatre without an audience, you know the pacing, the smoking if you smoke, the drinking coffee, or whatever your mannerisms are, standing back and looking, clicking your fingers, I don't know? 2.50.16

Dan: It's very nice. I'd never thought about that before, it's a really nice thought. 2.50.19

Katie: I don't think it's entirely... it's not my thought, well it is, but I nicked it. (laughter) You know people like Jacqueline Humphries is a very good example of that, and there's a brilliant interview on Bomb Magazine's website between Jacqueline Humphries and Cecily Brown. I think Cecily Brown is interviewing Jacqueline Humphries actually, but obviously both practices are cited. You can't look at those works without this image in your head of her doing that and Yves Kline, the painted body pressed, or Abigail Lanes ink pad arse. 2.51.21

Andrew: She didn't use her own bum apparently. 2.51.23

Katie: But Gillian Carnegie did. (group laughter) 2.51.28

Andrew: So which is more authentic? (laughter) 2.51.32

Katie: I just mean this... even looking at Stuart's there you know? The whole point is that this activity, which isn't documented except in the finished painting, but it's implicit. It's the outtakes of the movie, and we know that it happens, that's part of the whole thing about being hand-made as opposed to... and one thing you lose when you become a factory is that it becomes a kind of hive activity as opposed to...  
2.52.12

Andrew: When you think about the practice of someone Raoul De Keyser, firstly that it became present, widely present quite late, how did it really one doesn't know, but there was obviously a sense in which early age sort of hidden away, working as a sports journalist, but also within his work there is a radical commitment to re-working work, so paintings that had been exhibited in museums get re-done, back in the studio sort of 10 years later. He was quite explicit about that when he was alive, but there's another almost anti- example equally interesting because the painter René Daniëls was a younger, but an influence on De Keyser when he had his show at Camden, a very beautiful at Camden a few years ago. He was there at the opening, but because he had this massive stroke nobody quite knows how to communicate with him, and he doesn't communicate with other people, and it'd got this little section of new work that he'd made, these little marker pen drawings on canvas, and he always took the marker pen around, but Jenny Lomax told me they actually had to have the security guards around the masterworks from the Stedelijk or wherever because they were worried he'd whip his marker pen and do more work on them. And it's interesting, because within the mind of that man who's had this massive stroke, we don't know how he communicates with his world, there is still an imperative to go and re-enter... 2.54.03

Dan: It's like the De Kooning argument really. 2.54.04

Andrew: Yeah, the late De Kooning's. 2.54.05

Dan: Yeah, the late De Kooning's. 2.54.06

Ruth: Isn't there that myth about Renoir or someone turning up in the Orsay or something, and he'd been really bothered by a painting that just wasn't right, and eventually one day he came in to do the bit that needed to be fixed. 2.54.20

Katie: Was it own work or someone else's? 2.54.22

Ruth: His own work, yeah. 2.54.23

Katie: We were talking about that earlier, and there was another aspect that absolutely drives commercial galleries nuts, if you change work in your studio that they have on their books. (group laughter) They've shown it to the client, and the client's umming and ahing, and the work doesn't exist any more. 2.54.48

Andrew: They ask is that work in your studio, well it doesn't actually exist anymore. 2.54.54

Katie: Yeah, so I do it almost as a provocation sometimes. I've got some very old work from 2000/2001 out in my studio now, because I look at it and think it's bone idle, you know talking of theatre, is there some kind of movie of my life where I have to preserve this old work? So I could do better now so I'm going to use it as a ground, treat it as a found object to re-work it, because what is this kind of imaginary archive. Andrew's been very helpful with that because he destroys a lot of his work as well that he doesn't want to have... 2.55.35

Andrew: I once had an embarrassing experience putting a load of un-destroyed work in a skip, and this very nice woman who does yoga somewhere else in our studios came up to me in the street and said 'You're Andrew Bick aren't you?' I said 'Yes' she said 'I've got a piece of work of yours, yeah I took it out of a skip and googled you'. (group laughter) And I thought oh shit. 2.56.07

Katie: A friend of mine has got an Ofili from when she was a student at Chelsea. 2.56.11

Andrew: That she found in a skip? 2.56.11

Katie: She said to him, and he said 'Oh you can have that'. 2.56.18

Andrew: Yeah. But it's how things release themselves into the world you know? Although it's related to what galleries are doing with work, and what they would do with your inventory. I mean another colleague, Adam Gillam, who Katie and I have both worked with in different art schools, and I've curated Adam into shows, used to work with very disreputable galleries where she had some work in a show in New York, and they'd never shipped it back to him, and he was taking a trip of students to New York and went into that gallery about a year and a half later and discovered his work because they had never had the money from his London gallery to return it to

him, discovered it all mashed up and shoved in a bin, and Adam's commendably unprecious about his work, which is quite ephemeral stuff, but obviously he was horrified, and said 'That's my work' and they said 'Well Keith Talent never gave us the money to send it back. 2.57.14

Ruth: They went bust didn't they. 2.57.28

Dan: Yeah, there was a court case in Finland wasn't there? 2.57.33

Ruth: And everyone just had to move out of the studios with no notice. 2.57.35

Andrew: Were you in those studios? 2.57.38

Ruth: No friends were. 2.57.39

Andrew: They were in the same building as Tannery Arts is. That's a whole other story, they were in breach of their lease, because they were allowing people to sleep in the studios.

Ruth: Well that was when they were on Vyner Street. 2.57.49

Andrew: Ah. 2.57.51

Katie: L.A.F, they put a shower in, and I thought, why would you put a shower in if no one's sleeping here? 2.57.58

Ruth: Oh I know, it's recently changed, but more than half the people were living there I think. 2.58.03

Katie: Yeah, it's horrible. 2.58.03

Ruth: It's not now it's been taken over by Acme, but it was, it was unspoken. 2.58.11

Katie: That's awful, absolutely awful. 2.58.13

Ruth: Like most of the studios are converted with living accommodation, and people had piped the plumbing into their studio. 2.58.20

Andrew: But how can people afford, you know this goes back to the question we were talking about earlier. How can people afford to sustain a practice... 2.58.30

Andrew: Well yes, exactly. 2.58.31

Katie: Andrew has this whole new... 2.58.39

Andrew: New Creative Market Studios. 2.58.42

Katie: So it's a series of symposia that Andrew has been organizing. What I was going to say was that in some senses it's a deep... I mean we are a product of our generation, I'm very lucky, I live in a house, I own my own house and studio, although with loans and so on, but it's because I'm of a certain age and dear Aunt Doris didn't have any kids when she died, but having this kind of practice and having this lifestyle is perhaps, because I'm very concerned that there is a political message disseminated by everything we do including abstract painting, and that's what motivates me to make it, but I think there is this unpalatable aspect of it which it almost becomes ostentatious, as a declaration of a certain type of status of I do it because I can, or I've got a London studio. 2.59.44

Alison: Well that ties back to privilege as well then doesn't it? 2.59.44

Dan: But it's very decadent. 2.59.50

Katie: Which is the one thing that as abstractionists we try to avoid, that it's not about decoration or embellishment, but a serious activity, that it's an intellectual pursuit and so on, but yet it is a bit kind of like ladies who lunch, or footballers wives. 3.00.08

Andrew: Or tennis players husbands. 3.00.08

Katie: You know having a partner that supports your practice. 3.00.17

Andrew: But I mean it's also difficult in the sense that the people. The YBA's who've become prominent, the Chris Ofili's, there's a certain bling that goes with that, you know, someone like Tracey Emin is a fully signed up conservative who was going to leave the country if she had to pay 50% tax. 3.00.41

Katie: She's also a working class kid made good thing isn't it? 3.00.43

Andrew: Yeah, but there's a lot of things that need to be readjusted in the way institutions work, not just universities and art schools, but in the way public museums work, and why is it for example that someone like Penelope Curtis, who doesn't make things easy for people about isn't about entertainment? Why is it she got drummed out of Tate Britain because audience numbers weren't as big as Tate Modern? 3.01.17

Katie: It's the BBC argument isn't it? 3.01.17

Andrew: Well exactly. There's something that it's fine if what we do in visual art is

part of the entertainment industry, you know. 3.01.29

Alison: Yeah, there's this whole thing about private and public, and Stuart was talking about this, how those boundaries are kind of blending, how the beholder isn't just so much the beholder now, they're producer as well, through the content that they produce whether it's a selfie in front of a work, or it's a film, or it's a photograph... 3.01.51

Andrew: And also the feedback questionnaire you know, which is an inevitable part of any transaction, you buy something online and you get a questionnaire, like 'How was it for you?' 3.01.58

Dan: Isn't this a question to do with audience, historically, looking back through the history of painting, who the audience is for the work is very, very different at different times? At the moment we live in a culture where there is a feeling from Tate Modern, for example, that there is meant to be masses of people. 3.02.23

Katie: Well it's also to do with metrics, you know, what you can and can't measure, what Andrew was saying earlier that it doesn't matter if only people from this building go there, but they then disseminate it. 3.02.35

Andrew: You can see that Tate Modern model being trotted out even to the way the Whitworth has been beautifully refurbished. You know you have an elegant café and you have the wide spaces and you have a... 3.02.49

Katie: Shop? 3.02.49

Andrew: Shops selling luxury, you know, aesthetically enhanced... 3.02.59

Dan: Silk scarves, designs for a wallpaper collection perhaps? 3.03.01

Andrew: Yeah. 3.03.01

Katie: And Richard Woods, his little sideline, apparently the South Bank Centre sells his furniture, but the shop and the café is a known phenomena. I did my undergraduate dissertation on museums and Brandon was my dissertation tutor. So the shop and the café, the experience that they add is very much part of what a museum is, and it's not necessarily the same as what we do as we make the stuff. Maybe contemporary art is slightly outside of... maybe that's where there's a kind of distinction between contemporary and modern, that if it's contemporary you don't have that celebrity you know maybe where Gerhard Richter has crossed into both

camps and is still alive. 3.04.27

Alison: So I we have covered lots here today. Given the questions that I've asked you, and we've discussed, are there different terms, phrases, or questions that you might apply? Is there anything that has come to mind that you have thought that's something we haven't entered into or something that is missing? 3.04.54

Katie: I wouldn't have reflected on absorption in my own practice without being prompted to do so. 3.05.10

Alison: Yes, that's important, because obviously I am looking at an art historical through painting practice today, and how that might map from one to the other. 3.05.24

Dan: Has it been interesting for you? (directed at collaborators)3.05.29

Katie: It has, very much so. I mean it's always a good discipline to take a lens and a context. It's like being in a group exhibition. It's a very particular context. This group of creators, and this argument, and to have your work put in that; it's a privilege actually, for someone to take the energy to contextualize your work and put it in an essay or a discussion, and it's part of the impetus of making the work. So thank you Alison. 3.06.13

Alison: No thank you. 3.06.17

Katie: And thank you Dan. (group laughter) 3.06.17

Andrew: Yes, I would just reiterate that, but also to say that I think it's timely, because of what is going on at the moment, because of the shifts, but also because of (we mentioned Abstract Critical), but if you look at all the different online kind of sides that there are, you know you've got Abstraction.org, you know there's Paint Club, there's Turps Banana, Paint Britain, not just in the UK. There's this sense in which there's a shift, you know, just to ask a very simple question 'Why are a lot of young artists and art students making abstract paintings now?' 3.07.16

Katie: There's a very pragmatic reason, you know Helen Hayward who does Art Car Boot, she did an undergraduate degree in sculpture, and as soon as she went and got a studio she started painting, and I thought well you would wouldn't you? If you'd been trained to be a welder, which is what she was, what interested her, then there's a kind of pragmatism that painting is a more portable practice than some others; film production for example where you need a cast of thousands. So it is something you

could do in a small space. 3.07.56

Andrew: But it also satisfies certain needs in the individual, which are part of your questions. 3.08.03

Alison: Yes. 3.08.04

Andrew: And words that have come up in the discussion this morning, words like contemplative, why are we still using those words, and why do we need to contemplate you know? If you like to just put the mind 'out of gear' and look at something without kind of cognitively measuring precisely what it is you're doing, it's not the same thing as reading you know to look at this that way, to read it is one thing, but to contemplate it that way is all that way. 3.08.41

Katie: And also the need to draw connections, and make allusions across different disciplines, like you were saying about artists who colonize a field that they know nothing about, most commonly astrophysics, certainly physics in general, you know 'Isn't it marvelous these photos of the stars?', and god knows what. 3.09.05

Andrew: Fractals. I once had an MA student who went on about string theory, and after listening him going on I said 'Listen, you don't know what you're talking about, I don't know what you're talking about, so why can't we talk about the work?' he flew into a temper. 3.09.22

Katie: Fractals, string theory, and the other one is the psychology of aesthetics: what makes me like blue, and I think you're never going to get to the bottom of that. 3.09.43

Alison: Well there we are. I think that's a good place to finish. Thank you both of you so much for your time. 3.09.48

Katie: You're welcome. 3.09.49

Andrew: Well thanks for re-scheduling. 1.29.52

Alison: Thank you both again. 3.09.53