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THE PAINTED DOUBLE: FIGURATION, LANGUAGE, AND THE
LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Shanti Duyen Shea-An, hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Shanti', followed by a horizontal line.

10th June 2024

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LANGUAGE, AND THE LIMITS OF
REPRESENTATION

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Abstract

This practice-led research project traces understandings of doubling and legibility within historic and contemporary examples of figurative painting. Despite painting's capacity to *present* images before our eyes, it has always been haunted by a certain kind of absence. The painted image, in its negotiation of these two states, is doubled from the outset. This inquiry interrogates how the painted image continues to wrestle with this duality through a studio investigation that traverses questions of reading, prying open, folding, and the space between interiority and exteriority.

In this project I interrogated the various ways the notion of the double can be used to reformulate conventional accounts of legibility through the painted image. I work through this question by drawing on the work of post-structuralists such as Roland Barthes, Jean-Luc Nancy, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida, and artists such as Piero della Francesca, Philip Guston, Simon Hantaï, Gerhard Richter, Ed Ruscha, and Luc Tuymans. The theoretical and practice-driven aspects of the project grapple with examples of doubling as well as the duality of presence and absence that defines image-making in general. Since paintings require us to see two surfaces at once—a surface of matter and a surface of inscription—I propose that it is necessary to attend to this complex sense of twofoldness, in order to provide alternative frameworks for the enmeshed relations between image and text in contemporary figuration.

This research contributes to the field of contemporary painting through a body of original creative work alongside a critical account of painting's relationship with doubling and language. My studio research is tested and situated alongside historical and contemporary examples of doubling, where I demonstrate that painting is bound to, and yet also finds ways to resist, the transitive confines of language. I propose that language itself is characterised as a process of doubling through its association with repetition and differentiation, despite its usual representative associations with communication and the transmission of pre-determined ideals.

The Painted Double: Figuration, Language, and the Limits of Representation reveals how figurative painting can enfold multiple histories and ways of knowing into a generative, discursive space of meaning making. This inquiry shows how painted images, especially those that resist conventional ways of signification, present what it means to inscribe ourselves in this world.

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Introduction

It is common to say that an image communicates with more immediacy than a text. While a text needs to be read, comprehended, and deciphered in time, images seem to make objects present before our eyes. Presence and the act of presenting would therefore appear to be inseparable from the domain of painted images. Despite this insistence upon *presentation*, however, painting is also haunted by a certain kind of absence. Hubert Damisch, drawing on the writings of the Renaissance humanist Leon Battista Alberti, refers to painting as a ‘remedy for absence.’¹ The painted image, in its negotiation of these two states, is doubled from the outset. We could say that this embedded dualism is the basis for painting’s paradoxical nature since it is always in the process of emerging outwards and retreating inwards.

This is the context for this practice-led research project into painting’s relationship with doubling and legibility. As an artist, I have often found myself contending with how to speak through the act of painting. This was, I felt, not a question of how to *express* oneself through the medium, but rather how to become *inscribed*. The philosopher Marie-José Mondzain writes that ‘it is every human subject’s destiny to be inscribed (*s’inscrire*) in the world through symbolic operations.’² While we often assume that our eyes are what allow us to see, she instead argues that we see because we can produce images. This relationship between sensory experience and making sense of experience is a central concern of my inquiry, which investigates how painting is marked by a desire for coherence and yet is left to grapple with what cannot be uttered, translated, or interpreted. In other words, what has been *written out*.

¹ Hubert Damisch, Kent Minturn, and Eric Trudel, "The Inventor of Painting," *Oxford Art Journal* 33, no. 1 (2010): 304. See also Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966).

² Marie-José Mondzain, "What Does Seeing an Image Mean?," *Journal of Visual Culture* 9, no. 3 (2010): 308.

The concept of the double, as that which invokes both presence and absence, grounds this doctoral research as an interrogation of painting's relationship to duality, contradiction, and paradox. Throughout the studio research, mediated images such as film stills, images taken from old books and magazines, and art historical references are deployed as part of a process of translation into painting. Rather than serving as a direct representation of the world, the painted image is a site where cognisance becomes unsettled, hovering between recognition and misrecognition. As I discuss throughout the exegesis, the picture within the picture, what can be understood as a form of *mise en abyme*, serves as a connecting thread across each stage of my investigation.³ Images within images produce multiple narrative readings, whilst at the same time alluding to the periphery of the image itself, a space that would usually be excluded from view.

It is first necessary to consider what is meant by the terms “doubling” and “legibility”. Firstly, the notion of doubling is associated with something that has been repeated, folded, or increased. It is also, in a figurative sense, related to deception, such as in the example of “double-dealing,” where one's actions do not correspond with their true intentions. As a way of describing a subject who has been split in two, the double is, according to Sigmund Freud, ‘an image of terror.’⁴ The double is the *doppelgänger*, the spectre, the shadow, or the mirror reflection which disorders and fractures our presence in the world. It articulates the unease that arises when we encounter the desires and fears which were once repressed but have now returned.

The term ‘legibility’ also carries multiple meanings depending on the context in which it is deployed. In its most simplistic definition, it denotes readability and clarity. Even within painting, the question of legibility is not a straightforward one. On one hand, the legibility of a painting might refer to how successfully it transmits a specific narrative or idea, and the ease with which the viewer is able to discern this meaning. The capacity to recognise and “read” what has been presented in a painting

³ A key text on the subject of *mise en abyme* is Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley with Emma Hughes (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁴ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Sigmund Freud: Essays and Papers* (London: Riverrun, 2020), 416.

has been, at different points throughout history, an indication of its power. On the other hand, legibility also concerns a clarity of expression, where something declares itself as painting, as a way of *making clear* that what one is doing, and showing, is painting.

This research takes both terms as points of departure for a series of studio investigations. The paintings discussed here deal with several aspects of doubling and legibility, beginning with the idea of the book as a physical container of knowledge and eventually moving towards questions of framing and the dialectic between interiority and exteriority. I follow the image of the book to the scene of the Annunciation within Christian painting—where Mary’s presence is doubled by the act of reading and being read—which then leads me to the concept of folding as not only an act of doubling but also a conceptual framework for understanding resemblance and recognition within painting. Whilst dealing with these thematic concerns, the paintings themselves are not intended as illustrations, but rather they operate as an arena where the questions are tested, played out, and quite often revised.

Ours is a time where visibility and access are things that many strive for. However, the moment we interrogate these concepts, we come to see them as fundamentally fraught. To make oneself visible and accessible, that is, to render oneself legible, very often involves suppressing the fragmentation and multiplicity that constitutes subjective experience. Making something legible means writing things out (*ex-scribing* them) and cutting things off (reframing them).⁵ This inquiry shows how attending to slippages in meaning allows us to open up surfaces that have been razed by a colonising, flattening logic. Although my research does not aim to deal with the political dimensions of doubling and legibility, it is worth noting that these terms are also situated within a set of complex power relations.

⁵ The idea of “ex-scribing” is developed by Jean-Luc Nancy, referring to an excess of meaning. See Jean-Luc Nancy, “Exscription,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 78 (1990): 63.

The primary aim of this research is to examine how doubling is enacted within my studio practice and what it reveals about legibility within art. Examining the relationship between language and representation within painting takes us back to the very origins of image-making, where touching one's hand against a cave wall constituted an acknowledgement of presence alongside an estrangement from oneself. Philosophers such as Alison Ross, Marie-José Mondzain, and Jean-Luc Nancy have all discussed this gesture of painting in the cave. Ross explains that the 'the closed space of the cave reinforces the magical features of the image; it binds the image to the structure of the wish.'⁶ Mondzain suggests that the cave is where humans became spectators. She writes that '[b]eing human means producing the trace of one's absence on the world's inner wall.'⁷ Nancy, in his 1996 essay "Painting in the Grotto," speaks of the earliest cave paintings as examples of how, through making an image, one shows the act of showing. For him, these images convey the 'strangeness of the world to the world,' by placing it at a distance.⁸

In the paintings I have made as part of my studio investigation, I frequently return to what it means to paint an image, and how such a gesture invokes this original sense of distancing. What I found was that this distancing is enacted within various gestures of "doubling," including reading, prying open, and folding. As such, my project conceptualises and interrogates the vital space between the singular painted surface and the multiple levels of representation contained within it. This negotiation between surface and depth, singularity and multiplicity, and the legible and the illegible persists through each stage of the research. Ultimately, it is through these dualities that I propose that, as a method of inquiry, painting is not simply a means of representing the world, but rather a way of inscribing ourselves within it, and of making ourselves double.

⁶ Alison Ross, "What is an Image? Form as a Category of Meaning in Philosophical Anthropology," *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* 26 (2016): 28.

⁷ Mondzain, "What Does Seeing an Image Mean?," 313.

⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Painting in the Grotto," in *The Muses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 70.

Reading into the book

For Roland Barthes, the book is something to be questioned. Very often, books are not examined as things in and of themselves since they perform a transmitting task. We surpass the book—its form, its objecthood—to contend with what has been inscribed on its pages. However, as Barthes suggests, it is important to distinguish between books and “texts.” Whereas the book is concrete and stable, the text is better understood as a ‘methodological field,’ insofar that it reveals itself through discourse; the text is not concerned with meaning exactly, but rather with associations and a kind of “play” that can take place across multiple works.⁹ While there is a tendency within post-structuralism to deal with texts rather than books, it is precisely the stability, containment, and concreteness of the book that I was most intrigued by in the early stages of my research.

As an entry point into my project, I addressed the book-form as a subject for painting and as a site for contemplation. When a book is laid open in front of the reader, it consists of two sides which are not only defined by symmetry but also the opposition and juxtaposition between two halves. It also opens from a bilateral split, which is both a seam and a crease. Painters have been drawn to the book as a signifier of mental absorption but also as an object that contains histories and traditions which can either be revered or contested. In the work of contemporary painter Liu Ye, the flatness of the book corresponds with the flatness of the canvas, and it is therefore difficult to distinguish between the textual and the pictorial. For Ed Ruscha, an artist who has long been fascinated by the book as an artistic object, it is its reversibility and temporal slippage which invites investigation. Lastly, the painted book marks a significant moment within the career of American painter Philip Guston. When he returned to figurative painting in 1967, Guston did so by painting an open book. He returned to this subject repeatedly, often alluding to its sense of authority and its relationship to inscription.

⁹ Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josuë V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 74.

While the book within painting speaks directly to reading and legibility, it also addresses the polarity of absence and presence. In the studio investigations, I would often either describe books without readers or readers without books. Historically, the written word has been associated with absence since it is the trace of a subject who is no longer present to speak. In his *Phaedrus* dialogue, Plato referred to writing as a form of forgetting since it frees us from the need to commit things to memory.¹⁰ It is also here that he likened the written word to paintings which ‘stand before us quite as though they were alive; but if you question them, they maintain a solemn silence.’¹¹ Committing something to paper means that we no longer need to hold it in our memory, and yet it can also become buried under its own weight, as we can see in Mamma Andersson’s *Lore* (2014) [Fig. 0.1].

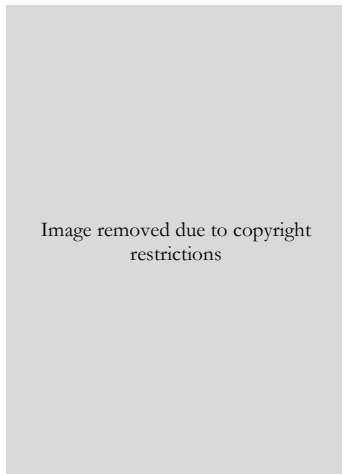


Fig. 0.1. Karin Mamma Andersson, *Lore* (2014), oil on panel, 95 x 66 cm.

Temporal slippages

If we follow the image of the book back through the history of Western painting, we arrive at its place within Christian iconography. In my studio research, I was fascinated by a particular Annunciation painting by the Italian Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca. His *Arezzo Annunciation*, made between 1452 and 1466, shows

¹⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. W. C. Helmbold (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1956), 69.

¹¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 69.

Mary with a book in her hand, which she holds close to her body. The book can be opened onto any page and therefore facilitates a kind of time-travel. Piero's painting is prophetic in nature, containing within it the past, present, and future events of the Christian story. After conducting fieldwork visits to Piero's frescoes in Italy, I observed how notions of doubling, symmetry, and reflection persist in his images, especially in *The Flagellation* (c. 1468-1470), *Madonna del Parto* (c. 1460), *Baptism of Christ* (c. 1437-1445), and the *Arezzo Annunciation* (between 1452-1466). These are all depictions of Christian subjects, and yet they are not purely concerned with translating a text into visual form, but rather with the tension between revelation and withdrawal [Fig. 0.2]. As Nancy remarked in his essay on Christian painting, 'the gods have withdrawn, withdrawing with them presence itself.'¹²



Fig. 0.2. Photograph taken during fieldwork visit to Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto* (c. 1460) in Monterchi, Italy.

In the context of this practice-led research project, my approach to Piero is not purely art historical.¹³ As I approach him through the lens of my studio investigation, it means that I am often led by pictorial and formal concerns. This, I have found,

¹² Jean-Luc Nancy, "Visitation: Of Christian Painting," in *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 123.

¹³ This is to emphasise the speculative nature of this part of the project, and to emphasise that it is not intended to address a gap in art historical knowledge. As I discuss in the exegesis, Piero's frescoes inform a group of paintings made in the studio and he is therefore a significant figure in my inquiry.

forms an additional temporal layer. Whilst examining the double in his work, I also reflect on what it means to look backwards and forwards in time and how entering a dialogue with the fifteenth-century painter produces another form of time travel. Reflecting on this, I return to Guston who also felt a kinship with Piero and described the painter as being 'so remote from other masters' and 'without their completeness of personality.'¹⁴ The enigmatic nature of Piero himself echoes the mystery of many of his pictures which invite a certain kind of *prying*. Not only do they gesture towards the desire to split things open to understand them, but they look to the capacity of painting to fold multiple histories into a single frame.

This collapsing of time brings distant objects and figures into closer proximity, permitting them to touch. What we find in the work of Piero is the artist grappling with this tension between proximity and distance, folding one space into another. His compositions are often arranged around a vertical split which divides heaven and earth. His use of multiple light sources, typically only discernible upon close inspection, point to these spatial disruptions. While these might initially seem to be forms of discontinuity, these junctures punctuate the image and as such, serve as openings for us to enter.

Doubling as folding

Folding is closely related to doubling. In the writings of Gilles Deleuze, the fold is presented as the conceptual framework of the Baroque. As a counterpoint to a classical mode of understanding the world, which posits that objects are fundamentally distinct from one another, Deleuze uses the fold to elucidate how the world is interconnected and part of a continuous surface that is twisted, contorted, and enfolded, but never broken. He develops this framework through a close reading of the German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, whose theory of *monadology* regards the world as a harmonious system consisting of

¹⁴ Philip Guston, "Piero della Francesca: The Impossibility of Painting," *Artnews* (May 1965): 38.

individual units.¹⁵ The fold develops out of this idea and attempts to dismantle the Cartesian belief that ‘the real distinction between parts entailed separability.’¹⁶ The studio research draws upon Baroque examples during different stages and, as such, the fold becomes a useful analogy for understanding how knowledge systems hinge upon multiplicity.

For Deleuze, the fold conceptualises the Baroque. Since the Baroque designates a shift away from the classical linearity of the Renaissance, he sees the fold as an analogy for this release from Cartesian space. Beyond this, it also elucidates how to make sense of the relationship between interiority and exteriority, especially in relation to the painted image. I introduced folding into my studio process halfway through the project, as a way of generating new compositions from found photographs. By folding and creasing these pictures, I observed interior spaces forming *within* the image surface, alluding to something that is retreating from view and therefore not able to be represented. The crease pointed to a limit or an edge that is approached but never arrived at. For the Hungarian-born artist Simon Hantaï, the act of folding and unfolding the canvas is a means of withdrawing from the act of painting to allow ‘the operation to carry itself out.’¹⁷ It is, therefore, a means of retreating from complete artistic authority but not a means of complete disappearance.

Inside/outside

Attending to the edges between images and the oscillation between interiority and exteriority has been a significant component of this research into doubling and legibility. The desire to make an image on a cave wall speaks to the complex spatial

¹⁵ See Mogens Laerke, "Five Figures of Folding: Deleuze on Leibniz's Monadological Metaphysics," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23, no. 6 (2015): 1192-1213; Daniel Garber, *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (London: Continuum, 2006), 5-6.

¹⁷ Philip Armstrong and Laura Lisbon, "Conversations with Hantaï: Didi-Huberman, Damisch, Rouan, Nancy," *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 1, no. 2 (2015): 226.

relationship that underpins all image-making. As an artist, it is often difficult to discern whether one is located inside the painting or outside of it.¹⁸ However, just as Deleuze described the inside as the “fold” of the outside, the painting can be understood as a “fold” of the world. In questioning this relationship between inside and outside, philosophers have attempted to pin down what happens at the edges of experience. For example, Jacques Derrida, in his reading of Immanuel Kant, deals with the idea of the *parergon*, which refers to something that is supplementary to one’s work but still touches it.¹⁹ The example given is the picture frame, which is both attached to the painting but is also *not* the painting. Derrida argues that this threshold object shifts depending on how we are looking: if we look at the painting, the frame belongs to the world outside of it, however if we are looking at the wall on which it hangs, then the frame belongs to the painting.

In *The Future of the Image* (2007), Jacques Rancière argues that looking at a painting involves seeing two things at once.²⁰ This is ‘not a matter of trompe-l’oeil or special effects,’ but rather ‘a question of the relations between the surface of exhibition of forms and the surface of inscription or words.’²¹ This is not only the case when literal words appear on a painted surface, or even when narrative is invoked, but also in the way that painting has the potential to rename or reconfigure symbolic expectations. Rancière’s argument recalls the British philosopher Richard Wollheim’s notion of twofoldness, or what he termed “seeing-in,” which referenced the incommensurate nature of representational painting.²² This involves seeing what has been described

¹⁸ This idea of negotiating the “inside” and “outside” within an artistic practice is addressed by Ross Gibson, who draws on the story of an Austrian sociologist and his wife to explain how knowledge is acquired differently—through critical distance and through embedding oneself in a situation—and how these are “married” together in artistic research. See Ross Gibson, “The Known World,” *TEXT* 14, no. Special 8 (2010): 1-11.

¹⁹ This first appeared in the article, Jacques Derrida, “The Parergon,” *October* 9 (1979): 3-41. Later published in Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

²⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 79.

²¹ Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 79.

²² This concept of “seeing-in” is discussed in a number of Wollheim’s texts. See, for example, Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987); Richard Wollheim, *Arts and Its Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

alongside what has been materially inscribed on the surface. Although these two visual registers are folded together, they cannot be reduced to any type of singularity and therefore invite a constant oscillation between two zones.

In this research, the relationship between inside and outside is addressed in diverse ways. In the context of reading, this dual position is concerned with how we position ourselves in relation to the text we are reading. When reflecting on the tradition of Christian painting, it is related to the demarcation between the secular and the sacred. In approaching the fold, the boundary between the two starts to dissolve. In the final stages of the project, this is interrogated through the lens of what it means to see and be seen, to position oneself within a practice but also on the outside looking in and attempting to render it legible. The studio investigations seek to tease out these concerns, questioning what it means to paint another image in a world that is already filled, and overflowing, with images.

Chapter outline

This exegesis is organised into four chapters. Chapter 1 investigates the book-form and the idea of reading as an activity that splits a subject. It addresses how Liu Ye, Ed Ruscha, and Philip Guston have referenced the book, whilst also discussing a group of paintings made during the first stage of my studio investigation. Chapter 2 focuses on the work of Piero della Francesca and his use of doubling, symmetry, and reflection. I reflect on how Piero's compositions have informed my paintings and what it means to enter a dialogue with a tradition that is far removed from one's own. Chapter 3 centres on folding as both a theoretical framework and as a practice of generating new compositions within the studio. I argue that the gesture of folding not only doubles the surface of an image, but it also facilitates resemblance and recognition, which are foundational to our capacity to make sense of the world. In Chapter 4, I argue that the painter occupies a doubled position, existing both inside and outside of their work and must therefore contend with the frame of the painted

image. The studio investigations discussed here all reference an aspect of cinema as a way of meditating on spectatorship and the mediation that painting performs.

As part of my research, I staged two exhibitions during my candidature, *Back to front* and *The world folding in upon itself*. These are discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, respectively. My intention for these exhibitions was to test how the configuration of the paintings might open new lines of thinking within my inquiry. The first exhibition, *Back to front*, brought together a series of works that deal with ambiguity, flatness, and blankness. These were formal qualities that I had been developing in works made during the first half of my project. *The world folding in upon itself* was focussed on folding and allowed me to identify the connection between folding and other instances of repetition, mirroring, and visual echoes across my paintings. These were critical moments within my inquiry that allowed me to take my questions around the double and the legible outside of the studio.

Outcomes

The outcome of this research project is a series of paintings that contend with the double and its relationship with various constructions of legibility. Through the studio research and its accompanying exegesis, I propose an alternative approach to thinking about contemporary figurative painting that is not concerned purely with the transmission of pre-determined content, nor with an outright refusal of textual meaning. The research engages with a tradition of image-making characterised by dualism and contradictions. As the paradoxical nature of my studio research demonstrates, the double, which is very often a site of intellectual uncertainty, produces a discursive, not didactic, space. In other words, it makes way for an opening.

In one of his essays on the idea of the fold, Deleuze wrote that '[i]t is never the other who is a double in the doubling process ... I do not encounter myself on the outside,

I find the other in me.²³ While my inquiry began with an investigation into the form of the book—an object that confirms, but also disrupts one’s selfhood—it eventually led to the doubled position of the artist as someone who exists inside and outside. Despite the desire to reconcile these multiple positions, this project reveals how a contemporary painting practice is not directed towards the restoration of an already known world, but rather to bring attention to the potential of new distortions.

²³ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 98.

Chapter 1: Double sided

Introduction

A book is an object that is easily overlooked. The physical form of the codex, which consists of separate leaves that have been cut, compacted, and bound along an edge, is what rendered the written word portable. It also enabled a reader to pause and resume a text, marking their place in order to return to it later. When inquiring into the nature of doubling within painting, it is not only the book itself—as an object that opens onto two opposing halves and is produced in “copies”—that speaks to the idea, but also what the act of reading does to us as readers that warrants investigation. This chapter traces how reading doubles our presence in the world. Here I discuss a group of paintings that are prompted by the book-form, situating them within a tradition of painters depicting books to meditate upon questions of symmetry, rationality, and inscription.

Beyond its capacity to transmit ideas, books are also physical, sensory objects. Buzz Spector, for example, refers to the way that a book’s ‘twin paper curves’ appear to ‘meet in a recessed seam.’²⁴ He suggests that we do not simply read a book, but we *receive it* in a kind of embrace. In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), Roland Barthes developed what has since been termed an ‘erotics of reading,’ whereby the activity is discussed in relation to the body, desire, and an intimate encounter with the ‘other.’²⁵ For him, reading is not a means of decoding or comprehending a text, but rather of submitting oneself to different states of pleasure. When we speak about the physical nature of the book, it is also common to employ a language of intimacy—the book has a spine, the text has a body, and, as Spector writes, the act of ‘page turning is a series of gentle, sweeping gestures, like the brush of fingers on a naked back.’²⁶

²⁴ Buzz Spector, “The Fetishism of the Book Object,” *Art on Paper* 14, no. 1 (2009): 77.

²⁵ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

²⁶ Spector, “The Fetishism of the Book Object,” 77.

Books are often held close to the body, they are cradled in our lap, and they accompany us to bed.

The preliminary stages of my studio research centred on describing books and meditating upon the gesture of reading. The formal qualities of mirroring informed my thinking around these paintings, particularly the symmetry of the open codex and the dual gestures of opening and closing. Each of these paintings, in their own way, was made in response to the following question: how does reading operate as a site of doubling, and can this be interrogated through the act of painting? Furthermore, how does reading produce a duality of presence and absence? Alongside a discussion of how I developed these paintings, I also address the work of three artists who have painted the book: Lie Ye, Ed Ruscha, and Philip Guston. While the book is associated with rationality, authority, and intelligibility, it is also a site where these ideas can be tested.

The book as a physical container

The codex is a signifier of collective wisdom, where knowledge is bound together. It also allows ideas to travel far from their original time and place. The book is just as much an object of the public realm—the realm of shared discourse and communication—as it is a symbol of privacy and retreat.²⁷ This dualism inherent within the form of the book is also analogous to painting, which is directed outwards to the visible world whilst also concerned with a powerful sense of interiority and containment. In approaching the book as a subject for painting, I was first drawn to the dual gestures of opening and closing a book, something which is, due to its commonplace nature, rarely attended to.

²⁷ As Spector states, '[f]or all its graphic or structural variety, the conventional book operates because its language is public and can be shared.' Spector, "The Fetishism of the Book Object," 76.

It is first necessary to consider briefly how painting and books have been linked throughout history. While the focus of my studio investigation began with the image of the book *within* painting, I also observed that in histories of the book, painting was there from the beginning. Before Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, books were written and painted by hand. Word and image coalesce in the early days of the book. Illuminated manuscripts show us how the two exist in concert, both serving the transmission of ideas and at times wrestling with one another. Despite serving a primarily illustrative function, the painted images in manuscripts also deviate from the main text. In the margins of medieval manuscripts, for example, we often find depictions of grotesque or humorous creatures that exist somewhere in between reality and fantasy. These are often intended as mnemonic devices, to assist the reader in being able to recite, that is *perform* the text.²⁸

Since depictions of living beings were not permitted by the Prophet Muhammed, this has meant that Islamic art is largely non-representational. In the book arts, however, we witness a divergence from this practice. Within courtly circles, manuscripts were commissioned and shared, bearing detailed depictions of people, animals, and the natural world [Fig. 1.1]. Concealed within the private pages of the book, these images were protected from the gaze of the public whilst also transforming the reader into a viewer of painting, shifting between the surface of the words and the surface of the images which often overflow into each other's spaces.

In recent years, scholars have turned their attention to the physical and material conditions surrounding the book, understanding it as not simply a carrier of the written word but as an object that has been made, handled, bought, and sold.²⁹ This is perhaps a response to the shift in reading practices which have become more prevalent in the first decades of the twenty-first century, where most reading now

²⁸ For a discussion of this, see Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski, *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. Mary Carruthers and J. M. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 1-31.

²⁹ See, for example, Heidi Brayman, Jesse M. Lander, and Zachary Lesser, eds., *The Book in History: The Book as History: New Intersections of the Material Text*, The Beinecke Series in the History of the Book (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016).

takes place on a screen. When looking back to the invention and widespread adoption of the codex, scholars have identified the link between this early book and the adoption of Christianity across the Roman empire.³⁰ In his book *Paper Machine* (2005), Jacques Derrida observed that although many of us now write exclusively on computers, we are still attached to the ‘norms and figures of paper’ which are ‘imposed on the screen: lines, “sheets,” pages, paragraphs, margins, and so on.’³¹ However, despite this attachment, the physical book belongs to a time that is waning, and has been for some time.



Fig. 1.1. *Khusraw Receiving his Captured Brother*, page from a manuscript of the *Khamsa* (Iran, Safavid or India, Mughal, 16th century). Opaque watercolour, ink on paper, 20.64 x 13.97 cm (sheet). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

Painting the book

In the studio, I aimed to test how referencing textual material would speak to the notion of the double. I decided to place open books on my studio table, observing the way that they are split open and outstretched when positioned on a surface. It

³⁰ Benjamin Harnett, "The Diffusion of the Codex," *Classical Antiquity* 36, no. 2 (2017).

³¹ Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 46.

was only once I had experimented with the arrangement of books and had begun painting that I realised that I had not included any text on these books, instead focussing on the blank page or the trace of an image that had been printed on the surface. Here I will discuss the development of three paintings: *Two sides* (2021), *Empty notebook* (2021), and *Four views* (2022).



Fig. 1.2. *Two sides* (2021), oil on linen, 36 x 41 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

The composition for *Two sides* [Fig. 1.2] centres on a book which sits face down on a table. Since it does not sit flush with the surface, its shape is reminiscent of a gabled roof, slightly lifting off the ground. This creates a sense of stability within the painting, as the book is contained, albeit loosely, within a triangular structure. Looking at the book itself, there is a portrait which is partly dissected by shadow on the left side of the cover. On the opposite side, there is a trace of a second portrait which is now a ghostly presence rendered in subtle touches of light grey on a cool,

pale blue surface. In parts of the work, I sought to draw attention to the weave of the linen by applying the paint so that it would “catch” on the surface, which can be seen in the top left corner of the painting. This produced a shimmer across parts of the work, where the image started to flicker, bringing the viewer’s gaze back to the materiality of the surface. The title alludes to the idea of twofoldness that underpins the painting, where the viewer is made aware of both the physical support and the imagery inscribed on it.

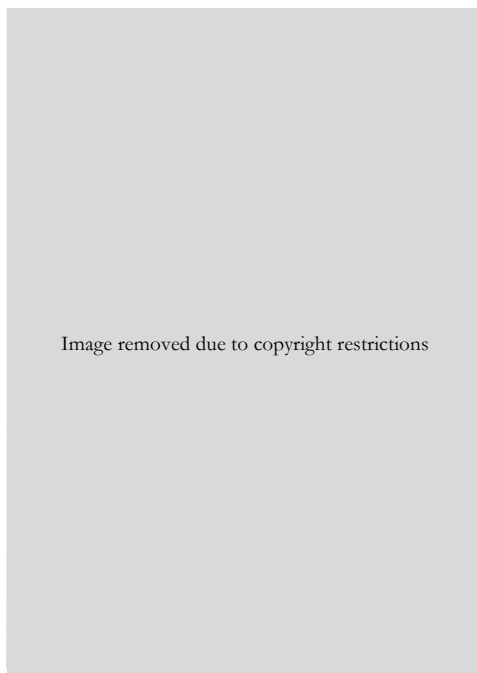


Fig. 1.3. Luc Tuymans, *The Book* (2007), oil on canvas, 306 x 212 cm. Pinault Collection, Paris.

Making this work, I began to question how the book allows us to occupy two places at once. In *The Book* (2007) [Fig. 1.3], the contemporary Belgian painter Luc Tuymans frames an image of a Baroque church that is both faded and creased. The painting itself measures just over three metres high, the scale which would have once been reserved for religious painting. According to Tuymans, images ‘take on several layers of meaning and distort themselves in the process.’³² In this particular work, the distortion can be identified first in the moment of the original photograph, which

³² Yasmine Van Pee, "Unnatural Resources: Luc Tuymans on Fighting the Literal and Mistrusting Images," *Modern Painters* 18, no. 8 (2007): 70.

reduces the grandeur of the architecture and transforms it into a reproducible image. The next layer of distortion is the compression and creasing that is enacted by the scale of the book. The final distortion is the return to a large-scale format, where the book is elevated to the scale of the original architecture that it has already flattened. Through this evocation of the book, Tuymans collapses the intimacy of the book object with the monumental scale of the Baroque church.

Negotiating a space between inscription and blankness, *Empty notebook* [Fig. 1.4] does not present the viewer with writing or imagery to be deciphered. In this painting, I used fleshlike tones to describe the book, with subtle shadows painted with a muted blue, aiming to reduce how much pictorial information would be available to the viewer. The shape of the book is suggested by the curves which follow the pages along the top and bottom of the composition, and the central seam is only alluded to by the shift from pink to blue. Its horizontality, underscored by the composition and the proportions of the canvas, also points to the back-and-forth nature of reading in the West, where we scan a page from left to right and back again. While there are no words or images on these pages, there is a gestural trace visible on the surface on the left side, problematising what is meant by emptiness or blankness.



Fig. 1.4. *Empty notebook* (2021), oil on linen, 25 x 50 cm. Photograph: Docqment.

Reflecting on the two sides of this book, I noticed the asymmetry that was produced by the composition. If this book were to be closed, the two “halves” would not align.

The ambiguous gestural quality of the work and the slippage between legibility and illegibility results in an image that appears open to being received, as if its “arms” are outstretched. Although I made this work as a means of reflecting on the symmetry of the book, I found that I was more interested in the suggestion of asymmetry and how this might evoke a kind of restlessness. As an inflection point, the spine of the book designates a shift from one surface to the next, but also implies the hinging movement that characterises the bound book.

Looking at the bible in Nicolas Poussin’s *Annunciation* (1657) [Fig. 1.5], it does not seem as symmetrical as we might imagine a book to be. As John Drury observes, if we pretend that we are closing the book, what we find is a misalignment:

The pages to our left would not nearly cover the pages to our right. Poussin has made one set longer than the other. An odd book, and yet so deliberately so! The effect is to nudge the balanced symmetry which we expect into the surprise of a horizontally impelled movement.³³

In attempting to make sense of these two parts of the open book, we are invited to consider other instances of ‘doubling’ across the image, including the wings of both Gabriel and the dove, whose outstretched wings echo the form of the book. Mary’s gesture is one of acceptance and willingness to receive the divine message. Her eyes are closed, so it is possible she is no longer in the mortal realm. We cannot see what Mary sees; her vision is protected from view.³⁴ As we return to the book—that solid, flat thing, which Mary gestures towards with an open palm—it, too, seems restless. A gust of wind, a slight push, and the left half could collapse back onto the right. These two separated halves are ready to be joined again, even if imperfectly.

Mary’s gesture also points to the inscription on the plaque along the base of the composition. This part of the painting is proof of the painting’s artifice and yet it shares Mary and Gabriel’s space. Oskar Bätschmann states that Poussin’s ‘insistence on pictorial representation also seems to dissolve the dialectic between absence and

³³ John Drury, *Painting the Word: Christian Pictures and their Meanings* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 58.

³⁴ For a discussion of Mary’s blindness, see David Carrier, “Blindness and the Representation of Desire in Poussin’s Paintings,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 19/20 (1990/1991): 31.

presence.³⁵ The inscription, which leads us to the open book and then to the figurative scene, sets in motion a system of textual readings, which are bound to the moment of pictorial revelation which we are witnessing. Although Mary is the only one in this scene without wings, she seems ready to take flight, as if about to be transported by the words she is hearing.



Fig. 1.5. Nicolas Poussin, *Annunciation* (1657), oil on canvas, 104.3 x 103.1 cm. The National Gallery, London.

This idea of page-turning formed the basis for *Four views* [Fig. 1.6], a painting which describes two books laid open on a table. On each page there is a separate image which appears diagrammatic, abstracted, a simplistic way of structuring space. This work developed following a scene I had observed in my studio, where I would often keep multiple books open while working on other paintings. The book was something to refer to when I became “stuck” on how to proceed, as a source to defer to, offering me a space to begin again. Making *Four views*, I had been looking at Philip Guston’s paintings of books, which I discuss further in the following section, as I was drawn to their pictorial simplicity but also Guston’s reconfiguration of the written text as a series of abstract marks on a surface [Fig. 1.7].

³⁵ Oskar Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting* (London: Reaktion, 1990), 61.

On the book closest to the viewer in *Four views* there is one pale yellow rectangle on the left and four blue rectangles on the right which form a grid. The other book shows two abstracted landscapes printed on the pages, one dissected into two along a slightly curved horizon line and the other consisting of the basic structure of an arch. Using a cool colour palette, I built up the surface through layers of opaque oil paint. Each page within this work speaks to various pictorial histories of painting, from the notion of framing and the painting as a “window” onto the world to questions of landscape and carving out space. If we imagine closing these books, these images will become pressed together, flattened, compacted even further. As I reflected on this work, and the back-and-forth movement it implied, I came to regard it as not just a depiction of two books on a table, but rather as a proposition of what constitutes a painting.



Fig. 1.6. *Four views* (2022), oil on canvas, 80 x 90 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.



Fig. 1.7. Left: Philip Guston, *Untitled* (1968), acrylic on panel, 41.9 x 49.5 cm. Private collection; right: Philip Guston, *Untitled* (1969), acrylic on panel, 72.6 x 81.3 cm. Private collection.

In a bind

The relationship between looking at a surface and looking into a space has been a persistent question for painters throughout history. Since 2013, Liu Ye has painted books as a way of meditating upon questions of interiority. The Beijing-based artist looks to the history of Northern European art, from early Netherlandish painting to the geometric compositions of the Dutch De Stijl artists. These references share a preoccupation with flatness and pictorial arrangement, often emphasising the descriptive qualities of the work over its capacity to elicit an emotional response from the viewer.³⁶ In close observation of the book, Liu conveys a particular reverence for both his textual and art historical sources.

In *Book Painting No. 6* (2014-15) [Fig. 1.8], Liu aligns the edges of the book with that of the canvas, emphasising the horizontal and vertical structure of the image. This

³⁶ It is generally understood that Northern European painting prioritises description over narrative or invention, which were deemed most important to Italian Renaissance artists. For a discussion of the opposition between description and narrative in the art of Northern Europe versus Italian art see Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

painting references Piet Mondrian's grid paintings, where primary colours are used to express a pure visual form. While citing these fundamental elements of painting, Liu also gestures to the basic elements of a book: the central binding, the pages, and the book jacket which, as we can see at the bottom of the composition, has lifted off the hard surface to accommodate its opening. These are made visible through the removal of narrative or subject matter. As a site of contemplation, the book is meditative and asks not to be read, simply to be looked at. This detailed rendering of a textual object ultimately brings painting and reading into closer proximity. By directing our attention to the flat surface and aligning the formal elements of the book with that of the canvas frame, the painting and the book are compressed into a single space where reading is visual and looking is textual.

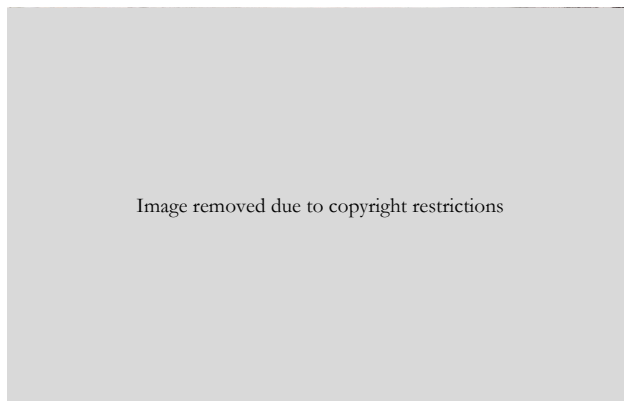


Fig. 1.8. Liu Ye, *Book Painting No. 6* (2014-15), acrylic on canvas, 25 x 40 cm.

Similarly, in the work of American artist Ed Ruscha, books are a recurring theme. *Old Book Back Then* (2011) [Fig. 1.9] is an acrylic painting on canvas where a book is opened to reveal two clean, blank pages. Despite its pristine appearance, the title tells us that this book is destined to be an old book (as all books are). We are therefore presented with an imagined back-and-forth gesture, where we are being shown an object as it once was, while also being asked to *imagine* how it presently appears. Ruscha plays with the concept of reversal in this work, an idea which has been a source of inspiration throughout his career. As Miguel de Baca observes, when looking at Ruscha's practice there are 'multiple temporal and directional passages

mutually influencing one another.³⁷ This references the dichotomies of ‘back/front, left/right, east/west’ persist throughout the artist’s work.³⁸ These are especially apparent in works where he deals with textual experience.



Fig. 1.9. Ed Ruscha, *Old Book Back Then* (2011), acrylic on canvas, 315 x 182.9 cm. Museum Brandhorst, Munich.

Distilling the image of the open book, Ruscha draws our attention to that ‘recessed seam’ which binds its pages together. Part of what is striking about this painting is the lack of any inscription on the pages. Its blankness may be read as a rejection of both expression and signification, alluding to a kind of impossibility of representation. A book is where we expect to be transported in some way, either by way of a written story or through images, and it is therefore significant that Ruscha denies us this. Instead, what we are made to contend with is the sequential nature of the book and the paradox of translating this temporality into a still, painted image.

In the eighteenth century, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing argued that since painting is still and silent, it is ‘compelled entirely to renounce time, progressive actions, as such, cannot be classed among its subjects.’³⁹ When the book appears in a painting, it invokes this impossibility by alluding to a sequence that cannot unfold. In Liu and

³⁷ Miguel de Baca, "On Ed Ruscha's Books, Los Angeles, and Peripatetic Flow," *Art in Print* 9, no. 2 (2019): 47.

³⁸ Baca, "On Ed Ruscha's Books, Los Angeles, and Peripatetic Flow," 47, 50.

³⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E. C. Beasley (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853), 100.

Ruscha's paintings, the book is at once solid and unmoving and yet also carrying the implication of *future* movement by way of turning the page. For Guston, the image of the book came to mark his "return to figuration," following a period of abstraction in the 1950s. In 1967, he painted *First Book* [Fig. 1.10], which consists of a cartoon-like representation of an open book with red pages hovering on a gestural, flesh-coloured background. There is no legible text; instead, horizontal dashes denote a generalised form of textual inscription which we follow from left to right.

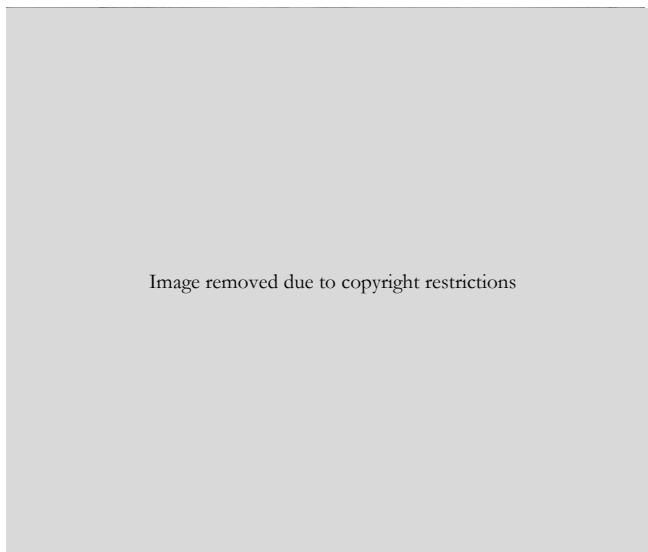


Fig. 1.10. Philip Guston, *First book* (1967), acrylic on panel, 35.6 x 41.9 cm. Private collection, New York.

This motif appears repeatedly throughout Guston's *oeuvre*, invoking at once the notion of authority—as is evident in a drawing titled *The Law* (1968), where a hooded figure points to the book—but also the broader question of one's relationship to history. It is significant that figuration is aligned with the image of the book, as an object associated with both storytelling and accepted traditions. As Dore Ashton notes, Guston worked in constant dialogue with not only the history of painting but his own.⁴⁰ His refusal to submit to modernist preoccupations with "forward progress" meant that he worked in cycles, either resisting his own tendencies, or the

⁴⁰ Dore Ashton, *A Critical Study of Philip Guston* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 7.

expectations of the viewing public. *First Book* can be read as an attempt to start the story of figurative painting again.

Guston's book motif is not intended to invoke a leisurely activity of reading. It is not the kind of textual reverence that Liu suggests in his *Book paintings*, or even the playfulness associated with Ruscha's. Rather, Guston is grappling with the weight of tradition and the task of telling stories after abstraction. In his drawings and paintings, Guston's book motif is something that is deferred to—it is a point of reference, an origin to contend with and perhaps resist, a source of authority and evidence. In this sense, the book can be understood as a counterpoint to abstraction and its attempt to empty the canvas of linguistic content. As W. J. T. Mitchell wrote, 'Modernist art, presumably, occupies a position that either cannot or need not ... be formulated in words.'⁴¹ For Guston, returning to figuration meant returning to the textual.

The question of how to locate meaning within a painting requires us to consider the two surfaces which constitute a painted image. In *Painting as an Art*, Richard Wollheim outlined a "twofoldness" of looking, which involves seeing the "configurational" alongside the "recognitional."⁴² This means being able to see the representation—the shapes, lines, and colours arranged on the surface—at the same time as seeing its subject matter. This is also discussed by E. H. Gombrich, who argues that it is impossible to maintain both of these visual registers at the same time, insisting that one 'cannot make use of an illusion and watch it.'⁴³ From the theorist's point of view, art is brought into existence first through some form of construction—an arrangement, or simply, a "bringing together" of forms or ideas—and then through identification, or a process of naming. Without this semantic

⁴¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, "'Ut Pictura Theoria': Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989): 351.

⁴² Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*.

⁴³ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 4th ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 1972), 5.

context, an artwork remains at the level of artifact.⁴⁴ These insights suggest that there is an incommensurability within the experience of painting. Even when there is no legible text inscribed on the canvas, the painting is always enacting some form of textual experience in the way that it asks us to name what it shows.

In the works discussed above, I had been focussed on the symmetry of the open book and its two opposing sides. Reflecting on these works, alongside examples by Liu, Ruscha, and Guston, I contemplated whether it was the dichotomy between absence and presence that was driving my fascination. I decided to introduce the figure of the reader into the painting as a way addressing textual experience as a form of both attention and distraction. I wanted to evoke how the process of reading directs attention towards a flat surface. This led me to reflect on how reading doubles our presence in the world, fixing us in place whilst also pulling us into a distant or imaginary world.

Attention and distraction

Through these early investigations into books and the representation of reading, I recognised a persistent fascination with not only ideas around origins, authority, and resistant modes of textual pleasure, but also the broader concept of attention. In *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Jonathan Crary associates the rise of modern subjectivity with a new form of visual experience concerned with an “attentiveness” that oscillates between attention and distraction.⁴⁵ As he explains, looking too closely leads to a loss of focus, and mental states of ‘distraction, reverie, dissociation, and trance.’⁴⁶ This tension between attention and

⁴⁴ Arthur Danto, for example, states that paintings ‘show what they denote,’ meaning they are *not* their subject matter, but a way of placing this subject matter ‘at a distance’. See Arthur C. Danto, “The Transfiguration of the Commonplace,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33, no. 2 (1974) 139-48; Arthur C. Danto, “The Artworld,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Sixty-First Annual Meeting, no. 19 (15 October 1964): 571-84.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, 47.

distraction is explored in two paintings, *A thought from behind* (2021) and *from the sea to the sea* (2021), where the act of reading alludes to a certain carving out of attention, as a withdrawal from the rest of the world.



Fig. 1.11. *A thought from behind* (2021), oil on canvas, 41 x 36 cm. Photograph: Docqment

In *A thought from behind* [Fig. 1.11], a *rückenfigur* is shown attending to a book, the corner of which is only just visible over his shoulder. His green shirt takes up most of the composition, whilst also emphasising his hunching over to read, to gaze intently at something we cannot see. Turning away, it is as if he is aware of the viewer, concealing the book from prying eyes. This heightens the desire to know what he is reading, to access what has been hinted at but not shown. He is surrounded by two shelves, with books shown either compacted and upright or leaning up against the sides, producing a visual tension between standing and leaning.

While making *A thought from behind*, I recognised the *rückenfigur* as a form of doubling, mirroring the viewer's stance before the painting. In René Magritte's *La Reproduction interdite* (*Not to be Reproduced*) (1937) [Fig. 1.12], he describes a *rückenfigur* which is

repeated in the mirror. This repetition denies access to the subject's face or identity.⁴⁷ The book in the corner of the painting, which is also repeated in the mirror, is another reference to the idea of multiplicity. Here a copy of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Narratives of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) sits on the ledge, a novel known for its unconventional narrative structure and ambiguous ending. While the mirror does not reflect the figure back to us, it does reflect the book as we would expect. As Scott Freer notes, the work recalls 'Poe's gothic taste for the uncanny' which 'teases the viewer whilst at the same time denying fulfilment of the desire to fully know.'⁴⁸ The painting implies that there is only so much of a subject's interiority that we are able to access.



Fig. 1.12. René Magritte, *La Reproduction interdite* (*Not to be Reproduced*) (1937), oil on canvas, 81 x 65.5 cm. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

The primary subject of Magritte's *La Reproduction interdite* (*Not to be Reproduced*) is the mirror image. The use of the *mise en abyme*, where a fragment of the representation is repeated within the frame, makes the painting self-reflexive. It draws attention to its own internal imagery as well as the presence of the beholder. By addressing its own construction, Magritte invokes a visual-verbal paradox: the mirror reflects the image

⁴⁷ The work was commissioned by the British poet Edward James and shows James viewed from behind. Scott Freer, "Magritte: The Uncanny Sublime," *Literature and Theology* 27, no. 3 (2013): 340.

⁴⁸ Freer, "Magritte: The Uncanny Sublime," 340.

whilst also failing to do so. This echoes the abrupt ending of Poe's 1838 story, which denies the reader any form of narrative resolution, whilst also disclosing the artifice of representation. Furthermore, the withholding of information is here aligned with a conspicuous doubling, suggesting that the act of turning away might also constitute an act of revelation.

Signifying the subject's absorption in an activity, the *rückenfigur* often accompanies scenes of reading. Gerhard Richter's *Lesende* (1994) [Fig. 1.13] is one such example, where a close-up view of a woman reading a magazine heightens the sense of distance between the beholder and subject. Richter emphasises a triangle of light on her neck, which leads the eye to this part of her body which directs her gaze to the page, indicating the physical exertion of looking. Here the act of reading maintains a sense of privacy as a form of withholding. Furthermore, since the entire image has been blurred, Richter alludes to a slippage between image and surface: the blur is both a physical *gesture* and the *removal* of the gesture, which signifies the lens blur of a camera. Not only does this distance us from the subject—the blur implies a loss of proximity—but it also produces an equivalence across the surface, rendering the scene difficult to locate in a specific time or place.⁴⁹ Richter's painting is reminiscent of works by the Danish artist Vilhelm Hammershøi who, like Richter, often painted his wife reading. In *Interior* (1899) [Fig. 1.14], an elegant yet cold bourgeois interior contains the figure of the reading woman, the angle of the walls evoking the pages and central crease of a book.

⁴⁹ As Robert Storr notes in his discussion of the painting, there is 'nothing that identifies the place or period from which the woman comes'. Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Doubt and Belief in Painting* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003), 137.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Fig. 1.13. Gerhard Richter, *Lesende* (1994), oil on canvas, 51 x 71 cm. High Museum of Art, Atlanta.



Fig. 1.14. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Interior* (1899), oil on canvas, 64.5 x 58.1 cm. Tate, London.

These gestures of turning away from the world invited me to reflect on my preoccupation with the book and the scene of reading. Wishing to crop and contain the figure further, I shifted it to the edge of the composition in *from the sea to the sea* [Fig. 1.15], a small painting on linen. On the right side, a figure looks down at a text which rests in his lap. Sitting on a train, the act of reading carves out privacy in this public space. The figure almost slips out of view, whilst also drawing attention to the lower right-hand corner of the work where his attention is contained. A series of horizontal bands of colour occupy most of the composition, articulating a transition from sky to sea which is framed by a window. These horizontal bands invite the viewer to scan the painting from left to right, evoking one's movement through the world but also across a line of text.



Fig. 1.15. *from the sea to the sea* (2021),
oil on linen, 28 x 35 cm.
Photograph: Docqment.

This painting invites the viewer into the space of the other's contemplation. Barthes suggests that there are two distinct kinds of desire that underscore our experience of reading. On one hand, there are pleasurable forms of reading which do not challenge our understanding of the world but instead provide us with comfort and 'consistency in [our] selfhood'.⁵⁰ This activity fulfils our desire for narrative closure and grants us reassurance in our relationship to culture. On the other hand, there are practices of reading which disrupt our selfhood insofar as they surprise us, 'prick us' in a way. Barthes associates this experience with "texts of bliss," which are associated with loss and a dismantling of our cultural language. As he writes, the reader becomes 'a subject split twice over,' rendered 'doubly perverse' by these two opposing desires.⁵¹ We are split into two subjects: one who seeks pleasure in knowing and one who experiences bliss in being confounded.

***Back to front* exhibition**

A thought from behind and *from the sea to the sea* were included in a solo exhibition, *Back to front*, held at Airspace Projects in Sydney [Fig. 1.16, Fig. 1.17]. This exhibition

⁵⁰ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 14.

⁵¹ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 14.

brought together thirteen paintings dealing with the formal qualities of blankness and flatness alongside evocations of absorption. The aim of this exhibition was to consider how the viewer might read these works in relation to one another and to examine the visual resonances that were emerging among the images. When installed in the gallery, I observed how each painting seemed to speak to reversibility—a back-and-forth gesture—which connected the formal qualities of the book with a moment of withdrawal.

The title, *Back to front*, suggests a relationship, or, more specifically, a reciprocity, between the front of an image and its reverse. It developed from the book paintings I had been making in the early stages of my research where I was reflecting on the experience of attending to a book, traversing its pages, and following its sequencing, shifting one's gaze from one side to another. These concerns were all related to a kind of correspondence between the reader and the book. The idea of having one's attention held to a surface, as is shown in *A thought from behind*, speaks to absorption, which involves turning away from the world, as the *rückenfigur* does. This results in the subject's back being brought to the *front* of the painting, as the first thing, and often the only thing, that we as viewers are given access to.



Fig. 1.16. Installation view, *Back to front*, Airspace Projects, Sydney, Photograph: Docqment.

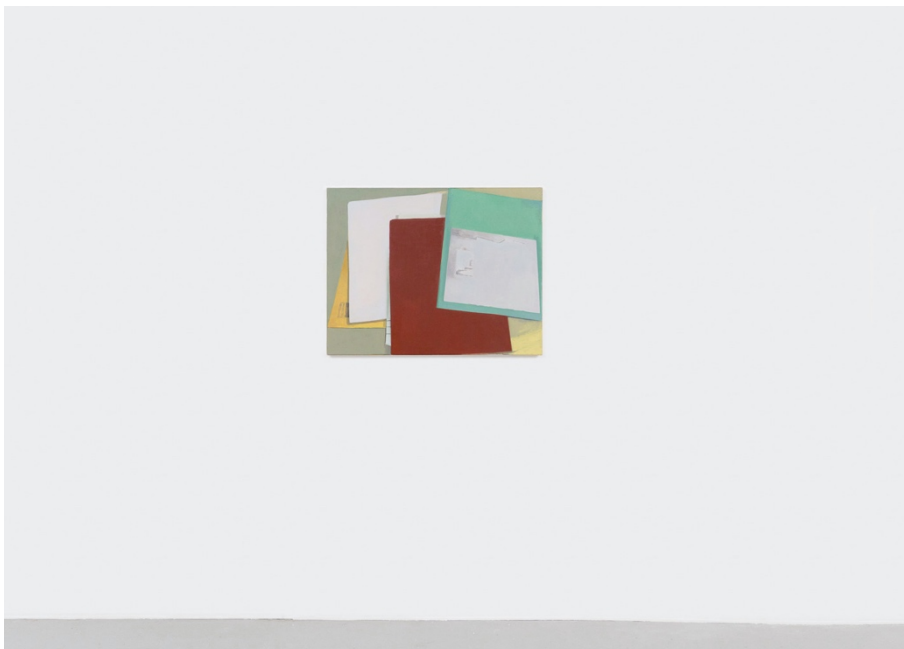


Fig. 1.17. Installation view, *Back to front*, Airspace Projects, Sydney, Photograph: Docqment.

The notion of “back to front” was also a reference to something being out of order, where one might perform an action the wrong way around, defying the sequence one is supposed to follow. For example, in painting the book, I wondered whether I was engaging with it “incorrectly” in the sense that I was not abiding by its intended purpose as something to be *read*. Dealing with the book in this “back to front” manner also brought to mind the possibility of reading something back to front, beginning with the end and therefore reversing the sequence. As Ruscha’s *Old Book Back Then* suggests, the book is multi-directional, allowing us to enter into a dialogue with the past, just as the author addresses a reader in the future.⁵²

Conclusion

The symmetry of the open book and the presence/absence of the reader bookended the initial stage of my studio research. I began by reflecting on the tension between surface and depth when it comes to reading and making paintings, alongside the symmetrical structure of the book. I then considered how artists such as Liu Ye, Ed Ruscha, and Philip Guston attend to the material properties of books, working between modes of representation and abstraction, and alluding to temporal slippages. As I shifted my attention to the reader, I explored ways of suggesting absorption within painting and how pushing the reading subject to the edge of the frame might produce a different sense of containment. Throughout these studio investigations, I encountered certain keywords which go on to inform later stages of this research project, including notions of withdrawal and misalignment, which are addressed in the following chapters. These suggest a certain oscillation between separate zones and a preoccupation with how things are connected through shared boundaries. Looking at the book as an instance of symmetry, where two sides are joined by a dividing line, I also observed examples of doubling which I could expand upon in my paintings.

⁵² It is also important to note that the exhibition was originally planned for early 2022, however it was postponed until early 2023 due to the pandemic.

This chapter has examined a group of works that meditate upon the notion of textual experience. From the outset, I asked how the book might serve as a site for doubling within painting. I sought to understand how painting deals with reversibility, symmetry and asymmetry, as well as the relationship between presence and absence. Although I was first fascinated by the subject of reading because of the suggestion of privacy, I soon found that attending to these categories also led to further polarities. The symmetry of the open book does not so much invoke the existence of two equal sides but rather the possibilities of juxtaposition and opposition, providing an intellectual space for engagement to contend with the book's containment of knowledge. Similarly, the privacy of reading fixes our attention and body in place, but also alludes to an encounter with an absent subject. This is also true of painting, which has long been thought of as a medium which has the capacity to make the absent present, or even, bring the dead back to life.

The following chapter charts my inquiry as it shifts from the book and the subject of reading towards instances of mirroring and symmetry within Christian painting. Expanding on these questions of symmetry, opening and closing, and the duality of presence and absence, I turn to a group of frescoes by the fifteenth-century Italian painter Piero della Francesca. Earlier in this chapter I referred to the open book in Poussin's *Annunciation*—a book that does *not* consist of two equal halves—as an example of how a painting can generate narrative openings, rather than be bound to narrative representation. This is addressed through the next stage of my research, alongside an attempt to further unravel the duality of painting.

Chapter 2: In dialogue with Piero della Francesca

Introduction

The bilateralism of the open book can be read alongside the split between the realms of the divine and the earthly within Christian art. This chapter investigates these ideas through the work of the Italian Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca whose frescoes have served as a significant point of reference for this studio research. Alongside a discussion of Piero's work, I draw on the writing of the post-structuralist Jean-Luc Nancy, particularly his essays on the place of the image within the Christian tradition.⁵³ Folding this philosophical discourse into my studio research involves re-engaging with a historical moment far removed from my own in order to examine what new insights can be gained from entering into a dialogue with the past.

For Nancy, the Christian image is concerned with both the arrival and subsequent withdrawal of the divine. Just as the Holy text is not just a story to be read but embodies divinity itself, for him the image is not a second-order representation of an intelligible subject, but instead a complete, sensory event. When we look at a Christian painting, what we are witnessing is Christianity itself 'caught up in the process of making painting.'⁵⁴ This can also be extended to image-making more broadly, where rather than viewing an image as a representation of a story or a pre-given idea, we can relate to it as a form of *presence*, as something which seems to arrive before our eyes.

In the works discussed in this chapter, these questions of arrival and withdrawal are interrogated first through my own paintings then through testing these against Piero and Nancy, as part of an ongoing dialogue between image and text. Nancy states that Christian painting need not be defined as 'a question of repainting the skies' but

⁵³ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Notes on the Sacred," *Theory Culture & Society* 30, no. 5 (2013).

⁵⁴ Nancy, "Visitation: Of Christian Painting," 122.

instead one of ‘opening up the earth—dark, hard, and lost in space.’⁵⁵ In the studio, I approach this tradition of image-making as one might approach a shadow, acknowledging its instability but also its attachment to a presence outside of it. By quoting Piero’s paintings within my own, my aim is to fold multiple temporal registers into a single image. As Robert Sokolowski states, quotation is the ‘curious conjunction of being able to *name* and *contain*,’ which is to say that it allows us to point to what has been uttered by another, whilst also enfolding it into our own statement.⁵⁶ It is through this process that we become doubled. While my paintings are not concerned with depicting the sacred or the divine, they do invoke these dual concepts as a way of understanding the limits of what can be represented within painting, in its unfolding potential.

This stage of the project is informed by fieldwork visits undertaken in Italy, primarily in the towns of Monterchi and Arezzo, where I examined Piero’s frescoes *in situ*. I draw on these first-hand experiences throughout my analysis of his paintings and the discussion of my own work. Since many of these images were intended to be viewed within a specific architectural or ritualistic context, it is necessary to understand how they are encountered in the world before then articulating the ways in which they have been reproduced and recontextualised over time.

Arrivals and the open book

In the previous chapter, I discussed the relationship between painting and the book. This fascination with the book within my research allowed me to see it as a site of meditation and contemplation. However, as I noted towards the end of the chapter, the very idea of attention is also associated with its opposite: distraction. I sought to interrogate this idea of narrative interruption further in my studio investigation.

⁵⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 1.

⁵⁶ Robert Sokolowski, “Quotation,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 37, no. 4 (1984): 702.

Continuing with the image of the book, but shifting it to one side, I made *Arrivals* (2022) [Fig. 2.1].

In the foreground of this painting, an open book is placed on the right, whereas on the left, there is a provisional drawing of an angel. There are also four abstract shapes which disrupt the image as they do not seem to belong to the perspectival space, instead having the appearance of being stuck on, like a series of transparent sticky notes. I aimed to bring two visual orientations together in a single frame: the act of looking *down* into a space and looking *ahead* at a surface. This was a way of speaking to the painting's dual identity as both a window onto the world and a surface of inscribed marks, and to point to the slippage between these two visual modes.



Fig. 2.1. *Arrivals* (2022), oil on linen, 102 x 114 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

The space in this work is tilted, and there are times where the geometry of the tiles is misaligned. Some of the lines are not quite straight and the tiles themselves are irregular sizes, alluding to a tension between rational order—that is, something that is knowable and graspable—and the moment where this might falter, shift, and open onto another kind of space. When I first started working on *Arrivals*, I had included other pictorial elements in the composition, including a reference to a figure and other objects scattered across the floor. However, as I developed the work, I gradually re-painted sections of the composition before eventually eliminating the figure entirely. This resulted in an increased emphasis on the geometry of the floor which guides the eye up towards the back of the scene located beyond the top edge of the frame.

A key point of reference for this painting was Piero della Francesca's *The Flagellation of Christ* (c. 1468-70) [Fig. 2.2], which Kenneth Clark described as 'an expression of the Renaissance *mystique* of measurement, known as perspective.'⁵⁷ Although its subject is the scene of the Flagellation, the composition is divided into two sections, splitting our attention across two separate spaces and temporal moments. To the left of the column, we witness the scene of Christ being flagellated in the court of Pontius Pilate. Piero places the biblical narrative in the distance, despite the fact that it is the subject of the painting. To the right of the central column, and in the foreground, three men are standing outside the court, engaged in conversation. These men stand outside of the religious narrative and do not seem to acknowledge the Flagellation taking place.⁵⁸ Clark argues that the men are clearly not 'indifferent onlookers' but rather 'three important figures, two of them symbolical and one a portrait, whose thoughts are expressed by the sufferings of Our Lord.'⁵⁹ As a

⁵⁷ Kenneth Clark, *Piero della Francesca* (London: Phaidon, 1951), 20.

⁵⁸ There has been much scholarly debate regarding the identity of these figures. This has been surveyed by Marilyn Lavin, Creighton Gilbert, and Franck Mercier. See Creighton Gilbert, "Piero della Francesca's Flagellation: The Figures in the Foreground," *The Art Bulletin* 53, no. 1 (1971): 41-51; Franck Mercier, "Salvation in Perspective: A New Interpretation of Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation of Christ*," *Annales HSS (English Edition)* 72, no. 3 (2017): 489-523; Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "Piero della Francesca's Flagellation: The Triumph of Christian Glory," *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 4 (1968): 321-42.

⁵⁹ Clark, *Piero della Francesca*, 19.

doubled representation, *The Flagellation* describes not only the biblical story but also the moment that it is being *summoned*. This explains why the men are turned away from the Flagellation; it is not intended to show indifference on their part, but rather to show how their words are capable of invoking the image which we see on the left.



Fig. 2.2. Piero della Francesca, *The Flagellation of Christ* (c. 1468-70), tempera on panel, 67.5 x 91 cm. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Piero places the divine realm in the distance as something which can be pointed to but not accessed in its entirety. Making *Arrivals*, I was interested evoking the sense of splitting and multiplicity embedded in *The Flagellation*, since it is through the split in the image that the present enters into a communion with the past. In this context, *The Flagellation* can be understood as a representation of picturing, where objects are brought before our eyes but also placed at a distance. Alison Ross states that traditionally, the Christian image is taken to be ‘split between image and icon,’ where ‘God is incarnated in the *imago dei* of the son who, in turn, stands behind iconic representations.’⁶⁰ The image’s symbolism means that it is always deferred and pointing to something outside of itself, where the abstract idea is located behind a form which is visible. This is understood as a relation between the intelligible and the sensible, between what can be known and what gives us access to it. Before returning to discuss my painting further, it is necessary to consider what this doubled surface of the image involves and how it is expressed in Nancy’s philosophy.

⁶⁰ Ross, "What is an Image? Form as a Category of Meaning in Philosophical Anthropology," 21.

Central to Nancy's project is the transition from the question of meaning to that of 'significance.' For him, it is no longer relevant, or even tenable, to think through what images mean, as this assumes that there is an underlying truth to be excavated.⁶¹ Addressing the significance of things means questioning how we relate to them as materially embodied events. As he writes in *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (2008), 'the idea of Christian revelation is that, in the end, *nothing is revealed*, nothing but the end of revelation itself.'⁶² This speaks to an incommensurability that is exposed through the realisation that knowledge is not attained simply by dispelling uncertainty or darkness. Rather, it is a result of difference, of separate spaces being brought together even if they are unable to be reconciled.

Returning to *Arrivals*, I recognised that these multiple viewing registers—looking down and looking ahead—were two ways of knowing the world. On one hand, the perspectival lines draw the eye in, leading the viewer into a space that they are able to occupy, a space that is arranged for them. On the other hand, the abandoned objects and the abstracted forms that sit flush with the surface evoke a sense of interruption, disrupting the possibility of entering this world. Reflecting on how Piero's *Flagellation* presents us with a view of representation itself, my work also sought to enact this. In the bottom-left corner, the sheet of paper looks as though it is lifting up from the surface, casting a shadow onto the white tile below [Fig. 2.3], denoting a separation between two surfaces.

⁶¹ See Peter Joseph Fritz, "On the V(I)Erge: Jean-Luc Nancy, Christianity, and Incompletion," *The Heythrop Journal* 55, no. 4 (2014): 620-34.

⁶² Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 147.



Fig. 2.3. Detail, *Arrivals*.

Displacement and doubling (in) the *Madonna del Parto*

Piero's *Madonna del Parto* (c. 1460) [Fig. 2.4] centres on symmetry and doubling. Nancy refers to it as a 'scene without any status in the religious legend,' since it does not depict a specific biblical event.⁶³ Andrei Tarkovsky references it in the opening scenes of *Nostalgia* (1983), a film concerned with exile, displacement, and a subject divided between two cultures. Piero's fresco, which has itself been displaced from its original location in the church of the Santa Maria della Momentana, now exists as a fragment in a museum devoted to it. In the studio, I was initially drawn to its symmetrical arrangement, having spent years looking at the work in reproduction. As part of this research project, however, I conducted a fieldwork visit to Monterchi in Italy to examine how an embodied experience of the work might inform my reading of its doubling. I discovered that it is an image that women have travelled to for

⁶³ Nancy, "Visitation: Of Christian Painting," 119.

centuries; it serves as a ritualistic site for pregnant women who come to ask the Virgin for protection during their pregnancy and a pain-free childbirth.⁶⁴

Originally made as an altarpiece, the *Madonna del Parto* is now housed in a small museum that used to be a primary school. As Hubert Damisch observes, in its current location it has the appearance of a hologram, hanging behind glass and lit by a spotlight in a darkened interior as if were a 'rare specimen.'⁶⁵ When visiting the fresco, the experience was similar to that of being in a small movie theatre [Fig. 2.5]. Brightly lit in a darkened room, viewing the painting was like viewing a screen. In the corner of the room, there was a cardboard box piled with letters, poems, and flowers. These were all addressed to the Virgin. Although it is no longer in the church which it was initially made for, the ritual has persisted in an altered form. This is an idea I will return to shortly; however, I will first outline how the formal qualities of the painting were important for my own studio investigation.

⁶⁴ It is so embedded in the cultural life of the region that in 1954, the Mayor of Monterchi did not allow the work to be loaned to an exhibition in Florence in case 'during its absence something might happen to a woman in [labour] and the consequent reaction to this.' Piero Bianconi, *All the Paintings of Piero della Francesca*, trans. Paul Colacicchi (New York: Hawthorn, 1962), 43.

⁶⁵ Hubert Damisch, *A Childhood Memory by Piero della Francesca*, trans. John Goodman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 20-21.



Fig. 2.4. Piero della Francesca, *Madonna del Parto* (c. 1460), fresco, 260 x 203 cm. Musei Civici Madonna del Parto, Monterchi.



Fig. 2.5. *Madonna del Parto*, Musei Civici Madonna del Parto, Monterchi.

The idea of a surface splitting in two is what led me to refer to this fresco in my own painting, *If only I could part the sky* (2022) [Fig. 2.6]. I used a reduced colour palette consisting of cool blue, pale pink, and beige to describe the silhouettes of three figures who seem to be opening the sky. This painting is a quotation of Piero's fresco, but it also miniaturises it. The small scale of the painting transforms the Virgin and her attending angels into an abbreviation, a motif that looks like it could have been stamped onto the surface. Removing most of the pictorial detail from the figurative group, my painting reads like an after-image carrying only a trace of the original.



Fig. 2.6. *If only I could part the sky* (2022), oil on linen, 30 x 36 cm. Photograph: Docqment.

In Piero's fresco, the pregnant Virgin stands at the threshold of a tent with one hand on her hip and the other on her belly, pointing to the split in her dress. It is not clear whether she is stepping out to greet us or if she is in fact retreating into the tent, and she is therefore poised in between emergence and withdrawal. According to Laurie Schneider Adams, her gesturing towards her belly references 'a traditional act of queens required to produce a legitimate heir.'⁶⁶ However, it also mirrors the action of revealing taking place within the scene as a whole. The Virgin is flanked by two

⁶⁶ Laurie Schneider Adams, *Italian Renaissance Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 186.

angels—the angel on the left wears a green robe, but its stockings and wings are coloured red, whilst the angel on the right bears the opposite colouring. The opening in the Virgin’s dress echoes the angels’ opening of the curtains. As viewers, we become beholders of an eternal process of unveiling taking place through the curtain, the dress, and the flesh.

When viewing the fresco in the Musei Civici Madonna del Parto, one can see where Piero has adjusted the placement of one of the angels, underscoring the importance of an exact symmetry in the final work [Fig. 2.7]. This trace of the drawing led me to reflect on how Piero produced this symmetry through not just repeating the image of the angel but flipping it in order to create the mirror images. Both of the angels are drawn from the same cartoon, with Piero tracing one before then flipping the parchment over to trace the other.⁶⁷ This act of flipping a sheet of paper back-and-forth is something that becomes increasingly important within my own studio inquiry and is returned later in this exegesis.



Fig. 2.7. Detail showing where Piero adjusted his drawing of the angel on the left. Musei Civici Madonna del Parto, Monterchi.

⁶⁷ As Laurie Schneider Adams explains, cartoons were transferred onto a surface for painting by “pricking” the drawing with a sharp tool, before then applying powdered charcoal to register the outlines onto the surface, through a process known as “pouncing.” This is evident upon close inspection of the fresco. See Schneider Adams, *Italian Renaissance Art*, 187.

My own engagement with Piero's fresco was a means of entering into a dialogue with an artist from a distant time and place, as a way of speaking to the displacement within the image. In returning to this idea of displacement, it is useful to consider its place within Andrei Tarkovsky's film, *Nostalgia*. The narrative follows Andrei, a Russian writer who is travelling for research through Tuscany and becomes increasingly infatuated by his translator, Eugenia. At the beginning of the film, the pair arrive at a Romanesque church to visit the *Madonna del Parto*. Andrei does not enter the church and instead chooses to wait outside. Upon entering the church, the camera cuts back and forth between two views: Eugenia approaching the fresco and a young woman kneeling and reciting a prayer in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary, Piero's painting visible in the background [Fig. 2.8].

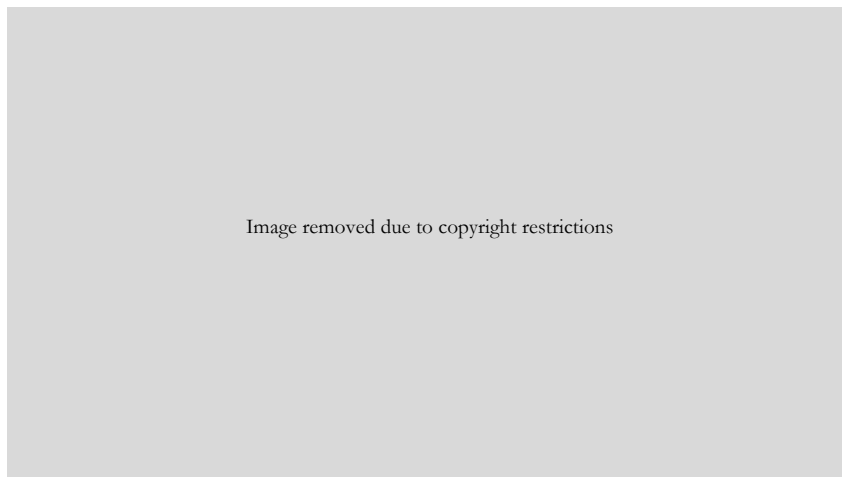


Fig. 2.8. Opening scenes, *Nostalgia* (1983), Andrei Tarkovsky.

The painting that we see in the film is not the original, but a reproduction, thereby marking another instance of displacement.⁶⁸ By referencing the fresco, he produces a spatial-temporal slippage, where the camera submits the stillness of the original to an extended temporal moment facilitated by the moving image. In these opening scenes, the camera brings us closer to Piero's painting as it slowly zooms in on the Virgin's

⁶⁸ Tarkovsky used a reproduction of the fresco and installed it in the church used for filming. James Macgillivray, "Andrei Tarkovsky's Madonna del Parto," *Revue Canadienne d'Études cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 11, no. 2 (2002): 83.

expression [Fig. 2.9], whilst also reminding us that we are not viewing the original, but rather a picture of a picture. As film scholar Yelizaveta Moss notes, 'Tarkovsky's 'pacing is slow, he lingers for entire scenes on *mise-en-scène*, and his actors double back and repeat movements, like broken records.'⁶⁹ This temporal shift between stillness and movement functions like a stretching of the image. In a 1983 interview for the Italian magazine *La Repubblica*, Tarkovsky stated that upon seeing the finished film, he 'felt uneasy, as when one sees oneself in a mirror.'⁷⁰ Beyond the fact that there are multiple parallels between the character of Andrei, played by Oleg Yankovsky, and Tarkovsky himself, *Nostalgia* also deals with the nature of inscribing oneself in the world, writing oneself into a specific time and place.

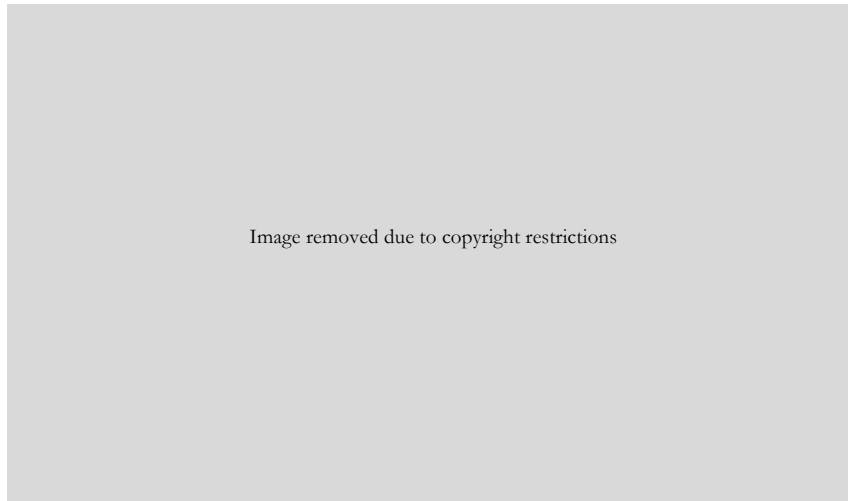


Fig. 2.9. Close-up of the *Madonna del Parto*. *Nostalgia* (1983), Andrei Tarkovsky.

From Tarkovsky's film, I drew the conclusion that Piero's doubling is not only an instance of displacement, but it also describes the original distance inherent within all images. In his writing on the image, Nancy presents the image as something that is distinct, or separate, from the world, using an analogy of the earth's relationship to

⁶⁹ Yelizaveta Goldfarb Moss, "Framing Infinity in Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*," in *ReFocus: The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, ed. Sergey Toymontsev (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 122.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Tony Mitchell, "Andrei Tarkovsky and 'Nostalgia'," *Film Criticism* 8, no. 3 (1984): 5.

the sky, which is differentiated from it. As Nancy posits: 'It is first of all something that, in the ancient cosmogonies, a god or a force more remote than the gods separates from the earth.'⁷¹ Just as he describes Christian painting as not the pictorial representation of a Christian story, but rather Christianity itself being 'caught up in the process of making painting: pregnant with painting, giving birth to it while also announcing itself in it and as it,'⁷² this idea of an image *as* the sky speaks of the essential distance of the image which is carved out from the fabric of experience, presenting itself.

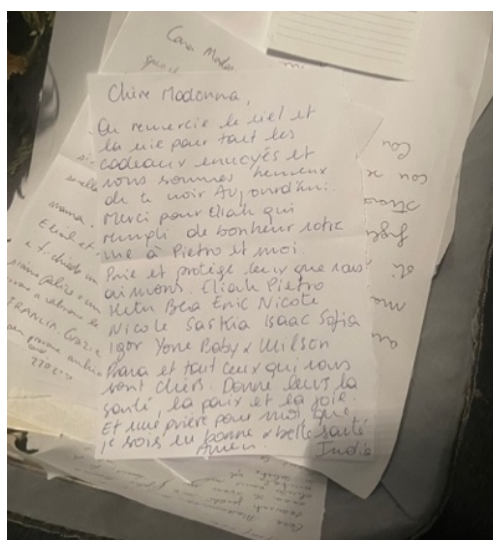


Fig. 2.10. Letters addressed to the Madonna. Musei Civici Madonna del Parto, Monterchi.

Tearing apart and stitching back together

Understanding the image as that which is cut out from the world means recognising its attachment to the universal and the specific. In the early months of my research project, I had a small reproduction of Piero's *Baptism of Christ* (c. 1437-1445) taped to the wall in my studio. As was the case with the works discussed so far in this chapter, I was primarily interested in the symmetry that Piero uses to arrange his composition.

⁷¹ Nancy, "The Image—the Distinct," 5.

⁷² Nancy, "Visitation: Of Christian Painting," 122.

In the *Baptism*, we can connect the symmetry which is produced by Christ's gesture of prayer—two hands brought together—with the dove, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, hovering above his head, its wings outstretched but also completely still. The painting is organised into two halves, the left side gesturing towards the divine realm of the angels and the right side describing the earthly realm. The baptism itself is a crossing-over from one side to the next, as John Drury explains, it designates Christ's 'passing-over into new life'.⁷³



Fig. 2.11. My studio in 2020, with a small reproduction of Piero's *Baptism* stuck to the wall.

Despite its apparent stillness, Piero grapples with how to describe multiple narrative moments within a single image.⁷⁴ To facilitate this, he employs multiple light sources to indicate shifts in time and space. We are accustomed to reading an image like we would a text, from left to right, however, in the *Baptism* the narrative progresses from right to left, with the three angels pinpointing Christ's destination. This is not a simple reversal. As Avigdor W. G. Posèq suggests, the left-to-right reading of the narrative *is* maintained, it is just that it has been arranged for the eye of Christ, who stands on the other side of the picture plane, instead of for us.⁷⁵ Furthermore, casting

⁷³ Drury, *Painting the Word*, 86.

⁷⁴ As Avigdor W. G. Posèq suggests, it is among the painter's earliest attempts to 'solve the problem' of how to deal with this simultaneity. Avigdor W. G. Posèq, "Chronography of Space in Piero della Francesca," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 25, no. 2 (2006): 6.

⁷⁵ Posèq, "Chronography of Space in Piero della Francesca," 5.

our gaze down to Christ's feet, we notice another instance of reversal. Here there is a transition from 'reflection to refraction,' where the water shifts from reflecting the world above to deflecting the riverbed below.⁷⁶



Fig. 2.12. Piero della Francesca, *The Baptism of Christ* (c. 1437-1445), egg tempera on polar, 167 x 116 cm. The National Gallery, London.

In a short essay from 1965 the painter Philip Guston wrote that Piero is like 'a visitor to the earth, reflecting on distances, gravity and [the] positions of essential forms,' whilst also identifying 'a necessary and generous law.'⁷⁷ Since Piero was preoccupied by the task of how to position forms in space, Guston suggests that he embodied the very 'anxiety' of painting, which is first and foremost concerned with how to locate and arrange the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface.⁷⁸ In recent years, however, the art historian Joost Keizer has drawn attention to the way in which the 'world in Piero's paintings is small and local.'⁷⁹ His landscapes are not generalised Italian landscapes, but reference the specific topography of his local

⁷⁶ For a discussion of this see John Shearman, "Refraction, and Reflection," *Studies in the History of Art* 48, Symposium Papers XXVIII: Piero della Francesca and His Legacy (1995): 214.

⁷⁷ Guston, "Piero della Francesca: The Impossibility of Painting," 38.

⁷⁸ In her monograph on Philip Guston, Dore Ashton accounts: 'In a lecture given in 1971 at the Studio School, Guston told his audience that "like a needle on a compass I always return to Piero. I'm under the spell of his majesty."' Ashton, *A Critical Study of Philip Guston*, 149.

⁷⁹ Joost Keizer, *The Realism of Piero della Francesca* (London: Routledge, 2018), 1.

Sansepolcro. The figures he paints are also particular, their faces appear quite distinct from other Quattrocento paintings. Although we might often assume that universality is what allows for us to empathise with a subject—if something is universal, it is supposedly relevant to all of us, regardless of our historical or geographical context—the specificity of Piero’s paintings lends a certain kind of presence which reaches out across the temporal divide.

Reflecting on the small reproduction hanging in my studio, I made a number of paintings in which I inserted part of the *Baptism* into the composition. I was wrestling with the arrangement of forms and how to make sense of the interior space of the studio alongside the art historical references which gestured towards a world beyond the frame. In two of these examples, *Ground* (2021) and *Marginalia* (2021) [Fig. 2.13], I positioned this reference at the edge of the canvas, partially cut off by the border and therefore inviting the viewer to contemplate the relationship between wall and image. These works bring together figurative and abstract pictorial registers, where the pictures seem to punctuate the space, serving as a world within the world. Although parts of the paintings are difficult to describe, these recognisable elements direct the viewer’s gaze to the corners of the frame.



Fig. 2.13. Two paintings, *Ground* (2021) and *Marginalia* (2021), referencing Piero’s *Baptism of Christ*.

Citing Piero's painting in these works was a way of opening a dialogue between myself and the fifteenth-century painter, acknowledging the distance across time and space. It was also an act of pushing the tradition of Christian painting to the side, whilst keeping it within the frame. In *Dis-Enclosure*, Nancy approaches the dissolution of monotheism and the rise of secularisation as two tendencies which have shaped modernity.⁸⁰ Importantly, he frames this not in terms of a disappearance of religion, as one might assume, but as a kind of re-naming. In this sense, he attends to the traces of religion that persist in secular society, making it clear that the secular can only ever define itself in relation to the sacred.⁸¹ This question of the sacred and the secular is interrogated further in the final section of this chapter, which focusses on a painting I made which sought to secularise the Annunciation story.

Inside and outside the text

The Annunciation is an origin story within the Christian tradition signalling the moment when 'the word' becomes flesh. The art historian Hanneke Grootenboer argues that despite its emphasis on the delivery of a message, the Annunciation points to the limits of human interpretation.⁸² The archangel Gabriel arrives at the Virgin's bedchamber to tell her that she will bear the son of God, and yet his message is ultimately 'obscured' by his inability to explain how it will happen.⁸³ Artists have relied on pictorial metaphors for penetration, including references to 'the infusion of breath' or 'sound entering by the ear' as a way of suggesting the conception without depicting it exactly.⁸⁴ The Annunciation therefore centres on something which is unrepresentable and unknowable. The true nature of the

⁸⁰ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*.

⁸¹ For a recent discussion of this idea, see Ashok Collins, "Beyond Secularism and Religion: Jean-Luc Nancy on Global Monotheism," *Journal of European Studies* 50, no. 4 (2020): 343-59.

⁸² Hanneke Grootenboer, "Reading the Annunciation," *Art History* 30, no. 3 (2007): 350.

⁸³ Grootenboer, "Reading the Annunciation," 350.

⁸⁴ As Leo Steinberg notes, Gabriel effectively "dodges" Mary's question. Leo Steinberg, "'How Shall This Be?'" Reflections on Filippo Lippi's "Annunciation" in London, Part I," *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no. 16 (1987): 25.

conception is always deferred, which articulates an unravelling of the correspondence between word and image, along with the representational logic of cause and effect.

In the studio, I sought to reconfigure the Annunciation, a story that has been represented many times throughout the history of Western painting. I was curious to observe how an engagement with this iconographic tradition might constitute a form of doubling, of repeating what has already been said. Experimenting with images torn from old magazines and books, I began folding pictures to generate unexpected compositions. I noticed that a crease in the paper denoted a shift in the image, which seemed to operate as a temporal and spatial disruption. This resulted in a painting titled *The news* (2022) [Fig. 2.14], where a split in an image brings two figures closer together. Here a seated figure is greeted by a doctor who rests a large clipboard on her arm. The crease cuts off parts of their bodies, alluding to a part of the image which is concealed within the fold. The painting is concerned with the transmission of a message, like the Annunciation, yet it also about a piece of missing information which invites the viewer to imagine what has been hidden.



Fig. 2.14. *The news* (2022), oil on linen, 80 x 59 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

Annunciation pictures are often split down the middle, with Gabriel entering from the left and the Virgin positioned on the right. This compositional structure evokes the bilateralism of heaven and earth, the two realms which are brought together in this narrative moment. Piero's Arezzo *Annunciation* [Fig. 2.15], painted between 1452 and 1466, is included in *The Legend of the True Cross* fresco cycle, which is located in the Basilica di San Francesco in Arezzo, not far from Monterchi. It is important to note that although it is included in this program, the moment of the Annunciation is not directly related to either of the narratives which are woven together here.⁸⁵ Instead, it operates as a prophetic image, signifying the origin of the conception which also carries all future events.



Fig. 2.15. Piero della Francesca, *Annunciation* (between 1452-1466), fresco, 329 x 193 cm. *Legend of the True Cross* cycle. Basilica di San Francesco, Arezzo.

⁸⁵ The story of the True Cross is based on Jacopo da Voragine's thirteenth-century text known as the *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend), which was a collection of the lives of the saints. The frescoes incorporate these stories from Saint Helena's discovery of the cross alongside Constantine's conversion to Christianity in the 4th century, linking the historical discovery with the idea of conversion as a spiritual discovery.

In Piero's *Annunciation*, Mary holds a book close to her body, keeping her finger in the text. Not only does this indicate a pause in reading, suggesting that she is holding her place in the book so that she can return to it, it also alludes to her doubled presence in the narrative, as someone who is both inside and outside of the text. Although there is no mention of Mary's reading at the Annunciation accounted in the Gospel of Luke, it has been a fixture of Annunciation pictures since at least the twelfth century.⁸⁶ Through his placement of the book, Piero humanises, and consequently sexualises, our reading of the virginal conception. Describing the book as an object that Mary not only touches, but *fingers*, the painter gestures towards our own desire to penetrate—that is, to *know*—the miracle which eludes representation.⁸⁷ The book itself also allows a story to be opened at any point, therefore binding together past, present, and future events.

The theorist Louis Marin argues that Piero's Arezzo *Annunciation* functions like a prophetic image within the context of the fresco cycle. Even though it does not contain a reference to the crucifix, a motif that appears throughout the other panels, its idea remains 'fully functional' as the 'schema-operator' of the image.⁸⁸ The composition is organised around a cross-section, produced by the column and the horizontal lines of the architecture, and it is therefore on the cross that the image hangs. During my fieldwork in Arezzo, I visited the Basilica di San Francesco the day after seeing the *Madonna del Parto*. I aimed to observe how the *Annunciation* panel related to the rest of the narrative as well as the surrounding architecture of the church. Entering the chapel, I was struck by two things. Firstly, Piero folds multiple histories together, weaving the biblical narrative into historical events surrounding Constantine's conversion to Christianity. The panels were not organised in a

⁸⁶ Laura Seitveit Miles argues that this corresponds with a growing popularity of anchoresses—female recluses who chose to be walled into a cell attached to a church—during the Middle Ages. Miles notes that Mary's 'involute womb parallels her enclosed room or the space of the temple which, like the monastic cell, physically protects from the world's sins.' Laura Saetveit Miles, "The Origins and Development of the Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation," *Speculum* 89, no. 3 (2014): 634.

⁸⁷ As Grootenboer suggests, any attempt to construct meaning is 'the result of a perverse desire to pry open a painting in order to reveal its most intimate, or, if you like, private, parts.' Grootenboer, "Reading the Annunciation," 350.

⁸⁸ Louis Marin, "Narrative Theory and Piero as History Painter," *October* 65 (1993): 130.

chronological or linear manner, but rather according to formal and pictorial mirroring, which invites a “back and forth” reading across the chapel walls. Secondly, Piero uses repeat images to describe multiple figures, such as the fallen Persian king in the *Battle of Heraclius against Kosroës* and the Christian god in the *Annunciation*, suggesting a link between the secular and sacred rulers [Fig. 2.16].



Fig. 2.16. The Persian king in the *Battle of Heraclius against Kosroës* and the divine father in the *Annunciation*. *Legend of the True Cross* cycle. Basilica di San Francesco, Arezzo.

In the top right quadrant of the fresco, we are presented with a visual substitute for the concept of God, not typically common to Annunciation iconography. Here Piero depicts an open window and a wooden bar that passes in front of it. The shadow follows a path along the wall, seeming to pass through a metal loop which is hanging from the bracket, and into the void of the open window.⁸⁹ This desire for physical proximity to the divine, echoed by Mary’s fingers in the book, is Piero’s attempt to describe the immaculate conception through purely pictorial means. However, the bar itself could also be read as an obstruction of an entry point, a reference to Mary’s virginity and the inaccessibility of the divine through the image. Piero uses these visual paradoxes as ways of implying the dynamics of presence and absence where the impossible ideal content is presented but not represented in precise terms.

⁸⁹ Laurie Schneider suggests that if we read the painting from left to right, the shadow could be said to ‘appear from God’. Laurie Schneider, "Shadow Metaphors and Piero della Francesca’s Arezzo “Annunciation”,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 5, no. 1 (1985): 19. See also George Goldner, "Notes on the Iconography of Piero della Francesca’s Annunciation in Arezzo," *The Art Bulletin* 56, no. 3 (1974): 342.

The news is not only a painting of a secular Annunciation scene, where a message is being conveyed from one side to another, it is also a picture of a picture that has been fixed to the wall. Although the image seems to exist on the same plane as the painting, I sought to draw attention to how it is also separate from it through depicting a piece of masking tape at the top and a shadow along the bottom edge of the paper to show it lifting up from the surface [Fig. 2.18]. These dual gestures of sticking the image down and allowing it to lift up recalled the ideas I had been exploring in *Arrivals*, discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Since *The news* centres on moments of interruption, these references to the image as a physical object, as that which is taken from elsewhere and presented within the frame, led me to reflect further on how a temporal “split” is central to an understanding of painting more broadly.

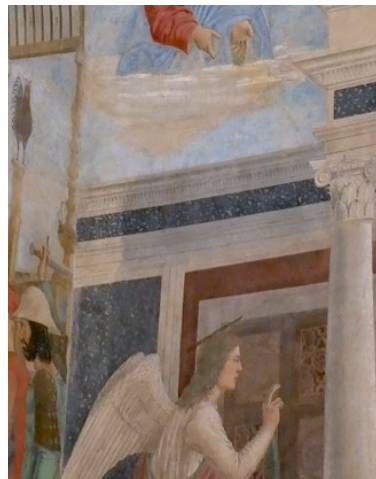
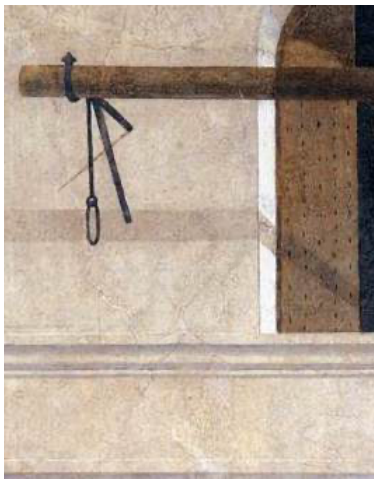


Fig. 2.17. Shadows in Piero's *Annunciation*.



Fig. 2.18. Details, *The news*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have inquired into what it means to re-engage with aspects of the Christian painting tradition through the lens of Piero. Rather than viewing the historical past as having lost its relevance, I have approached it as something that not only informs the present but also offers the contemporary painter a ground to contend with. In each of the studio works discussed here, I addressed Piero's work as a way of sharing some of this ground. These paintings also led me to consider how I might expand on certain formal qualities such as folding and quadrilateral symmetry as part of my studio research. The pictorial concerns that emerged through these works facilitated the shift away from the bilateral symmetry of the book, which formed the basis of Chapter 1, and lead towards the gesture of folding, the subject of Chapter 3.

The first kind of doubling which I identified in Piero's frescoes—and my own paintings—was related to temporality. In the Arezzo *Annunciation*, the *Baptism* and *The Flagellation*, time is either interrupted or doubled by the very act of painting. Instead of presenting the viewer with a specific narrative from the Christian text, the painter sets up a juncture between universal and specific time as they negotiate

iconography, symbols and narrative content. In the *Madonna del Parto* this temporal slippage is alluded to by placing the young Virgin at the threshold of the tent and therefore on the verge of both retreating and emerging. She is suspended here temporarily, just as all painting seeks to interrupt, by way of its stillness, the world in flux. The second kind of doubling which emerged was the desire to reproduce and repeat an image to extend the temporal register of looking. Tarkovsky's use of Piero's fresco in *Nostalgia* invokes an entire history of displacement through a single image, and Piero's own pictorial mirroring and use of visual analogy in the *Legend of the True Cross* cycle speaks of an affinity between the earthly and the divine kings. In both cases, the repetition constructs a space of both signification and a sensible *significance*.

In the next chapter, I discuss a series of paintings and an exhibition that I developed in response to the idea of folding as a form of doubling. The use of the fold in *The news* prompted further studio investigations into this pictorial strategy which gestured towards not only the dissection of the image but also the idea of the front and back of the image, or its *recto* and *verso*, as another dichotomy to address. It also led me to realise that up until this point, the studio investigations had always developed from a position of wanting to understand a certain form (the book) or a tradition (Christian painting) and had, to an extent, overlooked the material process of taking an image from the world—a photograph or an observation—and folding it into my own work.

Chapter 3: Folded images

Introduction

The word “folding” is associated with a sense of collapse. A world which is *folding in* could be one that is collapsing onto itself, dissolving, or submitting to a greater force. The fold, like the book, is also a way of thinking about containment, compression, and bringing together an inside and outside. In this sense, it maps out a relation between concealment and revelation, between its recesses and its surfaces. This chapter deals with the fold as both a practical means of “beginning” a painting and as an analogy for doubling. It examines what takes place when an existing image is folded to form the basis of a composition and what this practice does to the surface of the image. Furthermore, it asks how the world is folded into, and enveloped by, figurative painting. Here I argue that figuration, and the tradition of *mimesis*, is not simply concerned with the representation of the world as it appears, but rather with a more complex process of knowing and recognition.

Folding denotes an increase in complexity and a layering of surfaces. According to Gilles Deleuze, the concept of the fold is the closest we have to a philosophy of the Baroque. In *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988), he traces the fold through the work of German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), situating it in relation to not only Baroque art, where we find references to folded drapery and twisting, contorted bodies, but also, more broadly, to systems of knowledge emerging in the seventeenth century. Deleuze considers how the world is constructed as a continuous surface, where multiplicity and complexity are the results of something being ‘folded in many ways.’⁹⁰ While Deleuze’s philosophy of folding extends beyond the subject of painting, we find its expression in the art of Dorothea Rockburne, Tauba Auerbach, and Simon Hantaï.

⁹⁰ Deleuze, *The Fold*, 3.

The studio investigations discussed here all gesture towards the way in which the world is folded into the space of the painting. As a kind of envelopment, the paintings play with the tension between *re-cognition*—which relies on a previous encounter and a capacity to name what we see—and *misrecognition*, a concept introduced by Jacques Lacan to describe how we mistakenly identify our mirror image as ourselves.⁹¹ My paintings wrestle with what it means to re-cognise something, that is, to *know it again*. In an essay on Deleuze, Nancy speaks of the importance of ‘work[ing] with the fold’ and attending to ‘that which in the fold forms a simple but incontestable incompatibility.’⁹² Towards the end of the chapter, I discuss an exhibition I held in 2023 which brought together works on folding and allowed me to distil the place of knowing and knowledge within my research.

A folded map

For Deleuze, the concept of the fold is a way of conceptualising the world beyond Cartesian thinking. In his reading of Leibniz, he reassesses our understanding of the Baroque, which is often associated with dynamic movement, drama, and theatricality. Deleuze characterises this aesthetic and philosophical sensibility in more nuanced terms, identifying a preoccupation with temporal and spatial slippages alongside a release from Euclidean space. The fold therefore analogises the shift that takes place between the classical linearity of the Renaissance and the curved space of the Baroque, or, to use the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin’s words, the shift from ‘calm fulfilment to restless animation.’⁹³ When folds are introduced into a painting, a surface seems to overlap and intersect with itself, resulting in an increasingly complex space that can no longer be grasped by the horizontal and vertical axes of Cartesian logic.

⁹¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 87.

⁹² Deleuze, *Foucault*, 119.

⁹³ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. Kathrin Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 80.

When evoked in painting, the fold articulates a relation between flatness and depth, whilst also visualising a surface's front and back, that is, its *recto* and *verso*, simultaneously. For the American artist Dorothea Rockburne, the fold combines her interests in mathematics, philosophy, and religious experience.⁹⁴ In *Sheba* (1980), a work from her series of "Egyptian Paintings," she describes *trompe l'œil* triangular folds in low relief [Fig. 3.1]. Although the paintings employ the language of geometric abstraction, this is inflected by a sense of heightened illusionism. As such, the works resist classification, challenging our capacity to recognise them as either image or object. As the art critic Kenneth Baker wrote, these paintings 'offer the right degree of resistance to our recognition of them as paintings to enable us to think these thoughts and to focus our vision by means of them.'⁹⁵ The fold has been a persistent visual element in Rockburne's work, not only as a motif within painting—which is to say, something that she *depicts*—but also as a material practice where creases and folds are used to produce images.

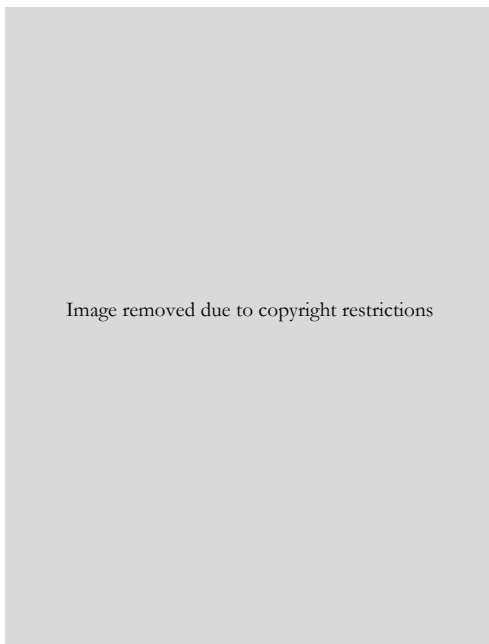


Fig. 3.1. Dorothea Rockburne, *Sheba* (1980), gesso, oil, conte crayon, glue on linen, 188 x 151 cm. National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC.

⁹⁴ Saul Ostrow and Dorothea Rockburne, "Dorothea Rockburne," *BOMB*, no. 25 (1988): 33.

⁹⁵ Kenneth Baker, "Dorothea Rockburne's 'Egyptian Paintings'," *Artforum* 19, no. 8 (1981): 24.

In Rockburne's work, the fold is a means of demarcating space and drawing a line. Some works, such as *Study for Seraphim: Love* (1982) [Fig. 3.2], are especially reminiscent of origami, the Japanese art of paper folding, where a flat sheet is transformed into a three-dimensional form. In this work, Rockburne paints with watercolour on vellum, a surface traditionally made from calfskin that was used for medieval manuscripts. The creases in the surface form compositional lines that direct our gaze up towards the top left corner. As folds dissect shapes in two, we are reminded of the symmetrical form of angel wings. As a geometric reconfiguration of the red-winged angels in Fra Angelico's fifteenth-century frescoes, *Study for Seraphim: Love* conveys a sense of upward movement, evoking an ascension towards the heavens, beyond any figurative reference to the angels.

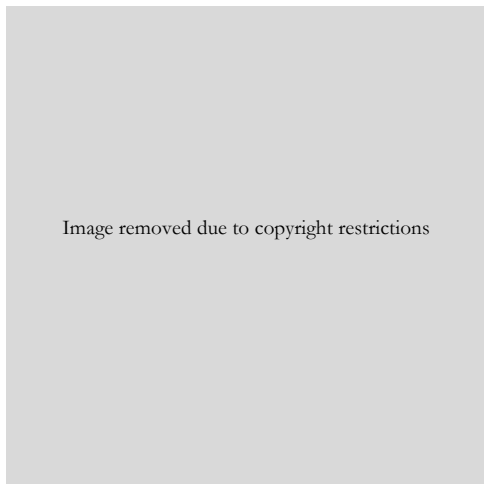


Fig. 3.2. Rockburne, *Study for Seraphim: Love* (1982), watercolour on vellum, 95.3 x 97.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

I had already introduced the fold into my studio investigation when making *The news* [Fig. 2.14] where I sought to disrupt the space between the two figures. Folding my source material not only generated a compositional split down the middle, but it also suggested an interior space within the image, alluding to something which could not be represented but nevertheless able to be sensed. I was curious to interrogate this formal element further within a painting titled *Map* (2022) [Fig. 3.3]. As the title suggests, the work is concerned with the notion of mapping, a process of connecting one set of coordinates with another which facilitates our movement through the world. While not a representation of a map *per se*, it developed out of a particular

fascination with the vertical and horizontal axes of the canvas alongside the paper map, a resource now replaced by digital technology, as an object which is unfolded and refolded, flattened down and compressed. While the left side of the sheet aligns with the edge of the canvas, the right side is slanted as if the central image is unfixing itself from the horizontal plane. There are traces of pictorial information scattered across the image—the cross of a windowpane in the distance, a body of water rendered in pale blue, and marks reminiscent of foliage or falling leaves. Although these elements of the landscape are abstracted, they keep the work from becoming purely nonrepresentational.



Fig. 3.3. *Map* (2022), oil on linen, 114 x 102 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

In *The Fold*, Deleuze states that a folded sheet of paper designates ‘a minimum of depth on our scale of things.’⁹⁶ To fold a sheet of paper means to double it—this increases its thickness whilst reducing its surface area—which also produces an enclosure. In *Map*, I was drawn to the sense of containment and flattening within the painting and decided to remove any cast shadows or references to spatial depth. Unlike Rockburne’s *Sheba*, there are no *trompe l’œil* folds in my painting. Focussing instead on the cross-section form and the reduced colour palette of green and pale blue, I reduced the distance between the image and the surface on which it is suspended, compressing and conflating these two spaces.

This tension between space and surface is addressed by another contemporary artist who interrogates the fold, Tauba Auerbach. Auerbach’s *Fold* paintings, a series she began in 2009, are informed by the language of mathematics, giving form to the complex visual process of spatial perception.⁹⁷ These works were made by folding and unfolding unstretched canvas, painting the surface to register the creases, before then stretching the canvas. This resulted in a *trompe l’œil* surface that we can understand as simultaneously two dimensional and three dimensional. In *Untitled (Fold)* (2010) [Fig. 3.4] there is an indexical relationship between the image and the physical manipulation of the surface prior to painting. Although we know that we are looking at something flat, its crumpled appearance suggests an agitation, a restlessness that implies the canvas is not fixed in place but rather still in a state of flux.

My approach to the fold is less process-based than Auerbach and less illusionistic than Rockburne. However, both artists reveal how folding produces the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. This is at the core of painting’s capacity for *mimesis*, which is central to understanding what it means to recognise something in an image. In Plato’s *Republic*, he argued that painters were the imitators of imitations, producing aesthetic resemblances of objects which were, in

⁹⁶ Deleuze, *The Fold*, 42.

⁹⁷ Hannah De Corte, "Canvas without Stretcher: Impact of the Removal of the Stretcher during Painting after 1945—From Jackson Pollock to Tauba Auerbach," *The International Journal of the Image* 12, no. 1 (2020): 13-25.

turn, resemblances of true, conceptual Forms produced by God.⁹⁸ As such, painting, along with poetry, was understood as being three-times removed from reality, only able to contend with phenomena:

...representation is therefore a long way removed from truth, and it is able to reproduce everything because it has little grasp of anything, and that little is of a mere phenomenal appearance [...] If he really knew about the things he represented, he would devote himself to them and not to their representation...⁹⁹

According to Plato, representation is associated with a kind of ignorance and misplaced attention. Instead of dealing with ideas, the painter attends to appearances. This is also framed as a corrupting force, since the painter ‘may, at a distance, deceive children or simple people.’¹⁰⁰

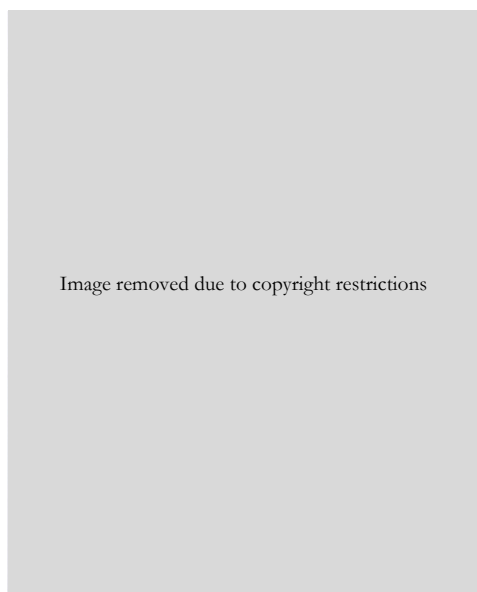


Fig. 3.4. Tauba Auerbach, *Untitled (Fold)* (2010), acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9 cm. Photograph: Vegard Kleven.

In *Map*, I reflected on the relationship that was emerging between recognition and misrecognition. In *The Future of the Image* (2007), Jacques Rancière argues that to ‘see something as art, be it a *Deposition from the Cross* or *White Square on White Background*’

⁹⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 2007), 339-40.

⁹⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, 340.

¹⁰⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, 340.

we must be able to recognise ‘two things in it at once.’¹⁰¹ That is, we must be able to see what has been inscribed onto its surface and what has been represented by this inscription. Rancière refers to this as a ‘de-figuration’ which allows us to see through the first surface to a second surface existing below.¹⁰² If we imagine these surfaces as transparent veils that both reveal and conceal elements of the work, it will seem as though any encounter with a painting would hinge on this multiplicity, a flickering between image and surface, with the image, at times, “catching” on the surface of the painting.

Temporarily fixed in place

The fold, as a means of splitting a surface in two, constituted a disruption in the image. In *Displaced pasture* (2022) [Fig. 3.5], a work made using the reverse side of the source image that I had used for *Map*, I wanted to describe the fold as that which produces a subtle agitation in the surface. To do this, I placed the image in the centre of the composition and described three pieces of masking tape around the edge. This resulted in a central diagonal line, produced by the fold, which suggested that the image was rotating. Furthermore, as the viewer traverses the image, the pictorial clarity shifts into looser brushwork, with parts of the image becoming less descriptive and slightly more gestural. While juxtaposing the actual scale of the wall with the compressed space of the central image, I decided to introduce slippages across these two surfaces. In the top right corner, the green of the landscape merges with the green of the background causing the edge to disappear, destabilising the relationship between figure and ground. This also appears along the internal fold. Although the crease in the image produces a split in the surface, some of the lines seem to continue across this dividing line.

The reference to the diagonal split speaks to how the fold is freed from the horizontal and vertical axes of Cartesian space. In *Displaced pasture*, the fold in the

¹⁰¹ Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 79.

¹⁰² Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 78.

image allows it to break away from the canvas edge through an implied tilting motion. In the top half of the composition, and as indicated by the title, I described a section of a field in various shades of green. The reference to landscape is here conflated with a kind of possession, showing an area of land that is demarcated, bordered, and representable, which is to say, *mappable*. Referencing the masking tape around the edge gestured towards this act of framing and presenting what one owns, and fixing it in place, even if temporarily. Furthermore, the composition's diagonal split was a way of expanding on the slackening of the cross section I had used in *Map*. Once I had introduced this split into the image, it also spoke to the fold's reliance on diagonality itself.¹⁰³ This is an idea I return to in the final section of this chapter, as it concerns painting's own relationship to diagonality via Renaissance perspective.



Fig. 3.5. *Displaced pasture* (2022), oil on linen, 66 x 48 cm.

My decision to reference the masking tape was a practical way of fixing the image in place. However, it also introduced an element into the composition that did not

¹⁰³ In simple terms, a diagonal line connects two points which are not located on the same edge.

belong to the central image yet was still attached to it. It recalled the use of *cartellini*, illusionistic paper notes, in Renaissance and Baroque painting. An example of this can be seen in the Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán's *Saint Serapion* (1628) [Fig. 3.6], where a small paper label appears fixed to the surface on the right side of the composition. In the centre of the work, the saint's body is mostly concealed by cascading, folded drapery, his arms tied to a tree. Due to the darkness of the background, however, it is as if he is pinned to the surface of the painting itself. The slightly creased note beside him is inscribed with Zurbarán's signature and the work's date.¹⁰⁴ As the art historian Steven F. Ostrow notes, the Spanish artist often sought to inscribe his authorial presence into his work, communicating to the viewer that these images were not to be taken as the Christian subject itself, but rather as an artistic interpretation.¹⁰⁵ This device demonstrated the artist's ability to first 'deceive the viewer' before then revealing that 'what we see is, ultimately, "artist-made"'.¹⁰⁶ This was in accordance with the Council of Trent's stipulation that idolatrous imagery leads to the worship of the image rather than what it represents.¹⁰⁷ The presence of the *cartellino* therefore points to a space outside of the image, as a form of proof that what we are seeing is *not* the thing itself but a mediation.



Fig. 3.6. Francisco de Zurbarán, *Saint Serapion* (1628), oil on canvas, 120.2 x 104 cm. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut.

¹⁰⁴ On the use of *cartellini* in the Italian Renaissance, see Kandice Rawlings, "Liminal Messages: The *Cartellino* in Italian Renaissance Painting" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University, 2009).

¹⁰⁵ Steven F. Ostrow, "Zurbarán's 'Cartellini': Presence and the 'Paragone'," *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 1 (2017): 67-96.

¹⁰⁶ Ostrow, "Zurbarán's 'Cartellini': Presence and the 'Paragone'," 82.

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of religious painting after Trent, see



Fig. 3.7. Detail, *Saint Serapion*.

Returning to my painting, I recognised a similar inclination in my use of the masking tape which fixed the image to the wall. This reference to “fixing” was also a counterpoint to the sense of displacement that characterised the image which had been torn, folded and recontextualised by being placed within the painting. In his essay “The Image—the Distinct,” Jean-Luc Nancy writes of the image’s relationship to detachment and displacement, stating that it is separated from the world as that which has been ‘cut out within a ground.’¹⁰⁸ It is cut out and framed, which requires a separation and displacement. This was something I sensed taking place within this painting. It was also emphasised by the fold which produced an additional separation.

Demarcating a boundary and “splitting” a surface in two were key ideas that emerged through this painting. While the landscape elements produced a reading of two spaces—the flat surface of the image and the implied depth of the field—I wanted to return to painting the figure, as I had done in *The news*. More specifically, I sought to meditate further on what it means to face a split or division, where the figures themselves are positioned in relation to the divergence. I decided to return to the compositional structure I had used in *The news* in another painting, titled *Split* (2022).

¹⁰⁸ Nancy writes: “The image is separated in two ways simultaneously. It is detached from a ground [*fond*] and it is cut out within a ground. It is pulled away and clipped or cut out. The pulling away raises it and brings it forward: makes it a “fore,” a separate frontal surface, whereas the ground itself had no face or surface.” Nancy, “The Image—the Distinct,” 7.

Folding and touching

A split is a fissure or rupture, dividing something in two. To split something is to separate it, often longitudinally, but the term is also used colloquially: to *split* (to leave the scene), to *split up* (to separate or divorce), to *split the difference* (to arrive at a compromise). *Split* [Fig. 3.8] centres on three figures, although the central figure is almost entirely obscured by the crease. They are seated around a table in an outdoor setting, with a harsh, white light entering from the top left corner, illuminating parts of their body and the glass objects on the table. Instead of showing tape fixing the image to another surface, as I had done in *Displaced pasture*, I described the torn edge and dog-eared corner on the left side as a way of revealing the blank white space behind the image. As an indication of the image's edge, these details attest to the fact that the image had been handled prior to being painted.



Fig. 3.8. *Split* (2022), oil on canvas, 120 x 140 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

The crease in *Split* recalls a similar form in a painting by Luc Tuymans titled *The Flag* (1995) [Fig. 3.9], which centres on a washed-out image of a flag which is hanging limp. This work references the Flemish flag, known as the Flemish Lion (*Vlaamse Leeuw*), which is typically recognisable by its bold black and yellow colour scheme. In this painting, however, the colours are pale, resulting from Tuymans' use of a Polaroid camera to make his source image. It is important to note that although the image references the flag, it does so through multiple degrees of distance. First, Tuymans made a watercolour painting of the flag. He then crumpled this up, before then making a Polaroid image of the crumpled up painting. This was then used as the source image for the final painting.¹⁰⁹ Three-times removed from reality, the painting invokes a sense of loss or collapse, where the image has been transmitted, mediated, and recontextualised.



Fig. 3.9. Luc Tuymans, *The Flag* (1995), oil on canvas, 138.1 x 78.1 cm.

Tuymans' *The Flag*, like his later painting *The Book* (2007) [See Fig. 1.3] is concerned with a symbol of authority which is collapsing under its own weight. The pictorial split in both of these works closes off parts of the image, rendering it partly

¹⁰⁹ Luc Tuymans et al., *Luc Tuymans* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 137.

inaccessible. Furthermore, while making *Split*, I returned to a study that I had made earlier in my research, which described a sheet of folded paper where the back and front could be seen at the same time. This instance of mirroring and doubling allowed me to make sense of what I was seeking to do in *Split*, which was to address the fold as something which not only produces a demarcation but also an enveloped space.



Fig. 3.10. *Study (paper fold)* (2021), oil on canvas, 41 x 36 cm.

Split describes a familiar scene of people sitting down to eat. In many ways, it is a commonplace subject. However, while the image initially conveys familiarity, the crease down the middle of the painting means that the viewer is split between identification and *misrecognition*. These multiple readings of the work means that the painting is open in terms of its potential of signification. In an essay on the nature of looking at art, Siri Hustvedt describes how the act of producing an image disrupts the usual temporality of our lives.¹¹⁰ It is, however, precisely our capacity to ‘be two places at once’ that allows us to construct images in the first place. She explains:

the act of picture making is only possible because we have the faculty of reflective self-consciousness – that is, we are able to represent ourselves to ourselves and muse about our own beings by becoming objects in our own eyes. This ability is distinct from what has been called pre-reflective self-consciousness,

¹¹⁰ Siri Hustvedt, "Embodied Visions: What Does It Mean to Look at a Work of Art?," *The Yale Review* 98, no. 4 (2010): 22-38.

that immersion in everyday experience that we do not have to reflect upon to perceive: the smell of the basil on the kitchen counter, the warmth of sunlight through a window, the feel of my body in a chair. I am not unconscious of myself as I sit in that chair, surely, but I can sit comfortably for a long period without meditating on what it means for me to be sitting there...¹¹¹

This capacity for 'reflective self-consciousness' can also be understood as a form of self-recognition. To make an image, therefore, involves placing ourselves outside of our body temporarily, distancing ourselves from *ourselves*.

For Rancière, this capacity for recognition is bound up with the question of what representation in art means. While it is common to speak of representation as synonymous with a mimetic tradition—a practice of capturing likenesses and producing resemblances as well as a correspondence between words and images—he describes representation as 'an ordered deployment of meanings, an adjusted relationship between what is understood or anticipated and what comes as a surprise.'¹¹² This means that traditional equivalences between imagery and language can be re-deployed to deliver meanings in a way that first confounds us before then offering the possibility of revelation.

To a certain extent, this recalls Barthes' writing on the distinct kinds of pleasure afforded to us by reading which I discussed in Chapter 1. To represent something means to not only reproduce it or double it, but to reveal what would otherwise remain hidden. The relationship between revealing and concealing is a central concern for the Hungarian-born painter Simon Hantaï, for whom folding was a way of releasing oneself from the demands of 'composition, control, corrections, [and] positions.'¹¹³ Hantaï developed his *pliage* (folding) method in the early 1960s. As Georges Didi-Huberman explains in his writing on Hantaï, the painter is just as concerned with the task of 'non-painting' as he is with painting itself.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Hustvedt, "Embodied Visions: What Does It Mean to Look at a Work of Art?," 22.

¹¹² Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 114.

¹¹³ Hantaï is quoted in Armstrong and Lisbon, "Conversations with Hantaï," 207.

¹¹⁴ This is from Georges Didi-Huberman's essay, "The (Re)foldings of Simon Hantaï," which was translated by Jennifer Branlat and published in Armstrong and Lisbon, "Conversations with Hantaï," 227.

As we can see in his *Tabula* paintings, Hantai produced grid-like structures from folding, unfolding and painting the canvas. In one of these large-scale works, ...*Del Parto* (1975) [Fig. 3.11] he references Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto*, a work which I myself responded to and discussed in the previous chapter. Hantai's painting engages multiple registers of looking; from a distance, it reads as a grid painted on a burnt umber ground. However, upon closer viewing we can see that the work is produced by the absence of paint corresponding to a series of creases that have been left over from his *pliage* method [Fig. 3.12]. The folds are followed by the painter, who submits himself to this gesture which is, paradoxically, a means of composing and *not* composing a picture at the same time.

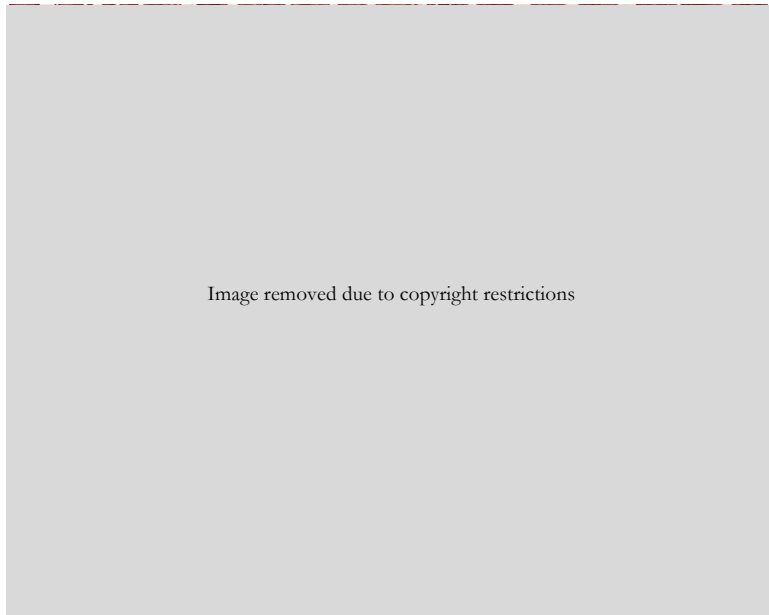


Fig. 3.11. Simon Hantai, ...*Del Parto. Tabula* (1975), acrylic on canvas, 255 x 320 cm. Musée d'art modern de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

According to Nancy, Hantai is not concerned with the subject of Piero's fresco but instead with 'its plane and its folds, manipulated in the interminable lifting up of a presence always already present in the ground.'¹¹⁵ The folds within the *Tabula*

¹¹⁵ Nancy, "Visitation: Of Christian Painting," 119.

paintings are not representational; rather, they are indexical traces of a prior gesture. Hantai and Nancy began exchanging correspondence in 1999 and continued until the painter's death in 2008.¹¹⁶ The pair were both concerned with readability and legibility, alongside what it means to withdraw from the world. Here withdrawal is not to be understood in terms of reverie or sentimentality, but rather a gesture of removing oneself to allow an operation to carry itself out, whether that is within a picture or in a text.¹¹⁷ In one of the letters that Nancy wrote to Hantai in July of 1999, the philosopher remarked, 'plier c'est faire se *toucher*,' which means 'folding is making something touch.'¹¹⁸ While describing Hantai's *pliage* method, it is also a reflection on dialogue itself, the idea that a textual exchange allows two distinct, distant things to come into contact.

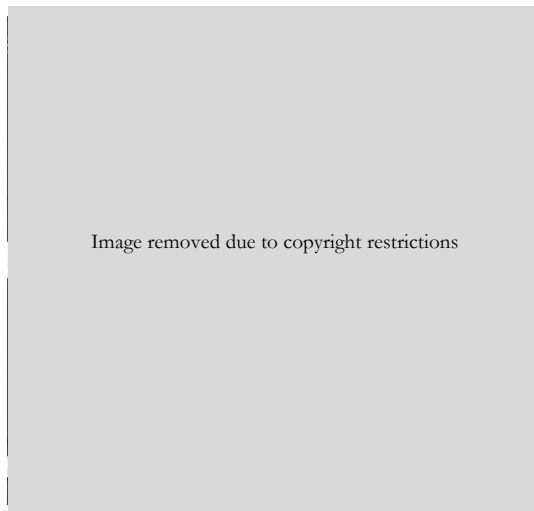


Fig. 3.12. Detail of one of Hantai's *Tabula* paintings, showing the surface quality of the painted and unpainted sections. Photographed by the author during a visit to the Centre Pompidou, Paris.

The subject of exchange and dialogue is also evoked in *Split*, where the figures are not only facing the split in the image but also each other. The type of fold that I reference in this work suggests a part of the image which faces inwards. Rather than removing myself from the tasks of composing, controlling, or correcting the image,

¹¹⁶ Julie Candler Hayes, "The Body of the Letter: Epistolary Acts of Simon Hantai, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Derrida," *Postmodern Culture* 13, no. 3 (2003): 35.

¹¹⁷ Hantai made the decision to withdraw from public life in 1982 and did not exhibit his work until sixteen years later.

¹¹⁸ Hayes, "The Body of the Letter: Epistolary Acts of Simon Hantai, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Derrida," 35.

as Hantaï sought to do, I address these as concerns which are embedded in the image. By referencing the fold and the torn edge, I was able to gesture towards how the image has been found, handled, touched, and distorted. This corresponds with a desire to make the process of artistic interpretation evident, echoing the motivation behind the *cartellini* discussed earlier.

The creases in *Map*, *Displaced pasture* and *Split* each demarcated a space of concealment within the image. In thinking through this notion of concealment alongside revelation, I began to question how a painting conceals parts of itself to slow down the viewer's comprehension and therefore delay the moment of revelation. I decided to explore this in another painting, *Cross section* (2022), where I departed from the folded paper image and instead attempted to evoke the fold through digitally manipulating my source material. This resulted in a different sense of splitting, where the viewer's experience of the painting becomes divided between multiple viewing positions.

Folding an image onto itself

In *Cross section* [Fig. 3.13], I experimented with layering multiple versions of the same image in Photoshop and then used this manipulated image as the basis for an oil painting. In the centre of the composition, a stretched image of a woman is shown in profile. Her gaze is directed to the top-left corner of the work, where there are three, abstracted figures in the distance and another figure standing closer to the picture plane, dressed in a green and white plaid coat. This figure's head looks to the right and appears to be directed towards the central woman, although it is clear that these two do not share the same perspectival space. Instead, the repeated, albeit distorted, forms across the left and right sides of the composition suggest that this painting consists of multiple versions of the same image which have been overlaid on one another.



Fig. 3.13. *Cross section* (2022), oil on linen, 80 x 59 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

This work references anamorphic painting, a technique that involves shifting the viewing position of an image so that it cannot be understood from the front, as one would usually stand before a painting. Instead, through manipulating the perspective, the artist is able to stretch and distort the image so that it becomes visible only from a certain angle. These ‘fugitive images,’ as the art historian Allan Shickman calls them, cannot be grasped instantly.¹¹⁹ This undermines the communicative capacity of painting, since the image is no longer something which is shown, and therefore *known*, all at once, but rather it is something that is revealed slowly over time.

One of the most often-cited examples of anamorphosis is Hans Holbein the Younger’s double portrait of Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve, known as *The Ambassadors* (1533) [Fig. 3.14]. Holbein describes the two men standing in a room, dressed in expensive fabrics and accompanied by their worldly possessions. The men

¹¹⁹ Allan Shickman, ““Turning Pictures” in Shakespeare’s England,” *The Art Bulletin* 59, no. 1 (1977): 67.

gaze out at us, acknowledging this act of picturing. This directness, or frontality, also characterises the placement of the objects—books, musical instruments and scientific instruments—which are being presented for us as viewers, as recognisable, readable symbols. What the painting *indirectly* shows, and as such, what it places on a *diagonal*, is the distorted skull in the foreground. Entering from the bottom of the scene is an object that looks like an apparition or a stain, which is to say it is unreadable, at least when examining the work within the same viewing position required to see the two humanists. It is only once we walk away from the painting and look back at it to view from an oblique angle that the skull is revealed.



Fig. 3.14. Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors* (1533), oil on oak, 207 x 209.5 cm. The National Gallery, London.

Holbein's picture splits the perspective in two, resulting in a separation between the painting's "text" and its "subtext." Martin Jay states that the painting invokes 'the Symbolic realm in which the subject is decentred, split, and comes to terms with its own incompleteness.'¹²⁰ Lacan, in *Book XI* of his *Seminar*, used this painting to elucidate his concept of the gaze, which he describes as 'the underside of consciousness.'¹²¹ In describing the visual experience of Holbein's painting, he explains how images ensnare us:

We shall then see emerging on the basis of vision, not the phallic symbol, the anamorphic ghost, but the gaze as such, in its pulsatile, dazzling and spread out

¹²⁰ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 363.

¹²¹ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 83.

function, as it is in this picture [...] This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze. In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear.¹²²

The viewer in front of Holbein's painting is caught, therefore, in a dynamic of recognition, identifying with the subject, while also never being able to assume a complete position of authority and knowledge over the image.

Anamorphic projection emerged alongside the development of linear perspective in the Renaissance. It is rooted in an embodied experience of an image, revealing how perspective is not a natural way of seeing, but rather a system of arranging forms for a viewer standing in space. While Holbein uses it in his composition, examples of this visual device can also be found in sixteenth and seventeenth century "turning" pictures. Also referred to as "perspective" pictures, these paintings employ multiple images which are cut and assembled so that as the viewer moves around the object, the image shifts from one view to another. In an example by an unknown Spanish artist, held in the Wellcome Collection in London, the portraits of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Francis de Paul, and Saint Peter are combined in a single object. Two of these views are shown in Fig. 3.15, as well as the corrugated surface that makes the optical effect possible.



Fig. 3.15. Two views of an anamorphic painting by an unknown Spanish artist, *Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Francis de Paul, and Saint Peter penitent* (17th (?) century), oil on wood, 45 x 36.5 x 2.5 cm. Wellcome Collection, London.

¹²² Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 89.

In *Cross section*, the repetition of the image means that there is not a single “correct” viewing position. No matter which image the viewer tries to see correctly, the others will always be distorted. This multiplicity splits the viewer’s gaze, asking them to shift back and forth between looking ahead and looking askew. I recognised this doubled viewing was something I had interrogated in other works such as *Arrivals*. In *Cross section*, however, this desire to confound the viewer became increasingly apparent, as I discovered that this extended the temporal experience of the image. The figures in this work also emphasised this gesture of moving “back and forth,” in that they seemed to be facing each other. As shown in Fig. 3.16, a figure turns her head as if to direct her gaze, and ours, to her own mirror image.



Fig. 3.16. Details of *Cross section*.

***The world folding in upon itself* exhibition**

In the final section of this chapter, I reflect on a solo exhibition held at ANCA Gallery in Canberra in 2023 titled *The world folding in upon itself*. In this exhibition, I brought together a group of paintings from my studio research, including *Map*, *Displaced pasture*, *Split* and *Cross section*, to explore the dialogue that was taking shape between folding and doubling in my studio research [Fig. 3.17].¹²³ I decided to arrange the paintings in a way that highlighted visual resonances among the images,

¹²³ This exhibition was held in the penultimate year of my research project. While I would have preferred to stage an exhibition earlier in my project—ideally around the halfway point—this was not possible due to the global pandemic and associated lockdowns.

rather than any kind of narrative reading. When viewing the works together, I identified affinities across the works in terms of folding, doubling, and mirroring. However, I also discovered that these resonances and pictorial affinities were in fact central to the kind of knowledge that painting produces.



Fig. 3.17. Installation view, *The world folding in upon itself*, ANCA Gallery, Canberra, Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

The title of the exhibition references a passage from Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966).¹²⁴ In this work Foucault develops a history of knowledge through tracing how epistemes are formed. In the first part of the book, he refers to how, up until the sixteenth century, the world was known through four similitudes:

Convenientia, *aemulatio*, *analogy*, and *sympathy* tell us how the world must fold in upon itself, duplicate itself, reflect itself, or form a chain with itself so that things can resemble one another. They tell us what the paths of similitude are and the

¹²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

directions they take; but not where it is, how one sees it, or by what mark it may be recognized.¹²⁵

It is through resemblance, and the capacity for recognition, that we can understand the relation between objects and phenomena. Just as folding a sheet of paper allows its most distant edges to touch, when we identify similarities in the world, it as if the world is being permitted to fold onto itself.

Being able to view the paintings side by side and across the gallery space allowed me to recognise similarities that were not immediately apparent in the studio. For example, I observed that I often placed a central image within the canvas frame so that it did not continue to the edge, thereby activating a space between the image and the wall. I also reflected on the titles I had chosen and found that I tended to use terms that hold double meanings, such as “split” or “map.” These words would allude to the formal structure of the composition, what I perceived the image to be *doing*, alongside its potential narrative opening. These are two aspects of the work that I address more closely in Chapter 4, which analyses the role of the frame.



Fig. 3.18. Installation view, *The world folding in upon itself*. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

¹²⁵ *Convenientia* refers to things that are adjacent, or convenient, to one another, and therefore connected spatially. *Aemulatio* is concerned with emulation, where things are seen to reflect one another. *Analogy* enables all things in the world to approach one another through a sense of rapport. The fourth similitude, *sympathy*, is related to a force or mobility or an inclination between things. See Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 29.

In his writing on Foucault, Deleuze argues that central to Foucault's thinking is the idea of the double, a repeating form which enables recognition. He states that 'folding or doubling haunts all Foucault's work but surfaces only at a late stage.'¹²⁶ This is also a relation of the inside to the outside, where Deleuze proposes that for Foucault, the inside is a folding of the outside.¹²⁷ In *The world folding in upon itself*, I aimed to examine how the paintings were speaking to not only folding but also systems of knowing, recognition, and resemblance. What I discovered was that the fold constitutes an interior which is still connected to what remains visible on the outside. Like my paintings suggest, the crease is not a separate area, just a concealed section of what is otherwise visible.

Conclusion

Approaching the fold within painting is not only a way of conceptualising doubling, but also a means of staging the generative potential of images. The process of folding my source material in *Map*, *Split*, and *Displaced pasture*, and evoking the fold in *Cross section*, led to a group of works that negotiate ideas around resemblance and recognition. The works demonstrate how folding transforms the image from a flat surface into something which conceals part of itself within itself. It also speaks to how depicting recognisable forms within art is not a task of simply repeating appearances but rather an attempt to know something from both the inside and the outside, to *represent oneself to oneself*. Although the paintings do not resolve the complexity surrounding the interiority and exteriority of the fold, they nevertheless destabilise and disrupt the image as a means of eliciting within the viewer a sense of the paradoxical experience of familiarity and misrecognition.

¹²⁶ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 99.

¹²⁷ He writes: 'If the inside is constituted by the folding of the outside, between them there is a topological relation: the relation to oneself is homologous to the relation with the outside and the two are in contact, through the intermediary of the strata which are relatively external environments (and therefore relatively internal).' Deleuze, *Foucault*, 119.

This chapter has examined the way ideas around folding and unfolding developed in my studio research. From describing folded paper within the paintings to evoking a sense of collapse between multiple images, the concept of the fold allowed me to examine doubling, splitting and the tension between interiority and exteriority. As the studio works discussed in this chapter demonstrate, folding an image produces a space that is both within and outside of the picture space. As a rupture in the surface, a fold is both an enclosed space and an opening.

The following chapter examines the doubled nature of painted images by asking what it means to see oneself seeing. Echoing the fold's tendency to point outwards as well as inwards, the final chapter looks to the relationship between image and frame, painting, and painter. While not intended to settle the question of painting's doubled nature, they speak to the disparate nature of the image as a negotiation between two realms, haunted by absence and yet bound to the act of presenting.

Chapter 4: The edge and the frame

Introduction

The relation between the intelligible and the sensible within figurative painting has been a persistent concern throughout this project. As the artist-as-researcher, I locate myself both inside and outside the work, often seeing myself *within* the image whilst also trying to work through its broader complexity. In this chapter, I address the idea of the edge and the frame within my paintings. This is both a formal quality which I attend to in the works themselves and a conceptual framework that I trace through the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. Extending beyond textual interpretation, reading involves speaking the words of another and situating oneself within a logic, and a body, that is outside of one's own. This is a central tenet of Derrida's deconstruction, in which he 'rehearses or reiterates the texts he reads' as a means of approaching the limits of language.¹²⁸ In this regard, the painted image can also be understood as hinging upon reiteration and the condition of repeatability.

In each of the four paintings discussed here, the image has its basis in a photograph or a film still. Through painting, it is then fragmented and destabilised in order to bring it into dialogue with its own limits. In *The world folding in*, a work which developed out of my fascination with the fold, a figure emerges from deep, dark space, which is revealed, at its edge, to be a flat sheet of paper. In *Dance*, a washed-out image of two figures facing one another is repeated along one side of the painting, suggesting that the image might infinitely repeat. *Place setting reflection* provides a close-up view of a table scene, gesturing towards a history of still-life painting where the human subject is no longer within the frame. Lastly, in *Body double*, the frame appears as a visual device which not only contains but also compresses the image. These works all point towards the edge of the canvas, tracing the boundary

¹²⁸ Jae Emerling, *Theory for Art History: Adapted from Theory for Religious Studies by William E. Deal and Timothy K. Beal*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 137.

between what can be represented within the frame and what the action of omission produces.

While working with the language of the photographic and the cinematic, these paintings also draw upon multiple art historical sources to develop a pictorial language which negotiates the figurative and the abstract. There is, however, an artist whose work I draw on more closely, the Belgian painter Luc Tuymans. Tuymans' work hinges on the role of the image and its relationship to legibility, transmission, and framing. In analysing his approach to the painted image, we can also sense similar questions that have informed Derrida's philosophy, namely the idea of *différance*, which denotes how meaning is always deferred.¹²⁹ For Tuymans, the image is something that is characterised by postponement, meaning it is both temporally delayed and spatially distanced.

As I unravel the role of deferral and repetition in my own work, I also reflect on Derrida's concept of the "trace" which shares an affinity with *différance*. This is a term that he uses to refer to the way in which linguistic meaning is produced by its place within a system of differences, which hinges on spacing.¹³⁰ The colloquial use of the term trace denotes a remnant or residue; this is also an appropriate description for the pictorial quality of Tuymans' paintings. By expanding on this term throughout this chapter and contextualising it within my studio research, I show how the process of painting an image—especially one which begins as a photograph or a frame from a film—is a way of producing a *reading*. It is through rehearsing, reiterating, and doubling the image that we move closer to an understanding of how it lives with us and through us.

¹²⁹ The concept of *différance* is developed in an essay titled "Différance," which was translated first in 1973 and then again in 1982. I refer to the 1982 translation by Alan Bass in this chapter. See Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹³⁰ Derrida refers to 'the fundamental property of writing, in a difficult sense of the word, as *spacing*: diastem and time becoming space; an unfolding as well, on an original site, of meanings which irreversible, linear consecution, moving from present point to present point, could only tend to repress, and (to a certain extent) could only fail to repress.' Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 217.

Another fold

Central to Derrida's discourse is the deconstruction of hierarchies within the Western philosophical tradition. Throughout his writing, he critiques logocentrism, the belief that language points to a consistent external reality. This is interrogated in *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida addresses the opposition between speech and writing, arguing that there is no such thing as "natural speech," as has often been assumed, since all language contains the trace of writing.¹³¹ Resisting the binary logic that associates speech with presence and writing with absence, he uses the term *arche-writing* to describe an abstract form of writing—what we might simply term "language"—that is the precondition of written and spoken words. With this, he is not claiming to privilege writing over speech, but rather seeks to expose the limitations and contradictions of this particular hierarchy.

Here it is necessary to turn to the argument proposed in his essay "Plato's Pharmacy". In his reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Derrida develops his concept of the *pharmakon*. The word *pharmakon* comes from Ancient Greek and, depending on the context in which it is used, can mean either 'remedy or poison.'¹³² The paradoxical nature of this word is used to describe how both written and spoken language is susceptible to misunderstanding and semiotic slippages. Introducing this idea within Plato's text, Derrida writes:

Socrates compares the written texts Phaedrus has brought along to a drug (*pharmakon*). This *pharmakon*, this "medicine," this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternately or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent.¹³³

Derrida shows how linguistic meaning is not causal or readily accessible but rather can bring about confusion through double meanings, pointing to lack of 'natural'

¹³¹ Here Derrida quotes Aristotle who writes in *De interpretatione* that 'spoken words (*ta en tē phone*) are the symbols of mental experience (*pathēmata tes psyches*) and written words are the symbols of spoken words'. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016), 11.

¹³² Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination* (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 70.

¹³³ Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 70.

relation between signs and their fixed meanings. More specifically, in invoking the contradictory nature of the *pharmakon*, he also addresses how language cannot be grasped through opposition. This is because one thing always carries the trace of its opposite—presence bears the trace of absence, just as the inside bears the trace of the outside—they cannot be taken as separate terms and instead form a necessary dependence. Although Derrida’s focus here is on written and spoken language, this conceptual framework also extends to our understanding of images.

In *Apotheek (Pharmacy)* (2003) [Fig. 4.1], Luc Tuymans frames a view of a green, slightly glowing, cross which casts a shadow onto the pavement. This is the sign for medical aid, commonly seen along urban streets in many European countries. Although this is a secular image, the cross carries the weight of the crucifixion and the story of Christianity itself, being cast down onto the Earth. It is therefore, both secular and divine, a sign of life and a sign of death. Gesturing towards this immaterial presence, this commonplace symbol of modern medicine contains the trace of religious salvation, speaking to and against religious iconography. From “Plato’s Pharmacy” to Tuymans’ *Apotheek*, our encounters with words and images are marked by contradiction and misrecognition.

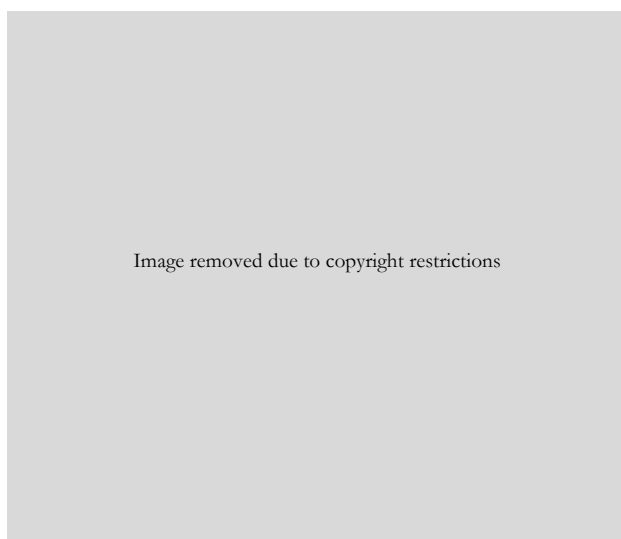


Fig. 4.1. Tuymans, *Apotheek (Pharmacy)* (2003), oil on canvas, 157.5 x 190 cm.

In the studio, I had turned my attention to film stills as the basis for painting. I wanted to examine the ways in which these images are first transmitted to me from

elsewhere, before then reconfigured and transmitted again into the materiality of the paint. In *The world folding in* [Fig. 4.2], I continued with the fold as a way of disrupting an image and alluding to its spatial depth. This work centres on an image which I made by taking a photograph of a film broadcast on television, cropping the image and then printing it onto copy paper and folding the paper along the edge. This printed and folded object was the ‘model’ for the final work. Here two different spaces are folded into one: the space to which the figure belongs—an ambiguous, dark space which feels expansive and impenetrable—alongside a noticeably shallow space where the paper fold is located. The corner of the image seems to fold up onto itself, lifting up from another surface and implying a subtle shift outward from the picture plane toward the space of the viewer. Not only does this crease in the paper interrupt the image, but it also draws the viewer’s gaze towards an outer limit.



Fig. 4.2. *The world folding in* (2023), oil on canvas, 51 x 71 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

Since I was still working with the fold, I decided to reference two pictorial precedents which have their origins in seventeenth-century Baroque art. Firstly, I was interested

in Baroque tenebrism, a term that is derived from the Latin *tenebrae*, meaning “darkness,” which refers to an intense contrast between light and shadow. This is used to cast figures into strong relief and heighten the sense of drama and theatricality across the composition.¹³⁴ I observed how the figure in my painting occupies an ambiguous position within the frame, her body contorted and twisted, with the dark recesses of the folds of her billowing skirt dissecting her in parts. While she seems to be turning towards the viewer, her face is obscured by shadow, rendering it difficult to discern the direction of her gaze.

Secondly, and perhaps less obviously, this work responds to the tradition of *trompe l'oeil* letter rack painting, a popular subject in the Dutch Republic that was developed by the artist Samuel van Hoogstraten. In these works, flat objects are shown strapped to letter racks or noticeboards, fixed in place to ensure that one’s personal and professional matters are, as Michiel Roscam Abbing notes, kept ‘close at hand and in plain sight.’¹³⁵ As we can see in Hoogstraten’s *Letter Rack with Medal and Own Plays* (1666/78) [Fig. 4.3] paper objects are shown creased, folded, and slightly lifting off from the surface. The space is shallow and yet every attention is given to the articulation of spatial depth. Looking at these works, I was struck by the way that multiple spatial registers are brought into dialogue with one another and found that I was also seeking a similar visual experience in my painting.

¹³⁴ Maria Rzepińska observes that “[t]he problem of light and darkness in Baroque painting was not purely artistic in character. It penetrated into the entire intellectual life of the time, into religion, philosophy, and natural science. This also seems to have been the only period in the history of European culture in which the phenomenon of shadow and darkness has aroused so much speculation and gained such an important position unknown of before or later.’ Maria Rzepińska, “Tenebrism in Baroque Painting and Its Ideological Background,” *Artibus et Historiae* 7, no. 13 (1986): 112.

¹³⁵ Michiel Roscam Abbing, “Samuel van Hoogstraten’s Personal Letter-Rack Paintings: Tributes with a Message,” in *The Universal Art of Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678): Painter, Writer, and Courtier*, ed. Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 118.



Fig. 4.3. Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Letter Rack with Medal and Own Plays* (1666/78), oil on canvas, 68 x 83.5 cm. Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe.

Alongside these broader visual affinities, I was also informed by two specific works. Given my interest in Christian painting but also Baroque tendencies, I had been examining El Greco's depictions of the Annunciation scene, a subject that he produced many versions of. In these works, I observed a certain "intensity" within both the handling of the paint and the almost-graphic composition where bodies and objects appear carved into the surface.¹³⁶ This extends to his depiction of folding, shifting fabric, which finds an equivalence in the folded appearance of the sky which seems to behave like drapery. This results in a sense of rippling across the image, as can be observed in his *Annunciation* (1609) [Fig. 4.4].

Tracing the idea of the creased paper through letter rack paintings, I also identified a visual resonance in a distant—which is to say, more recent—temporal moment. Gerhard Richter's *Turned Sheet* series centre on the image of curling or torn sheets of paper, evoking a tension between abstraction and figuration. One of the works from this series, *Umgeschlagenes Blatt [Turned Sheet]* (1966) [Fig. 4.5] shows a torn edge of paper which is curling and lifting up from the surface beneath it. Although this can be seen as an evocation of "blankness," as an instance of emptied signification, the

¹³⁶ In interviews, Tuymans has also commented on this sense of visual intensity in El Greco's canvases. See Luc Tuymans and Gottfried Boehm, *The Image Revisited: Luc Tuymans in Conversation with Hans De Wolf*, T.J. Clark & Gottfried Boehm, ed. Hans De Wolf (Brussels: Ludion, 2018).

painting is also concerned with a sense of anticipation. As viewers we wait for the arrival of textual meaning but are instead in a state of deferral.¹³⁷ The tearing of the sheet, or the turning of the page, does not unveil meaning. Instead, it reveals the very act of revelation, an exposure that could be repeated, theoretically, *ad infinitum*.



Fig. 4.4. El Greco, *Annunciation* (1609), oil on canvas, 294 x 204 cm. Private collection, Madrid.

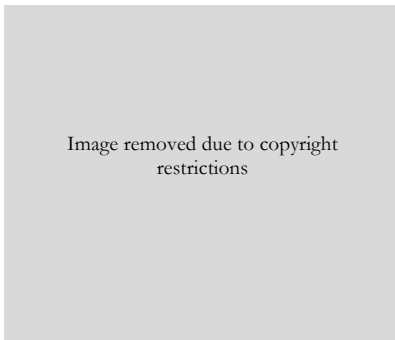


Fig. 4.5. Gerhard Richter, *Umgeschlagenes Blatt* [*Turned Sheet*] (1966), oil on canvas, 18 x 21 cm.

The world folding in draws the viewer's attention to the edge of the image—the seam, the split—which allows us to enter it. Since the image is taken from a film, the painting performs a translation from one pictorial language into another. Within

¹³⁷ Jeremy Gilbert Rolfe observes that while we can speak of a surface being blank, '[t]here are no such things as blank forms' since 'a smooth form is still a shape, with a figural relationship to an at least implicit field and all that that implies.' He argues that blankness is no longer a 'sign for absence' but 'it is now the sign of an invisible and ubiquitous technological presence.' Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, "Blankness as a Signifier," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (1997): 167.

translation, there is always a reminder or excess, something that cannot be carried over: its idiom. In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida states that '[o]ne is always tempted by this faith in the idiom: it supposedly says only one thing, properly speaking, and says it only in linking form and meaning too strictly to lend itself to translation.'¹³⁸ This sense of untranslatability, or rather, the inherent distance within translation, is also described by Walter Benjamin as that which finds itself 'at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.'¹³⁹ This irreducibility suggests that translating an image from one context to another is merely a gesture of reaching out, pointing outwards whilst looking back at the original. In *The world folding in*, I found that the painting did not reconcile two spaces or two folds but put these separate zones into dialogue with each other.

Repetition and the trace

For Derrida, photographic and cinematic images are like ghosts or *spectres*, haunted by both presence and absence, 'neither living nor dead.'¹⁴⁰ This suspended state was an idea I aimed to explore in *Dance* [Fig. 4.6], a painting that developed from a film still. In this image-of-an-image, two women are dancing with their arms thrown up in the air. In between these figures, a seated man is resting his head on his hand, as if asleep in the background. I initially intended for the figures to appear as though they were "facing off" with one another, as not-quite mirror images. In a way, they recalled the mirroring angels in Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto*, a work I discussed earlier in Chapter 2. However, the compositional arrangement was also similar to Alex Katz's *Double Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg* (1959) [Fig. 4.7], where the artist and the inverted double sit side by side, and are not identical.

¹³⁸ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 7.

¹³⁹ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (Boston and New York: Mariner, 2019), 19.

¹⁴⁰ Antoine de Baecque and Thierry Jousse, "Cinema and Its Ghosts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," *Discourse* 37, no. 1-2 (2015): 26.



Fig. 4.6. *Dance* (2022), oil on linen, 102 x 114 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

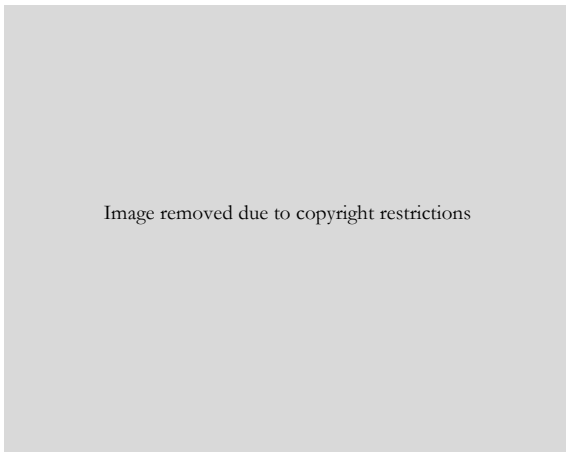


Fig. 4.7. Alex Katz, *Double Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg* (1959), oil on canvas, 167.6 x 217.2 cm. Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville.

In *Dance*, repetition appears in multiple forms. The figures themselves suggest a kind of mirroring, while the image's repetition along the left edge evokes the sense of a chain of images continuing off-screen. The doubling along the edge resembles a film strip, where a series of still images is projected in rapid succession to create the illusion of movement. While this painting is, like all conventional paintings, anchored in stillness, the repetition within it speaks to a lingering image that extends beyond its own bounds. Thinking about this painting's relationship to cinema, I used a washed-out colour palette to suspend the image in a hazy atmosphere of smoke or mist, suggesting the immaterial qualities of light projection. This is also emphasised by the area which surrounds the main image, which has the appearance of a pink and purple sky. The image appears to float within the frame, fixed in some places but also detaching in others, alluding to a process of decontextualisation. This is underscored by the presence of two pairs of hands flanking the scene whose bodies have been cut off by the frame.

The light and bleached-out colour I used in *Dance* recalls Tuymans' tendency to obscure parts of his images with excessive light. In *Hand* (1998) [Fig. 4.8], an overexposed image of a hand takes up most of the composition. When translated into the materiality of paint, the light garners opacity and becomes something that *conceals*. As Jamie McKendrick suggests, Tuymans' paintings 'interrogate the poisoned ambiguities of our way of knowing what happens, of the way any visual reconstruction remains opaque.'¹⁴¹ This was also the case in my painting, where I observed that the areas of the image which are the lightest in tone also conveyed a kind of thickness which was difficult to articulate; it was as if the light was being weighed down by the oil paint, which was unable to translate its immateriality.

¹⁴¹ Jamie McKendrick, "Heart of Darkness," *Modern Painters* 14, no. 3 (2001): 59.

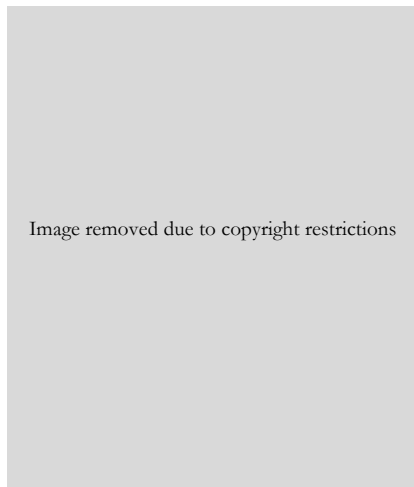


Fig. 4.8. Luc Tuymans, *Hand* (1998), oil on canvas, 51 x 42 cm.

Tuymans almost always works with images that have a photographic or cinematic origin, either referencing popular culture or films that he has made himself.¹⁴² These images become unfixed from their original context and are re-inscribed by the painter. Early in his career, his works were concerned with memory and the painted image's relationship with history, violence, and banality. He claimed that a good painting is self-critical insofar that it has the capacity to 'denounce' itself, an idea which recalls Derrida's deconstruction and its critique of accepted truths.¹⁴³ In *Still* (2019) [Fig. 4.9], Tuymans references David Lynch's 2001 film *Mulholland Drive*, painting a frame from the film where the Cowboy, played by actor Monty Montgomery, appears in a dreamlike scenario. Here the Cowboy is a figure of authority but also a symbol of an imagined freedom, embodying the very idea of the "West" and its articulation in Hollywood.¹⁴⁴ By painting this frame from the film, Tuymans not only invokes the image of the Cowboy, but he also calls to mind

¹⁴² Tuymans has stated, however, that it is difficult to maintain both practices—painting and filmmaking—at the same time, as they are 'both very intense, demanding activities.' Van Pee, "Unnatural Resources: Luc Tuymans on Fighting the Literal and Mistrusting Images," 69.

¹⁴³ Juan Vicente Aliaga and Luc Tuymans, "Interview: Juan Vicente Aliaga in Conversation with Luc Tuymans," in *Luc Tuymans*, eds Ulrich Looock, Juan Vicente Aliaga, and Nancy Spector (London: Phaidon, 1996), 12.

¹⁴⁴ See Alan Nelson, "Cowboy Rules: *Mulholland Drive*, Kafka, and Illusory Freedom," in *Mulholland Drive*, ed. Zina Giannopoulou (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

Lynch's original act of framing, thereby producing a layered operation where one image defers to the next.



Fig. 4.9. Luc Tuymans, *Still* (2019), oil on canvas, 90.6 x 176.2 cm.

This process of re-representing an image that is already circulating in the world is a way of producing a 'reverberation,' to borrow Benjamin's phrase. I have found that working with a found image is distinct from working from observation or directly from the imagination, as it requires a negotiation between two positions, viewer and painter. It introduces an additional distance into an activity already characterised by distance. The relationship between proximity and distance has already been addressed throughout this exegesis, however here it comes to the fore once more as I sought to understand how referencing the photographic and the cinematic might constitute a form of re-articulation in the studio.

When a painting re-represents an image in the world, it de-emphasises invention and instead concerns itself with repetition. In *Dance*, I was attempting to describe how an image is always brought into a painting from elsewhere and how it belongs to a chain of repeating images. According to the philosopher Marie-José Mondzain, images belong to 'systems of separation and distinction' which create 'irreducible and constitutive gaps.'¹⁴⁵ These gaps are instances of alterity where connections can be

¹⁴⁵ Mondzain, "What Does Seeing an Image Mean?," 313.

forged, and where the image is a way of ‘gaining access to something that, within the visible, both overflows and empties it at one and the same time.’¹⁴⁶ In my painting, this is enacted through my increased awareness of the boundaries of the image and how it is positioned within the frame of the canvas.

In her translator’s preface to *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes that there is ‘something ritually satisfying about beginning with the “trace”.’¹⁴⁷ She states that the:

structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent. That other is of course never to be found in its full being. As even such empirical events as answering a child’s question or consulting the dictionary proclaim, one sign leads to another and so on indefinitely.¹⁴⁸

This idea of one thing leading to another is not only an accurate characterisation of how one image always leads to another within studio research, but it is also a useful way of conceptualising the lack of fixed meaning within painted images. Derrida’s idea of the trace—which Spivak uses alongside the word “track,” to approximate the original French meaning—speaks to an endless chain that one can never arrive at the origin of.¹⁴⁹ That is, we can never reach its ‘full being’ and therefore find ourselves in a state of constant deferral.

Making a place

According to Hanneke Grootenboer, certain paintings do not ask to be interpreted, but rather are ‘kept free of signification’ to enact *thinking*.¹⁵⁰ She argues that these are philosophising images, where the painting invites us to follow its line of thought as opposed to extracting meaning from it. In the history of Western painting, still life

¹⁴⁶ Mondzain, "What Does Seeing an Image Mean?," 310.

¹⁴⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator’s Preface," in *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), xxxiv.

¹⁴⁸ Spivak, "Translator’s Preface," xxxv.

¹⁴⁹ Spivak, "Translator’s Preface," xxxiv.

¹⁵⁰ Hanneke Grootenboer, "The Pensive Image: On Thought in Jan van Huysum’s Still Life Paintings," *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 1 (2011): 17.

images in particular have this capacity for what she terms *pensiveness* since they cannot be submitted to the same kind of textual reading that other genres which centre on human action can. Instead, the objects in still life paintings often convey a ‘restlessness’ which is made possible precisely by their *lack* of narrative action. She posits that this is rooted in the medium itself:

painting, unlike photography ... has the capacity to add movement or animation to seemingly motionless objects, to make them possess movement-to-come, in rest. This sense of motion is something of a blending of different layers of time that are superimposed like two transparent sheets.¹⁵¹

For Grootenboer, the “thought” that these paintings contain is not a concept or narrative, rather it denotes an extended temporality that emerges only when the ground of the painting, as that which has been touched by the painter, is not looked through to examine an external meaning, but looked *at*. In other words, these images fix our attention to the surface by not asking us to leave. A consequence of this embodiment of thought is a degree of inexpressiveness, for once we sense expression in a work, we almost immediately enter the realm of decoding intention and emotion.¹⁵²

This process of thinking through painting, as opposed to expressing something with painting, has been a persistent concern throughout my inquiry. While I have not always set out to construct ‘philosophising images,’ I have been guided by a desire to resist simple modes of interpretation and to stretch the temporal moment of the viewer’s engagement. In *Place setting reflection* [Fig. 4.10], this takes place through evoking something of the *restlessness* that Grootenboer refers to. Here two upside-down wine glasses are placed on a table. The glasses are positioned in the centre of the composition, while the placemats and cutlery are cropped by the frame. Framing a view of a table setting, I made this work in response to a photograph I had taken years earlier of a table in a restaurant which had just been cleared and effectively “re-staged” for the next guests. The original image was not a close-up view, and I began

¹⁵¹ Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Pensive Image: Art as a Form of Thinking* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 45.

¹⁵² Grootenboer, *The Pensive Image: Art as a Form of Thinking*, 24.

by cropping the photograph until the pair of glasses occupied most of the composition. I was particularly drawn to the sense of mirroring but also misalignment across the image, and I found that the “thought” of the painting was closely related to the question of what it means to prepare a space and position objects in *anticipation* of the other’s arrival.

The colour palette I used for this work was intentionally limited. This decision was partly informed by the colours I had used in *Dance*, which resulted in an almost monochromatic image. In *Place setting reflection* cool blues are used for the highlights and maroons are used to describe the shadows. On one hand, I wanted to reduce the saturation of the colour palette to convey something of the absence which is inscribed in the work. On the other hand, however, I found that by limiting the palette to these two hues, I was able to focus more on the process of applying paint, that is, the *inscription* itself, which keeps the viewer’s gaze at the surface.



Fig. 4.10. *Place setting reflection* (2022), oil on canvas, 36 x 41 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

In referencing the genre of still life, this painting is also a meditation on surfaces. Firstly, there are multiple material surfaces which appear to have been doubled, mirrored or reflected. All of these imply a fracturing and fragmentation of pictorial information. For example, within the scene there are two tables pushed up against one another. Upon an initial glance, the viewer could easily mistake the second table as a reflection of the first. There are suggestions of grids in parts of the image—the implication of four “quadrants,” the repeated pattern along the edge of the tablecloth—but there are no actual grids organising the space. Instead, things appear askew and somewhat lopsided. The glasses, for one, are not exactly placed side-by-side, with one situated slightly further in the distance, and the tables themselves are placed at a diagonal. These spatial shifts and slippages are all subtle and yet they create an atmosphere where the objects seem to be jostling into place.

This productive tension between stillness and restlessness can be recognised in images that deal with still life objects. In the works of the seventeenth-century Dutch artist Willem Kalf, the lure of still and shiny, polished objects invite us into a meditative state. Kalf's depictions of luxury objects and intricate place settings belong to a specific category of still life painting that gained popularity in the Dutch Republic known as *pronkenstillevens* which describe ornate objects in a highly naturalistic style. In *Still Life with a Silver Jug and a Porcelain Bowl* (c. 1656) [Fig. 4.11], the silver objects emerge from the dark background through the articulation of reflected light. The painter invites us into the space by way of close observation of *surfaces*, from the smooth surface of polished silver to the dimpled texture of the fruit peel.



Fig. 4.II. Willem Kalf, *Still Life with a Silver Jug and a Porcelain Bowl* (c. 1656), oil on canvas, 73.8 x 65.2 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

In Tuymans' painting, *The Perfect Table Setting* (2005) [Fig. 4.12], the tradition of still life is invoked through the distance of the photograph. As Gerrit Vermeiren notes, this work references an image from Helen Koues' *The American Women's Encyclopedia of Home Decorating* (1948), in which a table has been laid with plates and placemats, glassware and a series of decorative objects, including candles and a parrot ornament.¹⁵³ The image looks faded, emptied in a way. Here Tuymans presents us with an image of middle-class respectability, which, at its core, relies on little more than the gesture of keeping things in place.

What does it mean to keep something in place? This is a question that painting deals with no matter its subject matter. As my own *Place setting reflection* suggests, to make a place, or to lay one out, denotes a kind of hospitality. To return to Derrida, the concept of hospitality presents us with a number of philosophical questions regarding what it means to open oneself to otherness and its relationship to ethics:

Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others. Insofar as it has to do with the ethos, that is, the residence, one's home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, ethics is

¹⁵³ Gerrit Vermeiren, *Luc Tuymans: Proper* (New York: David Zwirner, 2005), 15.

hospitality; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality.¹⁵⁴

This idea of hospitality as something which is given unconditionally—that is, offered without the expectation of receiving something in return—is part of Derrida’s attempt to re-read the boundaries and borderlines that shape the world in geographic and political terms. While reading this within the context of a studio investigation centred on doubling and legibility might seem tangential, I nevertheless sensed an affinity between Derrida’s writing on hospitality and the idea of making space or making time for thought within a painting, especially as a means of shifting away from an extractive mode of interpreting a picture.¹⁵⁵

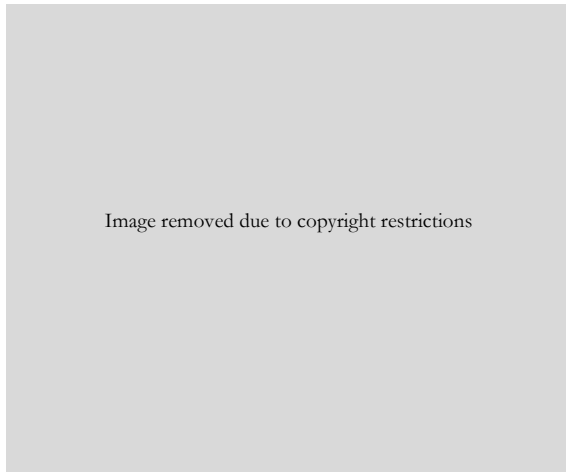


Fig. 4.12. Luc Tuymans, *The Perfect Table Setting* (2005), oil on canvas, 131 x 158 cm.

A double exposure

The frame, the boundary, and the threshold space are formal ideas that I have frequently returned to throughout this stage of the inquiry. Attending to the edge has been something to pursue precisely because of its elusive nature. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss a painting titled *Body double* [Fig. 4.13], a work which was

¹⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), 16-17.

¹⁵⁵ Given the limited scope of this project, the question of hospitality in Derrida serves a useful line of inquiry to be pursued in future research.

made in the later stages of my studio investigation that interrogates the role of framing within my painting. In the image, an actor fastens a *boutonniere* to his jacket, his gaze directed to something off-screen, beyond the edge. He is framed by a black border which does not continue around the entire canvas, cutting off along the bottom edge and not visible at all on the left side of the painting. What can be seen on the left side is the repeated form of the actor's shoulder. In parts of the painting, the figure seems to dissolve into the background, producing a sense of instability within the image. While the border works to contain and compress the image, it also invites the viewer to ponder where exactly the representation ends.



Fig. 4.13. *Body double* (2023), oil on linen, 51 x 61 cm. Photograph: Brenton McGeachie.

In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida speaks, as he often does, to the edges of both language and translatability.¹⁵⁶ Here he deconstructs a term used by Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), known as the *parergon*. In his text, Kant uses the term

¹⁵⁶ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*.

to describe forms which are supplementary to a work of art or architecture, such as ‘picture frames ... drapery on statues, or colonnades around magnificent buildings.’¹⁵⁷ Although these are regarded as adjacent and ornamental, they are not seen as purely decorative. This is because *parerga* provide a necessary frame and viewing context for the work, allowing us to see it as such, even whilst they remain external to the primary function.¹⁵⁸ Derrida, in his reading of Kant, expands on this idea and argues that the *parergon* is not, in fact, located on the outside but rather in a space that is neither inside or outside since it ‘touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside.’¹⁵⁹ Reflecting on my paintings that feature folds, creases, and masking tape, the concept of the *parergon* was a useful way of understanding my attraction to these pictorial details. I had initially conceived of them as a kind of studio “marginalia,” however, after reading Derrida’s writing on the *parergon*, I realised that this was not the correct term, since marginalia refers to a piece of textual or visual commentary occurring within a border. The *parergon*, as something that is supplementary but also integral, aligns more closely to my thinking around these border objects.

The frame in *Body double* was more explicit than those in my other paintings. Here the border served to visually contain the figure, whilst also separating it from the canvas edge. I was also intrigued by how it seemed to be both a part of the image and distinct from it, neither inside nor outside. As I had been contemplating the relationship between painting and cinema at this stage, I was also attempting to fold the framing of the cinematic image into the work.¹⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, for example, reflected on his own experience of going to the movies in a short essay from 1975 titled “Leaving the Movie Theater,” stating that his favourite part was what takes

¹⁵⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), 72.

¹⁵⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 72.

¹⁵⁹ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 54.

¹⁶⁰ In some works I had already used film stills as my source material, such as in *Cross section*, where the still image was cropped and digitally manipulated prior to painting. For a discussion of this work, see Chapter 3.

place *beyond* the film itself.¹⁶¹ He speaks of his fascination with the cinematic image as that which is *doubled*, writing that ‘it is as if I had *two bodies* at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost, into the engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize not the image but precisely what exceeds it.’¹⁶² He is drawn to the sensory experiences outside of the visual frame, including ‘the texture of the sound, the hall, the darkness, the obscure mass of the other bodies, the rays of light...’¹⁶³ By referencing the frame around the image in *Body double*, I sought to point to this outer edge, the frame which is necessary for the visual experience to take place.



Fig. 4.14. Detail, *Body double*.

This gesture of looking beyond the frame was also underscored by the central figure [Fig. 4.14]. Here I was reminded of a painting that I had encountered earlier in my research by the Italian Renaissance artist Antonello da Messina. Antonello's *Annunciate* (1473) [Fig. 4.15] interprets the Annunciation scene as a close-up portrait of the reading Virgin. She looks up from her book in response to the arrival of Gabriel, who is not represented in the frame. Following her gaze, we can assume that he has just arrived at her right. As Lorenzo Pericolo observes, the framing appears, to our modern eyes, like a ‘suspense close-up’ which is used in films to evoke a

¹⁶¹ Roland Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater," in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

¹⁶² Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater," 349. Emphasis added.

¹⁶³ Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater," 349.

feeling of ‘uncertainty, danger, and anxiety.’¹⁶⁴ The Virgin is shown looking up from her bible which is placed on a lectern in front of her, her hands lifting up which, in turn, causes the pages to lift up. Mary’s looking off-screen is here an indicator of Gabriel’s presence:

the Virgin turns her gaze to her right, still but anxious, to find out whose voice and presence close in on her. She is about to raise her hand in greeting, yet she pinches her veil on her breast, as if shielding herself from a potentially unwanted or intrusive stranger.¹⁶⁵

What I have found throughout this inquiry is that our capacity to see and make sense of images always relies on a frame which directs and contains the visual field. As Mondzain argues, we do not see images ‘because we have eyes,’ it is that ‘[o]ur eyes are opened by our ability to produce images.’¹⁶⁶



Fig. 4.15. Antonello da Messina, *Annunciate* (c. 1476), oil on wood, 45 x 34.5 cm. Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo.

In a work that Tuymans describes as a “double image,” a pair of eyes are emerging from rippling water.¹⁶⁷ *Resentment* (1995) [Fig. 4.16] is based on a cross-fade in

¹⁶⁴ Lorenzo Pericolo, "The Invisible Presence: Cut-In, Close-Up, and Off-Scene in Antonello da Messina's Palermo *Annunciate*," *Representations* 107, no. 1 (2009): 3.

¹⁶⁵ Pericolo, "The Invisible Presence," 5.

¹⁶⁶ Mondzain, "What Does Seeing an Image Mean?," 308.

¹⁶⁷ Tuymans and Boehm, *The Image Revisited*, 73.

between two scenes in a film, where one image is superimposed on the other. Not only does this destabilise the reading of figure and ground and the temporal sequence of before-and-after—a quality which I observed in *Body double*—but it also gestures towards a transitional state that painting contends with. Tuymans has stated that he is particularly drawn to the sense of loss and ‘possible failure’ in the image, where a painting undermines its own legibility.¹⁶⁸ In a work such as this, the image seems to be both emerging and retreating into itself, a paradox which I have also been fascinated by in my studio research. Through the photographic and the cinematic, Tuymans approaches what Luke Smythe refers to as the ‘incommensurable discrepancies’ between the immateriality of light and the opacity of pigment.¹⁶⁹ The image in *Resentment* is suspended, caught, between these two states.

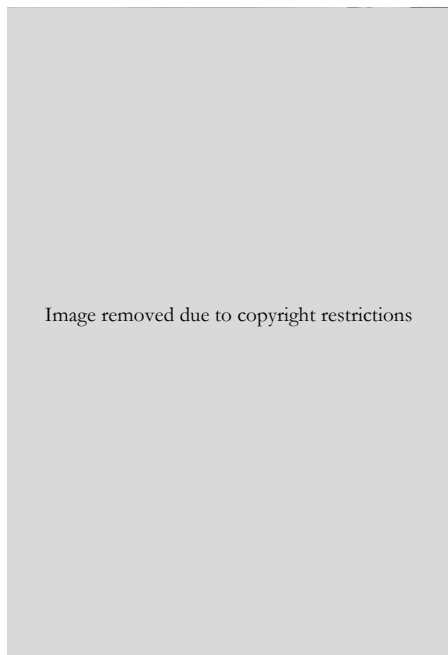


Fig. 4.16. Tuymans, *Resentment* (1995), oil on canvas, 94.5 x 63.5 cm.

As a way of introducing his writing on the *parergon*, Derrida uses another term that carries multiple meanings relating to the frame: *passé-partout*. This word refers to the

¹⁶⁸ Van Pee, "Unnatural Resources: Luc Tuymans on Fighting the Literal and Mistrusting Images," 68.

¹⁶⁹ Luke Smythe, "Pigment vs. Pixel: Painting in an Era of Light-Based Images," *Art Journal* 71, no. 4 (2012): 110.

matting board used to frame a photograph behind glass, but also means to “pass through” and refers to a *master key* which allows someone to gain access to multiple spaces. It is used by Derrida to contextualise an understanding of the *parergon* and to point to the operation of framing as both a “cutting out” and a “passing through,” that is, something that frames but also something that veils. Throughout history, painting, like cinema, has been characterised as both a window onto the world and a flat surface where forms are presented to the viewer. In a work such as *Body double*, which references the screen, the frame, and the surface, these different relations of viewing are brought together, deferring the possibility of seeing the work through a single lens or pre-determined perspective.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have interrogated the edge to understand how a painted image deals with its own limit. In each of these paintings—*The world folding in*, *Dance*, *Place setting reflection*, and *Body double*—productive tensions emerged through the evocations of inside and outside, centre and periphery, and figuration and abstraction. At times, the paintings seemed to extend beyond my own understanding, further alluding to the limit of what can be *known* in, and through, painting. By shifting my attention to images sourced from photographs and cinema, I was able to expand my thinking around language, signification, and doubling within the project. Since these images evidence a kind of transmission from the outset, their distance is ultimately repeated and rehearsed through my painting.

Tuymans served as a significant point of reference for contextualising both the formal qualities of the works and their complex relationship to meaning and representation. Throughout his work, the image is presented as something to be investigated, examined, and reiterated. His washed-out colour palette informed a number of my works, as did his use of cropping and citation. By placing my own work into dialogue with that of Tuymans, I observed how my studio investigation was often drawn to the instability of images. It was, in fact, precisely this relationship

between legibility and intellectual uncertainty—where the image makes us question the temporal moment we have been presented with—that formed the basis of this inquiry.

Derrida's deconstruction has been woven through this chapter as a way of dealing with the frame and elucidating its place within a philosophical discourse. The paintings were, however, not intended to illustrate Derrida's concerns. Rather the works developed alongside my reading of Derrida, something which I came to understand as a double re-enactment of theory and practice. In particular, Derrida's writing on the *pharmakon*, the trace, and the *parergon* are re-read through the lens of my work and can be traced through my own attention to threshold spaces and pictorial slippages. As I have aimed to demonstrate, Derrida does not provide singular definitions for these concepts, for this would only reinforce the assumption there is such a thing as a singular, fixed meaning. Instead, his writing *performs* these ideas, circling around language and rendering it foreign within moments of assumed familiarity. In a way, this has been what my research has also sought to do, approaching the image as a text to be read and rehearsed, speaking to it from the outside. In this sense, meaning in the painted image performs and maintains a suspended state of arrival, a condition that underscores its ontological certainty.

Conclusion

Seeing double

This practice-led inquiry has traced the intersections of doubling and legibility to reveal how contemporary figuration can be unfixed from conventional semiotic functions. In each stage of the studio investigation, the limits of representation have been broached in order to understand how painting—a medium which has been declared dead on multiple occasions—continues to fold absence into presence. Rather than rejecting pictorial representation, as many artists throughout history have done, I have found ways of bringing the image into dialogue with its own limits, whether that is through the interiority of the fold or an acknowledgement of the frame that contains it. This has resulted in a body of work that traverses the multiple ways that painting continues to ensnare us, fixing our attention to the surface, whilst also permitting us to revel in its mysteries.

As Isabelle Graw reminds us in *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium* (2018), ‘paintings do not explain themselves.’¹⁷⁰ Since they do not speak back to us, it is necessary to speak *about* them and *to* them, in order to elucidate the implicit knowledge that they contain. In the context of this project, the language of painting was first understood as a system which allows us to *read* what has been inscribed onto a surface. To speak of language within painting and in relation to painting denoted a certain capacity for textual experience. Towards the end of the project, however, this idea of “language” extended beyond the frame of the painted image, looking instead to a discourse that articulates the contradictions, slippages, and double meanings that cannot be readily grasped. In the works themselves, these ultimately led to pictorial gaps and narrative disruptions.

¹⁷⁰ Isabelle Graw, *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium* (London: Sternberg Press, 2018), 18.

This research was prompted by a desire to understand how painting deals with the concept of the double as a site of intellectual uncertainty and how this relates to the idea of legibility. I had set out to investigate these intersections and to open my practice to how images are not only visual texts to be deciphered but also sensible, traversable surfaces which are not always graspable in intellectual terms. As my research has demonstrated, painting is not a linear activity. It involves moving through and around questions, re-tracing one's steps, existing inside and outside of the work. Like a book that is altered upon a second, or third, reading, paintings are known through other paintings, they must be repeated and rearticulated in order to generate new forms of knowledge. This research has not only opened new lines of inquiry within my painting practice but also forms a unique contribution to the field of contemporary painting discourse which is not centred on the transmission of pre-determined ideas.

The four stages of the inquiry

The first stage of my studio inquiry responded to the symmetry of the open book. Painting the book served as an important entry point into my project, allowing me to test and develop the relationship between the pictorial and the textual. It was during this initial stage that I identified a productive tension between surface and spatial depth developing within my paintings. While I had primarily focussed on the image of the book within painting—an object that opens onto two halves and centres on a crease—it was only once my project had progressed that I recognised this initial fascination with the book was related to not only bifurcation and *splitting*, but also a capacity to shift between alternative temporal moments. At the same time, I experimented with painting readers who appear absorbed in activity, and therefore in a state of withdrawal. Through these works, I discovered that these gestures of presenting and retreating can be traced through the tradition of Christian painting.

Following my inquiry into the book, I arrived at the work of the fifteenth-century painter Piero della Francesca, whose frescoes served as a point of reference for my

own paintings. His use of symmetry and doubling elucidated a number of the aesthetic tendencies within my studio research, including mirroring and temporal/spatial disruption. Piero's ability to fold the universal into the specific, was an idea which I interrogated within my own work, and, during my fieldwork research in Italy to study his frescoes, I observed how this is enacted by combining multiple temporal and spatial registers into a single view. His compositions often seem to be based on a universal logic of symmetry and geometric precision, and yet this is also disrupted by the specificity of his figures and landscapes which invite us to read the pictures as narratives. The paradoxical and often enigmatic nature of Piero's works demonstrate the importance of delay when it comes to revelation. His images cannot be grasped quickly; instead, they postpone our recognition of them, thereby extending and stretching the moment of comprehension.

The fold emerged in my studio research as a way of generating new compositions. Introducing folds and creases into the paintings led me to interrogate how a surface is reconfigured into a space. Situating my work alongside Dorothea Rockburne, Tauba Auerbach, and Simon Hantaï allowed me to recognise that my use of the fold was distinct from these artists in that I was employing it within a figurative painting language. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's writing on the fold also elucidated the complexity of this subject, with its associations to mathematics and the natural sciences. While these ideas were clearly beyond the scope of my studio research, this aspect of the fold connects the processes of painting with philosophical questions concerning the very structures of knowledge itself. My solo exhibition *The world folding in upon itself* was an important moment within my research project, allowing me to test how the fold was being read in these paintings and how to consolidate these questions in my final works.

In the final stage of my project, I turned my attention to the edge as a pictorial element within the work and it became apparent that this idea had been present from the earliest stages of my studio research: the spacing of the text is of course, a space of edges and demarcations. In a series of paintings that respond to photographic and cinematic source material, I approached the frame of the image as a threshold space.

Through Jacques Derrida's writing on the *pharmakon*, the trace, and the *parergon* and Luc Tuymans' paintings, I recognised a shared preoccupation with addressing the limits of representation. My final studio works deal with the cinematic lexicon as a way of exposing how a painted image not only communicates meaning, but also generates new and unexpected sensory and symbolic effects.

Revelations in painting

The Painted Double first developed out of my interest in the relationship between painting and textual experience. Prior to this project, I had sensed that there was a kind of rustling, or *touching*, between what a painting can say to a viewer and what it is able to *show*. As a painter, I often asked myself: how does a painting differ from a text? What kind of language is painting, and can it be described in these terms? For some theorists, such as Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, painting is a language because it *transfigures* what it shows. This is understood in terms of the conventional, as opposed to the purely natural, where '[t]o paint figuratively is really to depart from and transform ordinary perception.'¹⁷¹ This is also discussed by Rancière, who points out that we have been taught to find meaning in 'irreducible non-sense.'¹⁷² This sense of seeing two things at once, of seeing double, is a relation between inscription and exposition, between the process of putting ideas into words versus putting them into forms.¹⁷³

In works such as *Empty notebook* (2021) and *Four views* (2022), the painting brings the book to the surface. Without any text inscribed on these pages, the books are not readable but are instead material objects to be apprehended. This was a way of fixing the viewer's attention to the surface and postponing textual meaning. In *The news* (2022), the fold demarcated a space within the image that was not visually accessible, yet still present, echoing the compositional structure of Piero's *Annunciation* at Arezzo

¹⁷¹ Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, "Painting as Language," *Art in Translation* 3, no. 2 (2015): 136.

¹⁷² Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 17.

¹⁷³ Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 79.

which asks us to enter it whilst also obstructing such an entry. In later works such as *The world folding in* (2023) and *Body double* (2023), the liminal space between the image in the painting and the space beyond the canvas edge became increasingly important. These paintings brought the language of cinema into contact with painting, and as such, gestured towards how a frame creates an incision in the world whilst also allowing an image to pass through.

In an interview with the art historian Michael Ann Holly, the cultural theorist Mieke Bal said that in her reading of Leibniz '[t]he point of the fold is that it doesn't let the viewer feel so powerful, distant, masterly. Nor does it allow viewing to be disembodied, retinal.'¹⁷⁴ For Bal, whose work addresses the operation of narrative across images and texts, the fold is an idea that destabilises the mappable, knowable world through its recesses and its projections, at once retreating and then resurfacing. Its resistance to finitude and commanding logic also means that it invites continuation. Instead of arriving at a fixed meaning from a critical distance, we might become enfolded and enveloped by the object of our study.

Future directions

This inquiry has opened new directions for further research into contemporary painting's relationship to signification and the broader questions relating to the ethics of mastery through the operations of the text. The work produced as part of my research shifts understandings away from figurative painting's attachment to recognisable meaning to an enfolded meaning that is less concerned with restoring a perceived wholeness to the world than it is with generating alternative forms of meaningfulness. The project also reveals how painting is, like reading, a way of existing in two places at once. This capacity to reflect on our position in the world allows us to imagine ourselves in distant times and places, to recognise something of our own lives in an image made centuries ago.

¹⁷⁴ Michael Ann Holly and Mieke Bal, "Reading, Writing, Filming, Dreaming, Dressing," *Art History* 30, no. 3 (2007): 415.

This project has followed a series of questions regarding how I, as a painter, relate to images, yet it has also prompted new ones, including how intellectual uncertainty is both productive and necessary in bringing painting into contact with the limits of language. While there is a tendency to either revere or renounce that which has come before, there is, I would argue, something to be gained by thinking through the book, the painting, and the screen as forms of time-travel. Instead of treating these objects as containers of ideas being transmitted to us, as readers/viewers/spectators, it is useful to understand them as our means of transport, as a way of moving back-and-forth.

Contribution

The Painted Double: Figuration, Language, and the Limits of Representation is a contribution to the field of contemporary painting. It consists of a body of original creative work alongside an exegetical account of the studio inquiry. Through drawing upon the philosophical discourse surrounding painting's relationship to signification, it argues for an alternative way of thinking and working through painted images. This is achieved by disrupting discourses that lock the correspondence between painting and signification into a singular representational logic. I have demonstrated and worked through the notion that painting is bound to, and yet also able to resist, the confines of language.

The mystery of painting rests on its ability to fix us in place whilst also inviting us into an encounter with some kind of *elsewhere*. At times, this has been understood through the concept of divine presence, as that which arrives and then retreats. At other times, it is concerned with a surface folding into itself, as when a book closes, or a piece of paper is creased in the middle. This sense of the *other* in painting is always present, simply lying latent beneath the surface, waiting to be summoned. It can also be understood as the frame, the *parergon*, which demarcates two zones whilst also making them touch. There is only so much that a painting can do, of course, but perhaps one of the most significant is that it can be two things at once.

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