



Australian
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Art for Earth's Sake

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Declaration of Originality

I, Michele England, 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.

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Abstract

This practice-led research explored painting compositions and techniques as a means of relaying my concerns about the escalating negative impact of entrenched anthropogenic systems on the Earth. I juxtaposed the still life painting genre with collage techniques to suggest the causes and impact of the growing crisis. The still life genre is a traditional approach that suggests the domestic interior, a contrived zone of human desire and safety. I used collage to inject terrestrial places of destruction and demise into this zone, suggesting the connection between systemic human activity and environmental degradation. A reflective and reflexive methodology helped to navigate numerous studio investigations and I utilised photography and drawing, in addition to collage, to drive visual compositions. Various materials and painting techniques were explored, and I settled on utilising a mix of paint materiality, craft, and traditional techniques. Flowers became a significant motif for their legacy regarding transience, global trade, and beauty. My studio investigations have resulted in an *expanded still life* language that discusses the current environmental issues in a novel manner.

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All photography of the author's work is by Brenton McGeachie, unless otherwise stated.

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Introduction

Therefore, we may consequently state that: this world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence... a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related.¹

My practice-led research combines the language of still life painting with collage to discuss human-caused environmental destruction, a pressing existential concern not only for humans but all beings on Earth. This destruction is driving the Earth system into a formidable epoch: the Anthropocene. I hypothesise that the still life and collage genres make fitting partners to examine the Anthropocene for their capacity to represent the familiar and the unexpected. I have harnessed still life painting for its principal characteristic of portraying familiar objects that encompass human lives in a human centred space: the domestic interior. Into this space of the everyday, I introduce the destabilising force of collage. Collage's capacity to disrupt meaning through juxtaposition is well known and in exploiting this facility, I have placed human-caused environmental destruction at the heart of our domestic interior. I will argue that my approach expands the still life painting language to make connections evident between the domestic interior and the expansive concept of the Anthropocene. To that end my research asks in what ways can I use collage to rouse the potential of the inoffensive and overlooked language of still life and challenge viewers about the Anthropocene.

¹ Clive Hamilton, *Requiem for a species: why we resist the truth about climate change* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2010). 137. Attributed to Plato, 4th century BCE.

The still life painting genre is often looked down upon as a trivial and decorative form of art.² I argue this virtue has made still life a useful pioneering tool for numerous artists.³ An example is Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque (Figure 1) who revolutionised representational art with their analytical and synthetic cubism experiments involving still life arrangements in painting and papier collè, also known as collage.⁴



Figure 1 Pablo Picasso, *Glass and bottle of Suze*, 1912 and Georges Braque, *Still life (violin and candlestick)*, 1920 (left to right)

Another pioneering example appears hundreds of years earlier when still life painting reflected a great change in western society: a shift to a global trading system. The independent still life of the 17th century, particularly in the newly minted Dutch Republic, highlighted the swift wealth accumulation that was a derivative of that economic system.⁵ Of particular interest to my research was the *flower piece* that arose in the early 1600s as an

² A number of texts were referenced to inform this passage: Margit Rowell, Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), and Hayward Gallery., *Objects of desire : the modern still life* (New York: Museum of Modern Art : Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 1997). 13; Amber Creswell Bell, *Still life: contemporary Australian painters* (Port Melbourne, VIC: Thames & Hudson Australia, 2021). 7; Susan Landauer et al., *The not-so-still life: a century of California painting and sculpture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). 1-2; Charles Sterling, *Still life painting from antiquity to the present time*, A new rev. ed. (New York: Universe Books, 1959). 94

³ Several texts discussed the experimental opportunities offered by the still life genre: Landauer et al., *The not-so-still life: a century of California painting and sculpture*. 2; Sterling, *Still life painting from antiquity to the present time*. 103; Jean Sutherland Boggs et al., *Picasso & things* (Cleveland; New York, NY: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992). 22

⁴ Boggs et al., *Picasso & things*. 17

⁵ Paul Taylor, *Dutch flower painting, 1600-1720* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). 1 – 16, 123 – 128

adjunct to the new culture of collecting specimens enabled by the global reach of this exploitative trade.⁶ The 17th century flower pieces of Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, Jan Breughel the Elder, Roelandt Savery, and Jacob de Gheyn (Figure 2) were evaluated as a springboard into my experimentation, culminating in my *Dark series*. In Chapters One and Three I also critique contemporary artists to understand the current use of still life containing my thematic concerns. These critiques include works by Janet Fish, Cindy Wright, and Christina Lowry.



Figure 2 Jacob de Gheyn, *Tulips and roses in a glass vase*, 1615

In rethinking the still life painting genre, I have looked at ways to inflect its traditional tropes and familiar objects with a new parlance that discusses human impacts on the Earth. I have tested my thesis through re-examination of familiar items from domestic spaces and seasonal flowers from my garden. How might I cross-contaminate these familiar innocuous objects, recognised for their entrenched place in interior spaces, with the expansiveness of

⁶ Before still life painting became a defined term, easel paintings of inanimate objects, in the Netherlands, were called by their subject matter. Hence the *flower piece* depicted primarily a floral arrangement. Sam Segal, *Flowers and nature: Netherlandish flower painting of four centuries* (Amstelveen: Hijnk International, 1990). 15

the Anthropocene? Similarly, I scrutinised traditional still life staging platforms, such as niches, to determine how I might upend these tropes and connect with ideas about anthropogenic environmental destruction. I contend that rethinking the genre of still life provides a means to show how human creation of the domestic space has significantly contributed to the development of the Anthropocene. This still life painting language I envisage uses collage to interrupt this predictable structure.

My use of collage in still life painting was researched for its visual language capacity. As an aesthetic tool, collage rips, cuts or takes imagery and material substances from their usual place of existence and embeds them into a new reality. I argue this act of dismemberment and rearticulation parallels the destructive mechanisms humans have used to excessively take and use parts of the Earth and bring about the Anthropocene.⁷ Collage also provides opportunity for me to highlight tension, ambiguity, and connections within the picture frame as each of these collaged snippets contain their own history, signification, scale, and perspectives. Collage has one overriding principle, as Silke Krohn writes in *The age of collage*, of “taking apart and putting back together”.⁸ I have used this key trait of dismantling and reassembly to capture elements of the domestic space and the Anthropocene and drive them into the same frame of experience. The human interior has become closely entwined with that of Earth’s, our exterior home, so that as Clive Hamilton puts it, the “fate of one determines the fate of the other”.⁹ Humanity’s exploitation of the Earth’s resources has been fundamental to the creation of our safe domestic space but, ironically, that exploitation has changed the environment such that our domestic spaces are now vulnerable to a threat that remains ambiguous and removed to many.

I realised during my initial research making dozens of paper-based collages (Figure 3) that this making method is an effective way of constructing compositions. Hence, I use collage to tinker: to construct compositions which encourages play and stimulates chance and

⁷ The Anthropocene is a new concept of the Earth System and defines a single, dynamic and integrated system. Clive Hamilton, *Defiant earth: the fate of humans in the anthropocene* (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2017). 12

⁸ Dennis Busch et al., *The age of collage : contemporary collage in modern art* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2013). Foreword by Silke Krohn 3

⁹ Hamilton, *Defiant earth: the fate of humans in the anthropocene*. 5

revelation. Etymologically, to tinker is a French word that relates to collage and bricolage.¹⁰ Tinkering is a mode of making, using trial and error and by way of gradual adjustments or creating using a synthesis of existing materials or sources.¹¹ Thus, tinkering or creating compositions through collage is a prime tool for collecting, sorting, arranging, rearranging, inserting, and interlacing materials and motifs into my painting constructions. The artist and art theorist Graeme Sullivan calls it “thinking through making”.¹²



Figure 3 Paper-based collages, *Pump action* and *Burning bush* (left to right), 2020

I have researched painters and photographers who use concepts of human endeavour and human-caused environmental destruction, such as climate change, in their practice. My research has shown that most painters address these issues through the landscape genre. Two notable landscape artists, Mandy Martin and John Wolseley, are investigated in Chapter Two. Unlike photography, my paintings are not documentary in scope. The medium of

¹⁰ Patrick Elliott et al., *Cut and paste: 400 years of collage* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2019). Essay *On Edge: Exploring Collage Tactics and Terminology*, Yuval Etgar, 36

¹¹ Oxford English Dictionary, "tinkering, adj." (Oxford University Press).
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/202263?rskey=nZMiXt&result=3>.

¹² Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh, UNITED KINGDOM: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). 50

photography uses its innate indexical facility to record the landscape and present issues about the environment. One such documentary photographer is Chris Jordan whose ongoing Midway series records and reveals plastics waste, consumerism, and their link on the mortality of birdlife in the middle of the Pacific (Figure 4).¹³ Yet other photographers have found still life to be a useful mode to probe environmental issues. In Chapter One, I critique the artists Marion Drew and Anne de Carbuccia for their photographic works depicting anthropogenic environmental destruction through the lens of still life.



Figure 4 Chris Jordan, *Midway: Message from the Gyre* 2009 – current, 2009

Historically collage has long been used as an artistic tool for ideological commentary. Artists as diverse as the German interwar Dadaist Hannah Hoch through to the English pop artist Richard Hamilton have used collage as a method to discuss socio-political concerns and current world events.¹⁴ Use of collage as a tool to mesh ideological concerns into the one frame is a prescient concern and in Chapter One I will discuss the aforementioned collagists

¹³ "Midway: Message from the Gyre," Chris Jordan, 2011, accessed 28/1/2022, 2022.

¹⁴ Douglas Kahn and collection Juan Davila, *John Heartfield: art and mass media*, 1st ed. (New York: Tanam Press, 1985). 111; Diane Waldman, *Collage, assemblage, and the found object* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1992). 100 – 107; Richard Hamilton et al., *Richard Hamilton: modern moral matters* (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2010).

and the socio-political artists Martha Rosler and Erró for their use of collage and the domestic vernacular.

My principal finding developed in this project is the creation of an expanded still life language that synthesises collage to subvert the familiar and denote an unsettled reality. I utilise this idiosyncratic language to concentrate the turmoil of the Anthropocene into the human contrived space of the domestic interior. I tackled linking exterior environmental issues with the interior domestic space through paint using its physical properties, craft methods, and traditional application techniques. I researched how to imply a still life structure so it might be understood as a piece of domestic furniture as well as a landscape, thus emphasising that the domestic interior and objects are fundamentally linked to the outside and that one cannot exist without the other.

My expanded still life framework calls upon the audience to consider our fundamental role as a planet changing agent. My use of collage in this language is paramount. The collage language of the cut and paste, shifting of scale, different viewing angles of objects and abutting edges when applied to the language of still life painting creates tension, ambiguity, and endeavours to engage viewers. The language of collage to aesthetically render dissimilar imagery onto the one spatial plane is an innovative way to examine our power to interrupt and change the Earth system. Co-locating large scale and remote Anthropogenic events and objects, such as mining trucks, and squeezing them into the frame of still life painting so they reside alongside the familiar, creates an uncertain reality and places ideas of the far into the zone of the near. I argue that this manipulation creates a metaphorical link between the entitled human interior and the embattled exterior. I outline this language of expanded still life painting and its suitability to critique the Anthropocene in more detail in Chapter One.

Key concept: the Anthropocene

As my research progressed, the significance of the Anthropocene became increasingly important for my art and an area of growing unease. Coming into this research I was primarily interested in how to use still life painting to relay systemic causes and impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. Much of this impact, which I call anthropogenic

environmental destruction, is related to industrialisation, capitalism, and colonisation. However, my literature research revealed that the Anthropocene is not only emblematic of anthropogenic environmental destruction but much more. A reappraisal of the Earth by scientists has shown the intimate connections within Earth's own system and how these are being abruptly interrupted.¹⁵ This disruption is captured in the term: the Anthropocene.¹⁶ In 2000 Paul Crutzen, a Nobel prize winning atmospheric chemist who discovered issues with the Ozone Layer, used the term Anthropocene in its present sense.¹⁷ The Anthropocene succeeds the *Holocene* and literally means the age of humans on Earth.¹⁸ It defines a new geological and biological epoch as we irrevocably alter and leave traces of our industry, consumption and progress in Earth's intricate interconnected system. The prominent Earth scientist Will Steffen, along with colleagues, sums up this point unequivocally:

The human imprint on the global environment has now become so large and active that it rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system.¹⁹

"Rupture" is a word used by academic and public intellectual Clive Hamilton to capture the Anthropocene as a paradigm shift perpetrated by humans to the dynamic interconnected spheres of the Earth System.²⁰ I agree with this view of rupture, but for my project it is more

¹⁵ The Earth System encompasses the atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, cryosphere and biosphere which work together in an integrated and tightly coupled way. Hamilton, *Defiant earth: the fate of humans in the anthropocene*. 12 – 13

¹⁶ Several texts were consulted to inform this view, including: Arun Saldanha, "A date with destiny: Racial capitalism and the beginnings of the Anthropocene," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775819871964>; Will Steffen, *TedX Canberra: The Anthropocene* (Youtube, 2010), 16/4/2021.; J. Rockström et al., "A safe operating space for humanity," *Nature (London)* 461, no. 7263 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1038/461472a>, <https://go.exlibris.link/3QMC6pQP>; Hamilton, *Defiant earth: the fate of humans in the anthropocene*.

¹⁷ The first reference to the Anthropocene as a name for the current geological epoch happened at a meeting of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) in 2000. At this meeting, Paul J. Crutzen became impatient with his colleague's repetitive use of the word Holocene and declared, "Stop using the word Holocene. We're not in the Holocene anymore. We're in the.. the.. the.. [searching for the right word], the Anthropocene!" Jane Carruthers, "The Anthropocene," *South African Journal of Science* 115, no. 7/8 (07/30 2019), <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2019/6428>, <https://sajs.co.za/article/view/6428>.

¹⁸ The Holocene is a time in Earth's life when human civilization has flourished. It is a geological epoch of approximately 12,000 years: the period since the last ice age. Neil Roberts, *The Holocene: An Environmental History* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2014). 5

¹⁹ Will Steffen et al., "The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 369, no. 1938 (2011), <https://doi.org.virtual.anu.edu.au/10.1098/rsta.2010.0327>, 842

²⁰ Hamilton, *Defiant earth: the fate of humans in the anthropocene*.

than a single *stratigraphic* moment in Earth's geology and these other facets help inform my art research.²¹

My use of the term is informed by other research asserting that the Anthropocene can be traced back to several pivotal points in human history where human impact on the planet has intensified and these have, in large part, driven the onset of the Anthropocene. The Neolithic, Urban and Industrial revolutions, and the Great Acceleration, are well documented for the upheaval they have caused to the ways humans live and the extent of change that this has created on Earth.²² The Industrial Revolution and its successor the Great Acceleration have had a particularly severe impact on the Earth's interconnected system and the latter is acknowledged as the foremost driver of the Anthropocene.²³ However, the history and events that surround colonialism, capitalism and consumerism should also be acknowledged as Holocene disruptors. The period of European colonisation and trade from the 16th to 18th centuries spread species across continents, disrupted indigenous peoples, flora and fauna and was a precursor to the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century and the post-World War 2 Great Acceleration.²⁴ For this reason, I have critiqued the nascent Dutch

²¹ A stratigraphic marker is a physical location on the Earth that depicts the moment a certain fossil or marked chemical change occurred and thus defines the instant a geological time interval begins. The Stratigraphic marker for the Anthropocene is believed to be either the radionuclides deposited after the 1945 nuclear explosions, or the expansion of materials associated with the Great Acceleration after WW2. "Global Boundary Stratotype Sections and Points," from the Encyclopedia of the Anthropocene, Elsevier, 2018, accessed 31/1/2022, [sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/stratigraphic-boundary](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/stratigraphic-boundary); Hamilton, *Defiant earth: the fate of humans in the anthropocene*. 2; May 2019, The 34 members of the Anthropocene Working Group voted to designate a new geologic epoch — the Anthropocene. This solidified an informal vote taken at the 2016 International Geological Congress in Cape Town. In 2021 a submission was delivered to the International Commission on Stratigraphy for a geologic marker signalling the end of the Holocene epoch and the start of one shaped by human activity. "Results of binding vote by AWG, Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, Working Group on the 'Anthropocene' (AWG)," Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, 2019, accessed 12/8/2021, <http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/>.

²² The Neolithic Revolution is a term coined by Vere Gordon Childe that marked the onset of farming and animal domestication. This change from subsistence farming altered the course of human relations with nature, changing permanently, to name a few, forest and grassland ecosystems and hydrological and nitrogen cycles. The Neolithic revolution also triggered the creation of the feudal, classic and other political systems and in turn the Urban revolution. Roberts, *The Holocene: An Environmental History*. 5; Clement A. Tisdell and Serge Svizzero, "The Agricultural Revolution, Childe's Theory of Economic Development as Outlined in Man Makes Himself, and Contemporary Economic Theories," *History of Economics Review* 71, no. 1 (2018/09/02 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10370196.2019.1598252>. 57; The *Great Acceleration* is a term used to describe time after World War 2 till present day where the imprint of human activity (resource use, manufacture of goods, technological change, use of petrochemicals, etc) on the globe increases sharply. Steffen et al., "The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives." 847 - 849.

²³ Ian Angus, "When Did the Anthropocene Begin...and Why Does It Matter?," *Monthly Review*, Sep 2015. 5 - 8

²⁴ I looked at various texts discussing: In this article the authors discuss how the intermingling of previously separate life forms and people contributed to a fast, ongoing and profound restructuring of life on Earth without geological precedent. Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* 519, no. 7542 (2015), <https://doi.org/doi:10.1038/nature14258>, 174; Saldanha, "A date with destiny: Racial capitalism and the beginnings of the Anthropocene." 16-19; Steffen et al., "The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives." 849 - 853

nation for its pursuit of wealth and power and consequent exploitation of resources through trade. Therefore, we can say that the Anthropocene rupture has happened because of these entrenched human legacies and systems that have accumulated over many human generations and as such are worthy of artistic interrogation.

Key term: Planetary Boundaries

My artwork is primarily concerned with communicating about systemic causes and impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss and these concerns have been augmented by a firm understanding of the Anthropocene. As detailed by Steffen, scientific evidence shows that the “Earth is a single, complex, integrated system - that is, the boundaries operate as an interdependent set.”²⁵ A parallel concept, arising from research into the Anthropocene, called *Planetary Boundaries*, details nine key system boundaries (Figure 5) that the human species must not transgress to ensure Earth remains a safe place for all beings.²⁶ I have used this concept and the currently transgressed boundaries of climate change, biosphere integrity, biogeochemical flows and land-system change for research in the studio. These boundaries have helped determine suitable types of still life motifs and objects, stories to relay in my paintings, connection within my compositions and how to use painterly expression²⁷. I further explain these boundaries in relation to individual work critiques and my studio research directions throughout my Exegesis.

²⁵ W. Steffen et al., "Planetary boundaries: guiding human development on a changing planet," *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)* 347, no. 6223 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1259855>, <https://go.exlibris.link/wRvB2xF3>.

²⁶ Planetary Boundaries is a scientific framework that aligns with the Anthropocene, it asserts to define a “Safe Operating Space” (SOS) in which humanity may develop. This evolving framework was first conceived in 2008 by Johan Rockström, internationally recognized for global sustainability issues and current joint director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Research. Rockström and colleagues contend, in the paper *A safe operating space for humanity* (2009), that nine crucial planetary system boundaries must not be transgressed or a break with the Holocene will unfold. Steffen et al., "Planetary boundaries: guiding human development on a changing planet."

²⁷ Steffen et al., "Planetary boundaries: guiding human development on a changing planet."

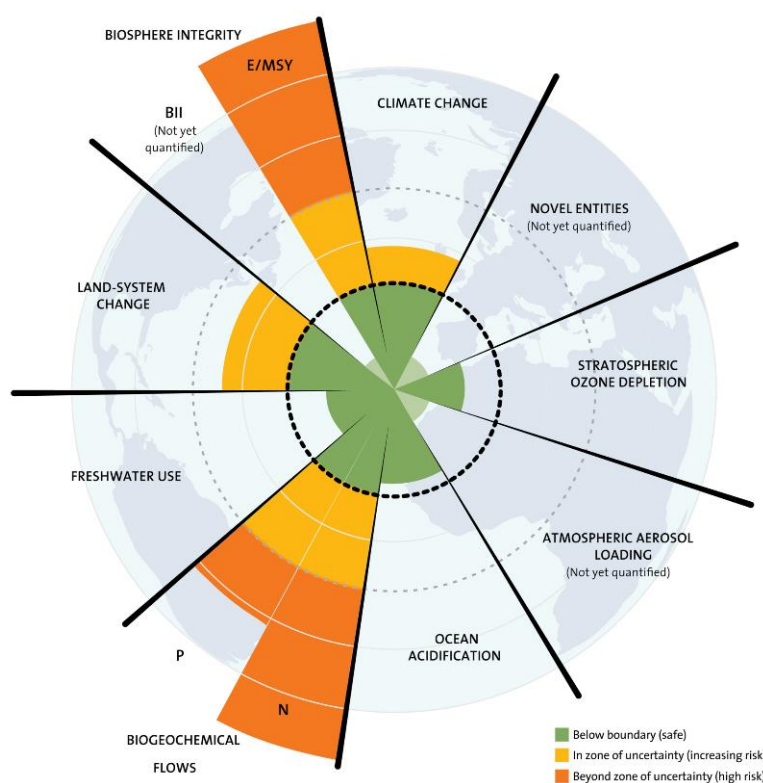


Figure 5 *Planetary Boundaries illustration, 2022*

Exegesis outline

In Chapter One I interrogate still life painting and reasons why it has potential for relaying concerns about environmental destruction: the underlying symbolism of objects, the recognisable form of still life and familiarity of its subject matter, and its known capacity for experimentation. A short discussion of the historical and contemporary artistic context will show where my research resides in a contemporary field. Following, I will outline my initial mixed-media collages and provide an examination of three, as these works were important in guiding my subsequent research. A detailed discussion about collage and its critiquing characteristics will be provided through an analysis of other artists' work. I will conclude this chapter with my early thoughts about the synthesis of collage and still life: the expanded still life.

Chapter Two is dedicated to the studio experiments I conducted during the first year of study. I will reveal four strands of research: still life structural trope of ledges, niche and table; materiality and craft techniques; the use of human figures; and my approach to

storytelling. I will identify how still life structural tropes and paint materiality can be utilised as an active compositional element and add to the reading of still life painting. Also, I will detail how human figures and an emphasis on storytelling in my compositions can be used to bring forward ideas associated with anthropogenic environmental destruction. I will highlight the important breakthroughs and key findings I made and that persevered in later works.

Chapter Three concentrates on three series of paintings made later in my candidacy: *Diorama*, *Table* and *Dark*. These series flow from and are a culmination of my studio experimentation period. The first two series of paintings were worked on concurrently. The *Diorama* series is a reference back to observational still life painting history while the *Table* works clearly have a more collaged aesthetic. A thorough examination of select works are given. The *Dark* series is a result of the *Diorama* and *Table* works and draws upon tropes present in nascent Dutch flower pieces. Importantly, I lay down my key findings of pulling abstract concepts associated with the Anthropocene into the zone of the near: the domestic space. This is accomplished by combining collaged and still life motifs, particularly floral arrangements, to build a narrative about the Anthropocene. I will discuss in detail these motifs, paint materiality and techniques and compositional devices.

In the conclusion to this exegesis, I will consider my research and the artworks I have developed to critique the Anthropocene and our agency in its conception by means of painting systems that synthesise still life and collage into an expanded still life painting language. I will summarise the contribution this research has in the field of contemporary painting and provide some reflections about the project.

Chapter One: Fusion of still life and collage

Introduction

This chapter details my motives for using still life combined with collage to critique human induced environmental catastrophe. I cover three main topics: still life painting, my first studio experiments, and collage. Firstly, I will explain three key attributes of the still life painting language that are useful in critiquing environmental destruction; its ability to discuss social and cultural concerns through material culture; its recognisable format that uses identifiable frameworks and familiar objects; and, as a genre known for its capacity as an experimental platform. I posit that these facets make the still life language a good candidate to relay my concerns regarding environmental issues. Following this thinking, I will introduce my interest in Dutch Golden Age still life and how my research fits in today's context by examining relevant contemporary painters and photographers.

Secondly, I will detail the mixed-media paper collages I made to overcome an impasse with painting investigations. After a brief analysis of collage as a visual language I will examine these initial collage experiments, detailing their conceptual framework, compositional elements, and outcomes used in painting research. Thirdly, I will continue my exploration of collage, both as a methodological approach in the studio and for its aesthetic and provocateur qualities. Working through large and politically contested issues like anthropogenic climate change can be challenging and I will explain how I use collage to help overcome these questions. Additionally, I will argue that collage is a fitting tool for its capacity to juxtapose unrelated imagery to generate additional meaning which ably critiques society. I will examine several artists in relation to this claim.

As I navigated the early part of my research, thoughts began to emerge about the synthesis of the still life and collage visual languages. I will briefly explain these embryonic thoughts.

Still life's three graces

I have looked to the still life genre for its longevity as a visual language that reveals cultural predilections and societal mechanisms in a simple yet potentially complex symbolic language. Still life painting unshackled itself from religious painting, trompe l'oeil and marquetry and appeared as an independent painting genre in the late 1500's.²⁸ These easel paintings, as stressed by art historian Charles Sterling were a "remarkable innovation" that retained their religious symbolic potency, an aura that has continued to modern times.²⁹ Since this historic period, still life painting has depicted inanimate objects as its exclusive subject; as Sterling declares they are "painted for their own sake".³⁰ However, in using still life I am keen to move beyond painting objects for their own sake. I aim to place within or alongside this well-trod language readable keys that articulate my concerns about anthropogenic environmental destruction.

Additionally, it is well understood that still life objects are signifying entities that embody more than just their physical form: they symbolise facets of the society and time in which they are made. For instance, the *vanitas*, a still life sub-genre, discusses human's fleeting life through items such as snuffed out candles, skulls, and timepieces, as seen in Pieter Claesz's painting of 1630 (Figure 6) or more recently in Fabrizio Biviano's *Book of longing* (Figure 7) of 2018.

²⁸ Sterling, *Still life painting from antiquity to the present time*. Chapter 3: The contribution from the North 25 – 30 and Chapter 4: The Renaissance and still life 31 – 41, 46

²⁹ Sterling, *Still life painting from antiquity to the present time*. 130

³⁰ Sterling, *Still life painting from antiquity to the present time*. 130

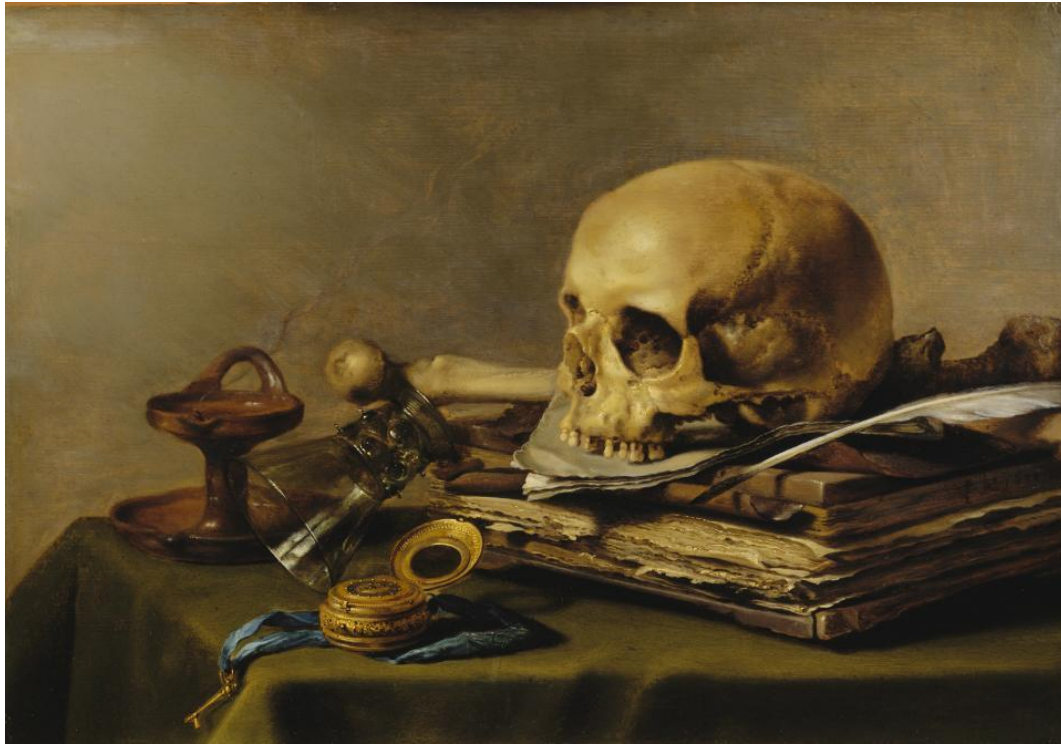


Figure 6 Pieter Claesz, *Vanitas still life*, 1630



Figure 7 Fabrizio Biviano, *Book of longing*, 2018

Although historical meanings linger, I am interested, like Biviano, in inflecting them with contemporary resonances. Art Historian, Margit Rowell, who has written about still life at length, claims that still life objects are selected based on their context, within both the historical and cultural fabric of a given society.³¹ In a similar stance, Art Historian Norman Bryson argues that still life objects are inflected by the culture of the time.³² Still life painting is not anachronistic and these critics support my understanding that the still life language can encompass a given society and culture at a certain point in history and therefore can be used to discuss such a moment. Thus, I argue the language of still life painting is fundamentally equipped to discuss manifestations of the Anthropocene in the 21st century.

Surprisingly, although there have been great changes to western civilisation since still life easel painting began, the cultural materials presented and underlying structure of still life has remained relatively persistent. This constancy makes still life a recognisable language; a virtue I aim to exploit in discussing topics such as Global Heating.³³ The familiar structural element of ledge, niche, and table provide a place in which to situate a still life arrangement and are common to human interiors. Although I have made works using all three structures, I argue that the trope of table is of particular significance (Figure 8). A table is often given over to habits of work but also to convivial activities. Therefore, the table setting implies these endeavours of the mind, of nourishment and human bonds. I am interested in pursuing thoughts about the interior and the table in my painting and in doing so give life to the pretty and the profound. Consequently, I have used these still life structures as a type of stage in which my thematic concerns are explored.

³¹ Rowell, Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), and Hayward Gallery., *Objects of desire : the modern still life*. 8

³² Norman Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990). 11 - 12

³³ "Global warming should be called global heating, says key scientist," The guardian, 2018, accessed 6/5/2022, www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/dec/15/global-warming-should-be-called-global-heating-says-key-scientist. Global heating is a more accurate term than global warming states Prof. Richard Betts, who heads up the climate research division of Britain's meteorological service. He goes on to announce that the word uncertainty should be taken out of climate discussions and instead discuss the risk that rising temperatures pose. Climate heating is technically more accurate as it discusses the changes in the energy balance of the planet. These statements were made at the UN Climate Summit in Katowice, Poland 2 – 15 December 2018.



Figure 8 *Water on the table*, 2020

Another familiar component of still life paintings is the kind of objects depicted. These often include arrangements of food, flowers, vessels, and other cultural material; those everyday things which are often taken for granted and overlooked. These objects, such as cut flowers, portray single acts of destruction, mimicking the actions that on a wider scale have propelled the Earth into the Age of Humans: the Anthropocene. According to Bryson, still life is predicated on rhopography or the depiction of trivial and everyday things.³⁴ Further, Bryson adds “the kind of attention provoked by still life isolates both painter and viewer from the rather hazy, rather lazy visual field the subject normally inhabits”.³⁵ With these thoughts in mind, I undertook experimentation with a variety of arranged still life objects from vases with flowers, imported blue-ware, to dirty dishes (Figure 9). The presence of everyday objects is employed to associate the drivers of the Anthropocene and our culpability in its

³⁴ Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting*. 15

³⁵ Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting*. 89

creation. I utilise still life painting as a provocation to isolate its contents into a central point of view and focus. Through still life objects I aim to dissolve the boundaries between the interior and exterior to expose the critical issues of human-induced climate change, species extinction and drivers of the Anthropocene.



Figure 9 *Cautionary tale about extremes, 2021*

Another important reason still life is a suitable framework to critique human-induced environmental concerns is its recognised capacity as an experimental painting platform. Still life is not laced with an inherent interest in depicting human primacy or uniqueness, often associated with portraiture or history painting: “megalographic” tendencies as Bryson suggests.³⁶ Instead, because of still life’s less important position in the painting genre strata and its centring on anonymity, it is an ideal framework to test ideas. I am not alone in this concern. Many artists have utilised the still life language to innovate and expand on the visual language of painting, sometimes in a revolutionary way. Artists in this category include Cezanne, Braque, Picasso, and Morandi to name a few. Again, Rowell, in the exhibition

³⁶ Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting*. 60 - 62

catalogue *Objects of desire: the modern still life*, discusses the experimental capacity afforded by still life:

It is because of the still life's relatively stable subject matter, and the presumed banality ... that the genre has been able to lend itself so freely to diversity and digression.³⁷

Moreover, Rowell states, these selections become unattainable "objects of desire" and lenses through which an artist discloses a unique narrative and take infinite artistic liberties to portray their idealised world.³⁸ These analyses gave me the confidence to subvert the still life language and investigate my thematic concerns. I argue that the language of still life is a suitable vehicle to discuss manifestations of the Anthropocene for its symbolism associated with objects, familiarity of its subject matter, and its experimental capability.

Within my still life paintings I resolved to insert unexpected imagery related to the Anthropocentric era. Rather than just a straightforward arrangement of still life objects, I aim to establish a different dimension, one that links causal factors with problems in the Anthropocene, such as enhanced extreme weather events. The causal factor is human derived, such as continued use of fossil fuels, whilst the Anthropocene is evidenced in the changing Earth system from the benign and familiar entity of the Holocene to one that is volatile and unknown. I executed this different dimension using collage which is explained shortly, but first I will examine my historical and contemporary artistic influences.

Still life: historical and contemporary artists

The still life genre could be likened to a societal barometer as the genre has changed and morphed along with societal shifts and upheavals, resulting in many still life styles, artistic pedigree, and artistic breakthroughs. At the outset of my candidature, I was certain that the 17th century Dutch Golden Age would be an historic marker worthy of analysis. Artefacts from this time were a window into this world and still life painting portrayed the intimate relationship between objects and the swift cultural change that occurred, as seen in Willem

³⁷ Rowell, Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), and Hayward Gallery., *Objects of desire : the modern still life*. 122

³⁸ Rowell, Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), and Hayward Gallery., *Objects of desire : the modern still life*. 8 - 9

Kalf's 1660 painting *Still life with ewer and basin, fruit, nautilus cup and other objects* (Figure 10).



Figure 10 Willem Kalf, *Still life with ewer and basin, fruit, nautilus cup and other objects*, 1660

I was particularly interested in this period as it also heralded the uptake in resource exploitation, trade globalisation and consumer culture. It is these facets, 400 years on, that are key drivers behind the Anthropocene. In Chapter Three I will speak about the critical analysis I have undertaken of historic Dutch paintings. However, first I will detail where my work resides in contemporary still life painting.

I acknowledge difficulty in finding contemporary painters creating work combining still life with collage and critiquing environmental destruction. Nevertheless, I did encounter some painters with pictorial affiliations and located artists in the photographic field with similar thematic concerns. Firstly, the contemporary American painter Janet Fish produced several paintings of fruit wrapped in plastic, for example *Bag of bananas* (Figure 11), from the 1970s.



Figure 11 Janet Fish, *Bag of bananas*, 1971

I was excited to locate these works early in my research and assumed a thematic link to my research would follow. Unfortunately, this was not the case as Fish's motivations were a reaction to Abstract Expressionism rather than any environmental discourse.³⁹ As Fish states, her work encapsulated still life because of "what was happening in the form".⁴⁰ Fish used still life objects to capture qualities of light, colour, repetition, and scale. Knowing this I persevered and investigated Fish's paintings. Her quality of painterly mark, choice of colours, use of big close-up perspectives and object arrangements were bold and vibrant. During her practice, Fish progressed with compositions that allowed the scene beyond to enter the pictorial space which influenced some of my paintings. As previously mentioned, the still life genre is a view into an historical moment and all its desires, beliefs, and interests. In some ways, Fish was ahead of her time in capturing the conveniently plastic wrapped foods that are so endemic in our society today. Thus, although Fish was not critiquing how interminably long plastic packaging lingers in the environment, I was able to gain some insights into how still life could be approached and I will discuss this at relevant points in my exegesis.

³⁹ Vincent Katz and Janet Fish, *Janet Fish: paintings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002). 17 - 18

⁴⁰ Katz and Fish, *Janet Fish: paintings*. 17 - 18

While painters using still life to critique the Anthropocene are limited, several contemporary texts detailed still life's move beyond the classic discipline of painting to other artistic fields.⁴¹ Australian photographer Marion Drew is one such artist whose work critiques the human relationships with nature by reinterpreting still life tropes of 17th century Dutch Masters. Drew's *Australiana still life* series, of 2003 to 2011, include white table linens and conventional still life objects alongside carcasses of Australian animals, often roadkill (Figure 12).⁴² Drew says that this series,

... aimed to raise questions about inherited cultural and historical ideas that frame present day perceptions of animals. Placing wild native animals into domestic interiors erases the perceived distance that conceptually separates humans from the natural world...⁴³



Figure 12 Marian Drew, *Lorikeet with green cloth*, 2006

⁴¹ Rowell, Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), and Hayward Gallery., *Objects of desire : the modern still life*. Ron Radford et al., *Still-life still lives* (Adelaide, S. Aust: Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1997). Landauer et al., *The not-so-still life: a century of California painting and sculpture*.

⁴² Alex Chomicz, "Australiana, Still life," (Australian Centre for Photography, 2005).
<https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/448530444108749050/>.

⁴³ "Australiana still life 2003 - 2011," unknown, accessed 20/12/2021, <https://www.mariandrew.com.au/australiana>.

Drew's concept of reducing distance between the domestic space and the natural world is a key theme I have been pursuing in studio research. However, unlike Drew, my concerns are not centred on human relationships to animals. I aim to reduce the distance between the abstract concept of the Anthropocene and the domestic space and thus our culpability in the former's onset. Although Drew is a photographer, her use of the still life language is like mine in using the symbolic and allegorical tradition of this genre to focus on contemporary environmental issues.

Another contemporary photographer working with still life is the French American, Anne de Carbuccia. de Carbuccia's artworks use temporary *time shrines*, that incorporate human and natural objects, staged in natural landscapes. These works are based on the tradition of the *vanitas* where objects symbolise the fragility of life and the transitory nature of earthly accomplishments and desires.⁴⁴ In depicting the *vanitas* objects of skull and timepiece in *Antarctic and Southern elephant seal skull* (Figure 13), de Carbuccia critiques the human impact on the environment reminding viewers of its vulnerability and fleeting beauty.



Figure 13 Anne de Carbuccia, *Antarctic and Southern elephant seal skull*, 2014

⁴⁴ "Still-Life with Anthropocene and Climate," unknown, accessed 26/3/2020, <https://www.crcresearch.org/still-life-anthropocene-and-climate>.

In an interview with Cassia Patel, de Carbuccia stated:

Through the aesthetic, I want to draw the audience in so they can emotionally listen to the story and the message behind the images. I am always trying to find the keys to people's hearts.⁴⁵

de Carbuccia's endeavour is reinforced by the psychologist Kaczmarczyk's research article *Art and Reality: Towards a Neuropsychological Theory of Aesthetic Perception*. Kaczmarczyk describes how art can facilitate a state of mindfulness by tapping into brain processes. This mindful state of attention can lead to the search for meanings and associations in an artwork and allow space for emotional response.⁴⁶ The quest to engage viewers in a state of contemplation is one of my aims and is discussed in detail with relevant works and key findings.

With my painting I am aiming for a verisimilitude but one that is rooted firmly in the material world of painting. I want my works to be a little gritty, to have drip marks and show their making. In producing in this manner I aim to anchor my paintings in the physical world. I have looked to painters Mandy Martin and John Wolseley with help regarding these concerns. Australian artist Mandy Martin's paintings have been a source of speculation and helped inform my aesthetic approach with paint materiality.

⁴⁵ "Anne de Carbuccia," Ocean Global, accessed 7/4/2020, <https://oceanic.global/anne-de-carbuccia/>

⁴⁶ Katarzyna Kaczmarczyk, "Art and Reality-Towards a Neuropsychological Theory of Aesthetic Perception," *Via panorâmica: revista eletrônica de estudos anglo-americanos* (2014). p 170-171



Figure 14 Mandy Martin, *Power Station 12*, 2011

Martin's *Power Station 12* (Figure 14) uses black oil paint to insinuate a deep darkness that is punched through with crusty application of whites, bright reds and yellows. These illuminating colours depict the coal stacks and workings of a coal driven power station implying activity and heat that is white hot and untouchable. When I see this work, I am transported to the *Black Paintings* by Francisco de Goya, particularly *Saturn devouring his son* (Figure 15).



Figure 15 Francisco de Goya, *Saturn devouring his son*, 1820 - 23

The deep coloured background contrasts against the morbid scene of depravity. The figure of Saturn and his act of execution is painted in light colours which brings the subject matter into sharp relief. The use of high contrast and thick application of paint has also been used by Martin to create high tension in her painting. The curator and writer Peter Haynes says of Martin, “her coercively seductive images reinforces the subtlety of her politicising and the validity of art as a political tool”⁴⁷ Martin’s use of light and dark, paint application methods, and the artist’s ideas about landscape or place have been a source of enquiry for my paintings. These aspects of my research are revealed in the Experiments: materials and methods section of Chapter Two and in Chapter Three when discussing the concept of “objects of care” in association with the *Dark* series.⁴⁸

The British-born Australian artist John Wolseley has made work regarding anthropogenic environmental destruction across several artistic disciplines with multiple making methods

⁴⁷ Mandy Martin et al., *Mandy Martin: painting 1981-2009*, Canberra Museum and Gallery (2008). 33

⁴⁸ Rebecca Huntley, *How to talk about climate change in a way that makes a difference* (Australia: Murdoch Books, 2020). 219

in single works. This diverse approach has provided guidance in my studio research with elements such as perspective, scale, and different techniques. I posit that a work containing several techniques creates curiosity in the viewer and a desire to problem-solve which are valuable artistic aims. The lithograph, *Botanist's Camp* (Figure 16), reveals many making methods originating from the initial collaged artwork: drawing, painting, text, and abstract mark making. The horizon sits high and depicts a tented camp amongst a bank of trees. This scene has depth typical of a landscape as the trees recede into the distance. In contrast, most of the paper is taken up by a foreground of earthy yellow which could be read as either earth under or space in front of the encampment. Either way, Wolseley's use of artistically drawn specimens of flora and fauna, suggests ambiguity and demands reflection. The flatness of the yellow and drawings works against the depth of the upper landscape. This facet of two perspectival spaces creates uncertainty and multiple artistic techniques adds interest in the work. These are attributes I am seeking to explore in my work.

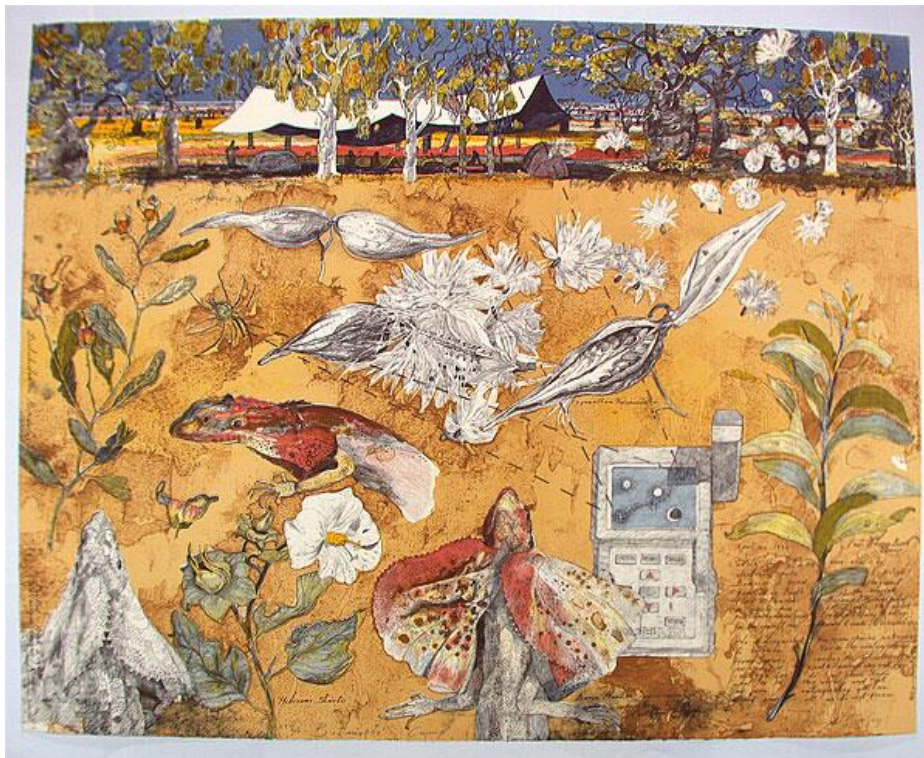


Figure 16 John Wolseley, *Botanist's camp*, 1997

Wolseley says of his work

... because of the circumstances of painting in wild, or once wild country. It is here that one is physically impinged upon, even physically excluded from the site by the agents of degradation and consumption, and as a result, one's anger is so roused that, cornered as it were, one uses the only weapon one knows, one's art, and attempts to make of that art—a didactic sword.⁴⁹

Thus far I have discussed my reasons for using still life to critique Anthropogenic environmental destruction. I have discussed several artists to show where my work resides in the contemporary context of the still life genre and artistic influences in my studio research. Following is an account of my first paper-based experiments in the studio and my use of collage.

Visual research: collage as a methodology

My start in the studio was a challenging time. I tentatively commenced with some still life setups and drawings but was disappointed with their clunky, rather clichéd appearance to convey my thematic concerns. I decided to make collages to explore motifs and compositional elements without the time or labour generally involved with painting. Due to stringent COVID restrictions I utilised materials available in my studio or online: mass media publications, wallpaper offcuts, art papers, acrylic paint, pens, pencils, and printouts. The imagery I employed related to domestic interiors, historical art, cultural artefacts, still life objects, human industrial systems, humans at play and work, and Australian faunal species. The uncomfortable start to studio work and subsequent decision to make collages proved valuable in formulating a methodology to construct my painting compositions, one that I used throughout my research. I will explain my *Paper Collage* series after a brief explanation about my use of collage.

I am interested in using collage to enhance the capability of the still life language to critique drivers of the Anthropocene. The use of collage as a tool and aesthetic approach is a natural

⁴⁹ Sasha Grishin, *John Wolseley: land marks II*, Rev ed. (Fishermans Bend, Vic: Craftsman House, 2006). 157

fit in exploring connections and choosing suitable images. Max Ernst, an innovative artist defined collage as,

...the systematic exploitation of the coincidental or artificially induced encounter of two or more unrelated realities on an apparently inappropriate plane – and the spark of poetry that leaps across the gaps between them.⁵⁰

When I use collage techniques, I am most interested in the way this aesthetic speaks of the removal of images and ideas from their usual place and their reestablishment into new and unexpected realities: the *spark* that Max Ernst speaks about.

Starting with mixed-media collage

My initial *Paper Collage* works provided a responsive test bed and reflective instrument in which to experiment with my thematic concerns surrounding the onset of the Anthropocene. As explained in my Introduction, the Anthropocene is a large, somewhat obscure public concept and I focussed on the associated Earth Boundaries theory to assist with research. Specifically, I concentrated on the Earth boundaries that have been transgressed: human induced climate change, species loss and landscape degradation.⁵¹ Thus, in my studio investigations I considered three main areas of interest whilst making these initial collages. The first was an intent to connect human causation with parts of the natural world that are adversely impacted. The second was a focus on domestic nomenclature. In other words, using the lens of still life: its objects and tropes. The third was a consideration of compositional elements such as pattern, colour, line, tone, weight and focus to support my thematic concerns.

I devised a set of construction rules when making the collages to assist with consistency and ensuing analysis. The rules enabled me to make small changes to compositions rather than large, less well understood, directional changes. My main rules related to size, materials, and

⁵⁰ Robert Klanten, Hendrik Hellige, and James Gallagher, *Cutting edges: contemporary collage* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2011). Preface

⁵¹ Rockström et al., "A safe operating space for humanity."; Steffen et al., "Planetary boundaries: guiding human development on a changing planet."

framework. I used an A4 200gsm paper as the base for each collage and an interior spatial structure from an interior design magazine, as a framing device. These magazines showcase the idealised home which is beautifully presented, combining the latest and often exclusive consumables all made available through Earth's finite resources. Actual wallpaper was used to imply domestic space and conceptually link to this idealised home. A limited palette helped to make the compositions cohesive. I made three distinct groups of mixed-media works in the *Paper collages* series. Select collages are in Appendix A, *Paper collages*.

In the first series of nine collages most compositions show floating non-traditional still life arrangements within an armature of decorative interior motifs. These elements reside within a fixed architectural framework (Figure 17) and infer varying states of stability or restlessness. The work *Smokescreen* (Figure 18) shows my initial thoughts regarding still life and collage and the use of these visual systems to discuss the Anthropocene and its drivers.

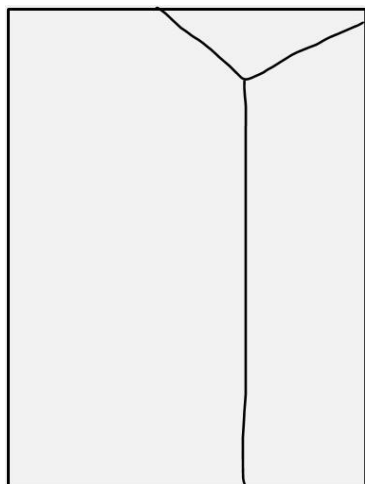


Figure 17 Series *Paper collage one*, architectural framework

Smokescreen's composition is evenly divided with an upper and lower register. The top register features my photograph of a white rendered exterior wall that includes diagonal shadows and a centrally located multi-paned window and draped curtain. The chiaroscuro of the wall and cast shadows are extended into the collage with solid- coloured blocks of matching acrylic paint. Chromatic greys and browns, muddy yellows and pinks dominate the colour scheme, insinuating deterioration. The central triangle of pale colour projects into the lower half of the collage like a beam of light, engaging the eye, providing a focal point, and

connecting the two halves of the composition. In the lower half, actual wallpaper is glued under a magazine print of a table with geometrically patterned fabric. The wallpaper's embossed surface is tactile and sensual adding an alluring haptic element. A richly decorated 'celebration' cake fills the table where the beam and vision land. The candles have been replaced with polluting smokestacks from a coal fired power plant. Fossil fuel energy use, that is coal, oil and gas, accounts significantly to rising CO₂ levels which is a primary driver behind global heating and thus anthropogenic climate change.⁵² I have placed the stacks masquerading as candles on the cake to imply that our festivities and way of life are fun but give rise to destruction and destabilisation.

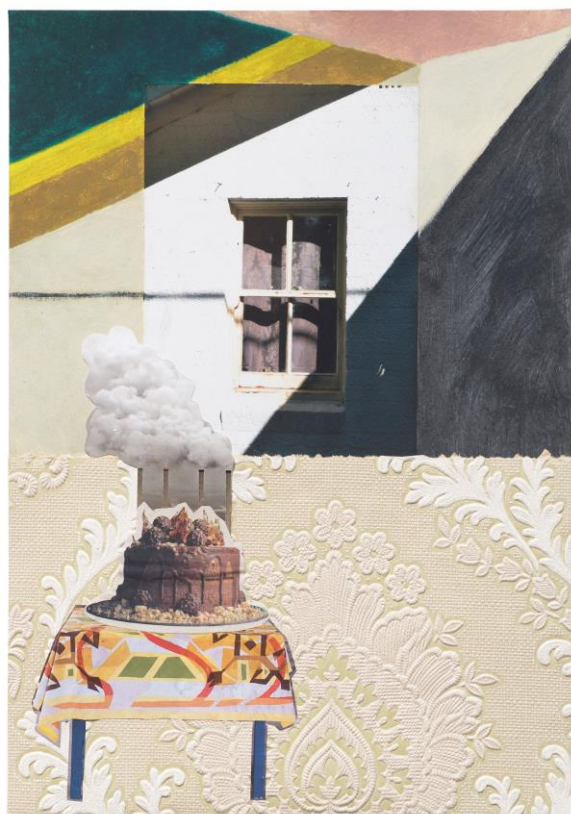


Figure 18 *Smokescreen*, 2020

The starkness of the upper portion, all angles and blocks of colour depicting an external scene, is countered by internal furnishings, arabesque decoration, and human activities in the lower portion. The shifting relationship of the wall and ceiling flips between inside a

⁵² "Frequently Asked Questions, Chapter Three - Human Influence on the Climate System, 3.1 - How Do We Know Humans Are Responsible for Climate Change?," FAQs, United Nations, International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2022, accessed 10/5/2022, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/faqs/IPCC_AR6_WGI_FAQ_Chapter_03.pdf.

room where the cake resides to another where we gaze into the window from outside. The restlessness and ambiguity of this perspectival shift could be considered disorientating. How are we to make sense of this tension? Another link between the top and bottom registers is the lacy curtain seen through the window that flows to the floral motif of the wallpaper. Is the cake behind the window and are we voyeuristically transported behind the solid walls to see into this private space? Through these many connections of disparate images and materials, I have aimed to link our domestic and cultural activities with that of polluting power generation. Everything that happens inside our homes is feeding into the Earth system and creating biogeophysical responses. By using tactile materials, flowing colour harmonies, repetitive patterns, and ambiguous inside/ outside spaces I have also sought to entrance the gaze and provide a space for speculation.

In the second series of eight collages, I built on my findings by introducing painterly elements, extreme weather imagery and more traditional still life motifs. A new architectural framework (Figure 19) underlying all compositions was established.

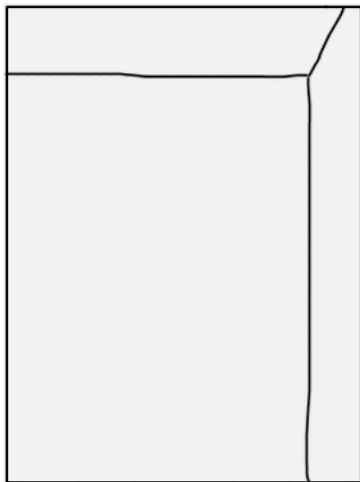


Figure 19 Series *Paper collage two*, architectural framework

The work *Sheltered* (Figure 20) shows a drought afflicted earthen plain, cracked with deep fissures that extend to the horizon. Dipping just below the horizon is a basket of grapes, its contents spilling over. The Dutch Golden Age still life trope of peeled lemon is lying on the

dried-out earthen plain.⁵³ The basket and plain are united in colour, a muted raw sienna, but their formal qualities stand in contrast. Thus, although they are touching, they are not united; they push against each other.

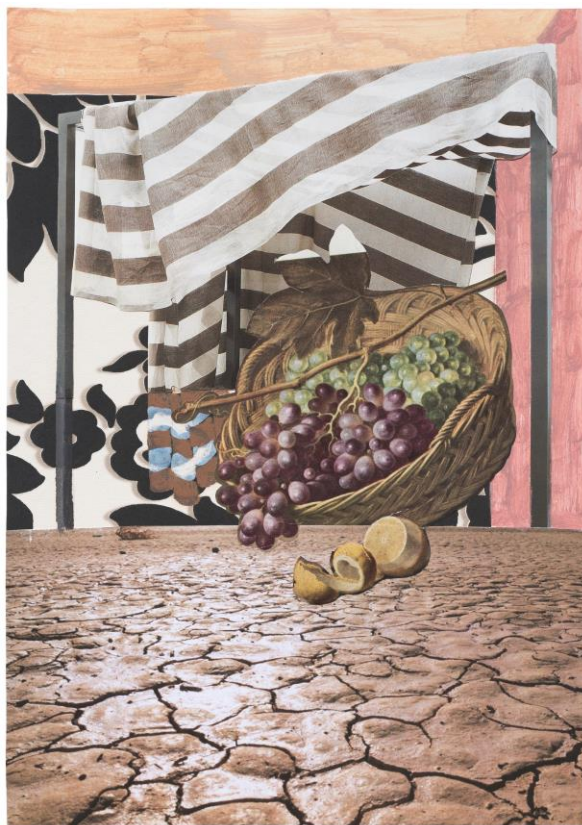


Figure 20 *Sheltered*, 2020

Overarching the basket is a shelter of draped striped fabric, coloured in browns like the contemporary floral wallpaper that sits flat to the picture plane. When I find images for use in my collages, they are invariably missing parts needed to complete the object, as seen in the portion of missing grape leaf and curtain. The absence of completed imagery provides the opportunity to extend connections between contrasting imagery in the collage. In *Sheltered*, missing parts have been amalgamated: the wallpaper pattern onto the striped drapery. This third entity, formed by the morphing of two distinct objects suggests linkages

⁵³ Ed L.G.G. Ramsey, "The Connoisseur," (Great Britain and USA: The Magazibe Company Ltd., 1962), Advertisement. For Auction House Pieter Claes, STILL LIFE, 1629. The still life motif of basket of fruit and lemon are from a print of an artwork by the notable 17th century still life painter Pieter Claesz.

between them, however remote these linkages may be in our lived experience. The story I am communicating in this collage is about shielding the contemporary human experience from the events of natural disasters, many emanating from human-induced climate change.

A purposeful change in my final series of ten collages, that is to use the still life trope of a ledge, resulted in key observations. As mentioned, the ledge is a familiar still life painting trope and I have used this structure, like painters from the past, to arrange objects and tell a story. Using the ledge allowed me to focus on objects and consider their placement, proportion, and relationship to each other. This key realisation meant the background could be simplified in contrast to previous collages.



Figure 21 *On the l-edge*, 2020

In my collage *On the l-edge* (Figure 21), a ledge divides the work forming a band through the centre of the composition. Atop this ledge are cut-out magazine images of utilitarian handcrafted pottery items interspliced with oil derricks. I have placed these items together to link the pottery product with the production of oil. I anticipate the oil derricks will slowly

reveal themselves with examination by viewers. The bottom portion of my collage features black and white paint mixed on the paper symbolising crude oil. Using magazine imagery helps me with colour and other compositional choices, such as the uppermost washy blue paint pulled from colours on the pottery. These making decisions are consistent with my methodology of taking clues from imagery and mental ‘flashes’ as I routinely experiment with different ideas. A written extract from my visual journal in April 2020 regarding this collage emphasises my making method:

Gestural paint in the lower third. Oil derricks mine sub soil for ‘black gold’ ...

Not sure about clouds so I paperclipped them on.⁵⁴

Using pins and paperclips suggests the formation of ideas and traces my lines of thought and hesitation as I experiment with novel concepts in the studio. Importantly, all the work I make in the studio, though at the time may seem redundant, is retained, and remembered. For instance, the temporarily paperclipped cloud is revisited in my studio research some months later in my *Diorama* series. Thus, works in the *Paper collage* series provided concepts that I pursued with interest in subsequent painting research. For example, the motif of wallpaper, so heavily used in *Collage series one* and *two*, reappeared using a craft technique in my final paintings, the *Dark* series. My reflections on the *Paper collage* series contributed to a studio methodology that became key in my research.

Collage: a crucial part of activating still life compositions

A major finding arising from the *Paper Collage* series was how vital collage would become as a working method in making preliminary compositions for paintings. Hence, I worked on systems to accumulate images, collate them into categories and consequently can select, snip, arrange, and fix them into compositions in a controlled yet loose process. The resulting collage sketches are rudimentary, but have importantly provided a process, or sandpit for ideas, to troubleshoot compositional elements and an opportunity for explorative play.

⁵⁴ Michele England, *Journal of Mphil studio work, 2020 February to June, 2020*. 31

Although I use these sketches to produce a painting, they are not copied laboriously, instead they act as a starting point.

Collage is a useful language to exploit for its juxtaposition potential to create fresh interpretations and as a tool for ideological commentary. This facility of collage has been particularly useful for artists since the early 20th century. The artist, Hannah Hoch, used daily newspapers and monthly magazines to portray social viewpoints in post-World War 2 Germany.⁵⁵ Hoch's *Indian Dancer* (Figure 22) interlaces a famous actress with ethnic mask and kitchen utensils. This photomontage challenges attitudes about women by surfacing prejudicial attitudes towards the *primitive* and paralleling them to fetishized images of women and their role in society.⁵⁶



Figure 22 Hannah Höch, *Indian dancer* (from *Ethnographic Museum* series), 1930

Höch's photomontages surfaced her societal concerns against the backdrop of the domestic space and women's pastimes, making a link between the agitational and the domestic. As Curator and Art Historian, Yuval Etgar discusses "Hoch saw the adoption of craft activities as

⁵⁵ The Museum of Modern Art Library, *The photomontages of Hannah Höch*, (New York: 1997).

⁵⁶ Library, *The photomontages of Hannah Höch*.

an opportunity to transform women's chores into choice" and "launched an inquiry into the manifestation of political discourse with the domestic sphere".⁵⁷

A dialogue between the domestic interior and the Anthropocene is of principal concern in my research. I have used the safe domestic interior depicted in still life painting as a space where collage can interlope. By placing imagery associated with human induced environmental destruction into the domestic domain I endeavour to connect these exterior issues inside our homes. Thus suggesting, that in time, problems outside the domestic space will also become part of the lived experience inside our homes. Like Höch, I have capitalised on ideas associated with the domestic, including decorative and craft techniques that I will detail in Chapter Two.

Decades after Höch, Richard Hamilton also used the domestic interior in the British Pop piece, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (Figure 23) to comment on consumer society. Hamilton said of this "allegorical" piece, that he threw "into the cramped space of the living room some representation of all the objects and ideas crowding into our post-war consciousness".⁵⁸ Thus his *room* of autonomous images combine to offer a demonstration of people's thoughts and aspirations in a growing consumer-driven society. In the 1990s, Hamilton reprised his landmark pop piece with *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different?* (Figure 24) using then current photo-editing computer systems. Thus, Hamilton demonstrated the continuing viability of collage as a method to use combinations of singular ready-made images to elicit a new interpretation and context.

⁵⁷ Elliott et al., *Cut and paste: 400 years of collage*. Yuval Etgar, essay: *On edge: Exploring collage tactics and terminology*. 42 - 43

⁵⁸ "Just what was it that made yesterday's homes so different, so appealing? (upgrade)," The Tate, 2007.



Figure 23 Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, 1956

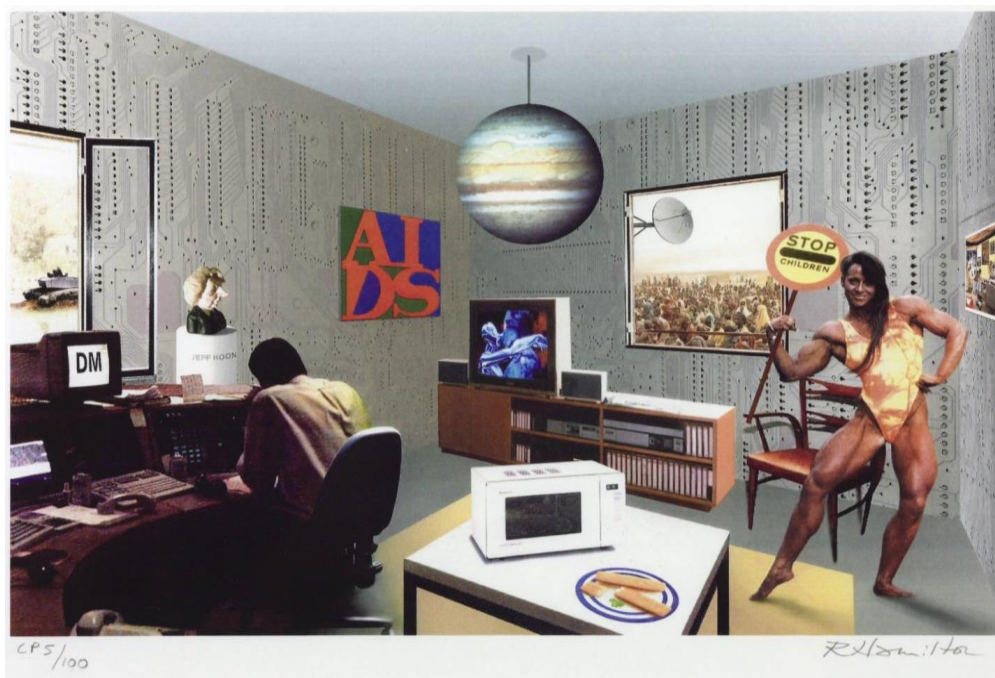


Figure 24 Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different?*, 1993

Collage not only cross-pollinates images but has been used by artists as a strategic tool to critique socio-political concerns. Two such artists are the American, Martha Rosler, and the Icelandic artist Erró. These artists merge pictures of home interiors and war or socialist imagery, respectively, to create connections between our private lives and that of greater societal decisions and current affairs. Rosler's photographic collages in the *House Beautiful: bringing the war home* series utilise war images cut from *Life* and *Look* spliced into prints of modernist architectural interiors: places of domesticity and safety (Figure 25).⁵⁹



Figure 25 Martha Rosler, *Red stripe kitchen* 1967 – 72

With these works, Rosler was “interested in contrast and collision and with that means to thereby poke a hole – a conceptual tear – in unacknowledged ideological ideas and images”.⁶⁰ Rosler sees collage as having the ability to cause friction between ideas as represented by images. From this standpoint, collage creates an opportunity for critical

⁵⁹ Martha Rosler, *House Beautiful (Bringing the War Home)*. 1967-72, *SEEING THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS* (YouTube.com: Museum of Modern Art, 2019).

⁶⁰ Rosler, *House Beautiful (Bringing the War Home)*. 1967-72. Busch et al., *The age of collage : contemporary collage in modern art*. 10

reflection. Forty years later Rosler revived these concepts in the *House Beautiful: bringing the war home, new series*, as seen in the work *Vanitas* (Figure 26). Rosler made these works in opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, once again, strengthening the continuing role of collage as a tool for socio-political critique.



Figure 26 Martha Rosler, *Vanitas*, 2004

Another collagist using cultural propaganda and mass media to critique society and culture is Gudmundur Gudmundsson, the French based artist known as Erró. In 1968 he made the mixed media and painting series *American Interiors*.⁶¹ The mixed media collage *For 4* (Figure 27) comprises imagery of an idealistic bourgeois American living room, characteristically featured in contemporary home design magazines. This space has been infiltrated by contrasting scenes from other propagandist imagery related to socialism. Through the collage technique the pointed fingers literally invade the space of the home, pointing to a table the site of conversation and familial activity, thus creating new narratives about cultural expectations and mass media.

⁶¹ Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson, *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975*, ed. Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson, vol. 32 (Leiden: BRILL, 2016). Danielle Kvaran, Chapter: Erró, or the Porousness of Borders, 291 - 302



Figure 27 Erró, *For 4*, 1968

Like Rosler's and Erró's collages, I endeavour to pull together distinct yet relatable ideas and imagery to address current societal concerns about drivers of human-induced environmental destruction. Analysing collage works by these artists has helped me think through ideas associated with imagery related to the Anthropocene, aesthetic values and the concept of domestic space in my compositions.

However, at the same time as recognising collage's innate ability to connect disparate concepts and be a tool for socio-political comment, I was concerned about its loss of potency. Since the 1970s, technological changes have resulted in collage taking on a different dimension to those when mechanical reproduction was a predominant form of information dissemination. Moreover, as Yuval Etgar declares, postmodernist theories and neo-liberal politics have adopted combinatory principles making collage a less daring and subversive tool for the avant-garde.⁶² In using collage, though, I am not attempting to be at the forefront of artistic endeavour. Rather, I use collage for its known power to create a third meaning, its capacity to critique through juxtaposition, and its potential to create a

⁶² Elliott et al., *Cut and paste: 400 years of collage*. Yuval Etgar Essay *On edge: Exploring collage tactics and terminology*, 36 & 46

poetic “spark” as referred to by Ernst.⁶³ This capability has been shown in the select works by Hoch, Hamilton, Rosler, and Erró. Also, my observation is that collage is a visual expression observed across many contemporary societal platforms, such as advertising and tik-tok videos, and is therefore a ubiquitous format and well understood by contemporary society.

Conclusion

This chapter examined my reasons for pursuing the language of still life with collage to highlight how combining these two formats can elicit a metaphorical link to the Anthropocene. Importantly, though I started making work about climate change, its drivers and consequences to inform my work, I soon pushed beyond this concept to include other forms of anthropogenic environmental degradation: species loss and land degradation. I realised during studio and literature research that my thematic concern is essentially about the Anthropocene which has resulted in a monumental shift in the Earth System caused by humans.

With hindsight, my *Paper collage* series foreshadowed a methodology that would become a key approach in constructing my painting compositions in the studio. This series also revealed that a language combining still life and collage would be fruitful. The interior domain that still life encompasses can be used as a scaffold to highlight my concerns about the Anthropocene and when placed in dialogue with external imagery can, as Martha Rosler says, create a “conceptual tear”.⁶⁴

Having started with the collage methodology I envisaged several areas of research concerning materials and technique, still life tropes and imagery, and the human figure. A fundamental concern of my research was beginning to emerge that involved bringing together still life painting with collage into an expanded still life language. The main thrust of this language is to place a critique about the Anthropocene into the space of the familiar. This concept, which developed over months of research is detailed in Chapter Two

⁶³ Klanten, Hellige, and Gallagher, *Cutting edges: contemporary collage*. Preface

⁶⁴ Busch et al., *The age of collage : contemporary collage in modern art*. 10

Chapter Two: Experimental phase

Introduction

This chapter discusses an experimental phase where I investigated how to merge the languages of still life and collage into my paintings. Initially I will discuss the preliminary paintings and dioramas that arose from my *Paper collage* series and that catapulted me into a comprehensive phase of enquiry. Most of the chapter details this experimentation phase and three main queries: the still life structural element of a platform, materials and methods, and the human figure.

Initially, I will discuss my painting queries regarding the structural trope of ledge and niche which hold painted still life objects and collaged imagery. These structures are also tested for their potential to reveal anthropogenic environmental degradation. Following, I will address the painting style experiments I conducted with materials and methods. I will reveal how I decided on paint application techniques, paint mediums and supports. I will posit that using non-traditional tools and techniques are an important way for me to connect the drivers of the Anthropocene with the domestic interior. Finally, I will detail the central place the subject of the human figure has in my compositions.

Following these arguments, I speculate that storytelling is an effective way to convey the subject of anthropogenic environmental destruction. Through examples I will expand on how and why I use a storytelling technique to generate compositions in unison with the previously discussed collage composition methodology.

Little paintings that ask big questions

The collage *Unremitting desire* (Figure 28) provided inspiration for my first experimental paintings (Figure 29). These paintings prompted me to question what still life objects and structures should be in my paintings. How could collaged imagery expand the language of still life painting? How might I instil anthropogenic destruction as a central theme? How can I inflect my work with notions of our culpability in this catastrophe? What painterly effects should I employ?



Figure 28 *Unremitting desire*, 2020



Figure 29 *U.R. study 1* and *U.R. study 2*, 2020

Looking for answers I experimented with photographed dioramas that used real still life objects and collaged imagery.⁶⁵ I hypothesised I could test the compositional elements, such as different perspectival systems, lighting, or by adding, removing or changing parts of the arrangement, and photograph each iteration, as seen in Figures 30 to 32

⁶⁵ I call these works photographed dioramas as they contain components like an historical diorama located in a museum or a scene from a stage. The elements I use such as backdrop, figures or still life props, are in the same vein as a diorama and I aim to reveal a story or scene using these elements. These dioramas might also be called assemblages.



Figure 30 Examples of photographic dioramas - *Propped up by coal studies, 2020*



Figure 31 Examples of photographic dioramas - *Coral and coal studies, 2020*



Figure 32 Examples of photographic dioramas - *Tipping points studies*, 2020

I envisaged painting the real diorama from these photographs. However, the overall compositional elements felt stymied by the lack of appropriate objects. I also thought the time and energy required to produce paintings from these photographs would not be beneficial. Nonetheless I did utilise some of the characteristics of these dioramas in future experiments, such as lighting to provide a focal point and wallpaper to insinuate the domestic space (Figure 30), and the use of imagery related to human caused environmental damage, such as the coal miner (Figure 31). In Figure 32, the tipping vase made me think of falling and breakage and the often-quoted tipping point issue in climate change debates.⁶⁶ I speculated that the ledge, an inherent feature in still life painting, might be useful in my research.

⁶⁶ "Tipping Points: Why we might not be able to reverse climate change," ClimateScience.org, 2022, accessed 18/5/2022, <https://climatescience.org/advanced-climate-climate-tipping-points>.

Experiments: ledges and niches

I investigated the still life framework tropes of ledge and niche for a contemporary interpretation: one that aimed to relay my concerns about human induced environmental destruction. I chose to experiment with the ledge because of its potential for flatness in the pictorial plane. I was interested in harnessing the ambiguity that occurs when a flat space is butted up against a space or motif that has recessive qualities. I argue that puzzlement, derived from ambiguity, can draw a viewer in and keep them engaged.

The experiments I conducted exploited the ambiguity afforded by the ledge's flatness when paired with a perspectival viewpoint of a ginger pot and a long-haul coal train motif. I selected the ginger pot for its affiliation with Chinese imports during the Dutch Golden Age and so resonated as a signifier to the history of global trade. On the ginger pot, I included an open-pit mine design: as a stand-in for the popular blue willow pattern (Figure 33).



Figure 33 *Study of blue ware, 2020*



Figure 34 *Study of pot with floating train, 2020*

I chose the coal-train motif to connote the large reserves of Australian mineral resources that are dug up and shipped around the globe. The train's scale was purposely reduced to fit the painting frame. At first the train floated (Figure 34) but a later experiment had it embedded onto the ledge and protruding into the realm of the viewer (Figure 35), like the overhanging plate with lemon in the 1634 painting *Still life with a gilded beer tankard* (Figure 36).



Figure 35 *Study of ledge with embedded train, 2020* and detail of woodgrain tool (left to right)



Figure 36 Willem Claesz Heda, *Still life with a gilded beer tankard*, 1634

In *Study of ledge with embedded train* I used a decorative paint tool to simulate a wood grain edge (Figure 35). This aroused my interest in paint materiality to simulate another substance which is explained further in the Experiments: materials and methods section of this chapter.



Figure 37 *Study of pot*, showing emerging table shape

One work, *Study of ledge as landscape* (Figure 38) triggered the idea of a table that also looked like a landscape due partly to the way it was painted (also, Figure 38) and objects residing on it. This idea is revisited in one of my smallest, yet most significant works *Life on the table* (Figure 52), detailed shortly.



Figure 38 *Study of ledge as landscape*, 2020 and detail of paint evocative of landscape (top and bottom)

These experiments intrigued me. What happens when the still life object, that innately conveys the domestic interior, is placed on a surface that depicts a landscape? Thus, these ledge experiments invited speculation about how different places and ideas could be pulled into one frame of reference, or space of a painting. This was an area of interest that I continued to process through research with niches.

Experimentation followed that utilised the framework element of a niche to hold still life objects and act as a portal to another place. The niche is a familiar still life trope from the 1700s that stemmed from Western religion where it was seen in architecture, stained glass, furniture, painting, and manuscripts. The niche and its association with religion is longstanding as seen in the 1460 Netherlandish *Book of Hours* (Figure 39), housed in the Euing collection at the University of Glasgow.⁶⁷



Figure 39 *Book of Hours* (Folios 48v-49r: *The Annunciation (Matins)*), 1460

I was interested in capturing some of the devotional aura that niches embody. Another niche attribute is how they act as a framing device: as a portal leading to another space. The work *Vase of flowers in a window* (Figure 40) by the Dutch painter Ambrosius Bosschaert, the Elder ably displays this portal quality. Norman Bryson discusses this work at length and theorises the foreground objects on the ledge work in tandem and psychologically with the background landscape to negate space “The framework of space and time is effectively neutralised... sudden leap from far to near”.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ David Ekserdjian, *Still life before still life* (New Haven, USA: Yale University Press, 2018). 8 - 12

⁶⁸ Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting*. 105



Figure 40 Ambrosius Bosschaert, the Elder, *Vase of flowers in a window*, 1618

Thinking about Bryson's analysis, I wondered how I might use trickery of the near shelf with what lays beyond the niche's 'portal' thus forming connections between two disparate sets of imagery. I also recalled Fish's still life works with window ledges showing the view beyond (Figure 41)



Figure 41 Janet Fish, *Still life with colored glass*, 1979

I made mixed-media collage compositions to think through preliminary ideas. Two such works (Figure 42) show woman on the outside of the frame who are cleaning, a task often located in a domestic interior. However, these figures are cleaning what appears in the niche: an open-pit coal mine. The cloud used in these experiments also adds an element of doubt and has multiple interpretations: is it the weather or a polluting plume and why is it infiltrating the interior space in which the figure resides? Again, I am interested in bringing these two distinct and different spaces, that of the domestic interior and Earth's embattled exterior, together to form a dialectic conversation.



Figure 42 Preliminary niche collages, *Cleaning our house 1* and *Cleaning our house 2*, 2020

These small experiments were repeated with different types of imagery in watercolour and gouache with the same aim of creating a link between the near and the far. Recalling Bryson's analysis and Heda's painting (refer Figure 36), I used the shelf as a site for still life arrangements: dirty dishes and objects precariously balanced in the viewers near space. Through the niche's portal I laid out the tailings from a mine site, in *Dirty dishes* and polluting smokestacks, as seen in *Stacks* (Figure 43). I argue that these works suggest that the near and far are interlaced and connected, perhaps more so in *Stacks* as the smoke also infiltrates past the edge of the niche into the space of the domestic objects and the viewer's space. The niche has effectively created a conduit to connect these consumer objects with their base material and energy source.



Figure 43 *Dirty dishes*, 2020 and *Stacks*, 2020

A small oil painting used the same concept but this time I queried how an endangered faunal species might work as opposed to an arrangement of objects. The work *Black throated finch and the Galilee* (Figure 44) recalls the precariously balanced urn from the *photographed dioramas* (refer Figure 32), although it is also embellished with a bird design. The bird is the endangered black-throated finch which until recently had stopped progression of the Adani coal mine in Queensland.⁶⁹ Beyond, through the niche, resides a painted rendition of mine-tailings.

A reason I am interested in bringing distant ideas to our present space and time relates to neuroscience and the psychological theory known as Temporal Construal Theory. The psychologists Pidgeon, Poortinga and Spence posit that people have an innate psychological barrier relating to distance, time, social group, and level of risk when dealing with anthropogenic climate change.⁷⁰ Climate change communication specialist, George Marshall

⁶⁹ Lisa Cox and Ben Smee, "Adani mine could snuff out black-throated finch's last chances of survival," *The Guardian* (online) 2019, News/Environment. "The Adani mine has now got environmental approval – so what next?," SBS (Special Broadcasting Service, Australia) News, 14/6/2019, accessed 14/10/2021.

⁷⁰ Alexa Spence, Wouter Poortinga, and Nick Pidgeon, "The Psychological Distance of Climate Change," *Risk Analysis* 32, no. 6 (2012), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1539-6924.2011.01695.x>. The psychological barriers associated

calls this the “them, there and then” issue. In his book *Don’t even think about it, why our brains are wired to ignore climate change*, Marshall details how the human brain has developed to disregard distant threats, or those that happen to others, or are distant in space or time.⁷¹



Figure 44 *Black throated finch and the Galilee*, 2020

Thinking about this problem I have used the portal of the niche to reduce the psychological barrier of distance. By placing the falling urn in the same space and time as the discarded remains of the mine site I aim to link breakage of our secure and safe domestic space with that of resource extraction. I posit that using these visual devices can bring the Anthropocene drivers into the viewers present frame of mind and help make them more

with geographic distance, the future, identification with others and level of risk have been posited through Construal Level Theory as barriers to climate change action.

⁷¹ George Marshall, *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change* (USA: Bloomsbury, 2015). Chapter 13

tangible and relatable. These ideas about reducing distance of time, space, social group, and risk have been an area of interest across my studio research.

Experiments: materials and methods

My research included experimenting with paint materials to evoke environmental degradation, the domestic space, and act as a lure to capture and hold the viewer's attention. This section discusses my initial experiments with paint and mediums, my thoughts about using craft practices and why I use small wooden panels. I will argue that using non-traditional tools and techniques are an important way for me to connect drivers of the Anthropocene with the human domestic interior.

I conducted material experiments researching the physical properties of paint by using different application methods and mediums. Drawing inspiration from Mandy Martin's painting, I thought paint techniques that embody degradation an important area to investigate. I was sure these methods would have an application in my compositions to contrast against the human-centred language of still life. To start, I located internet imagery of sites of human despoliation, including strip and pit mining, coal-fired power plants, and oil spills to name the most significant. I looked at how to evoke disturbance, grime, aerosols, and dumping through a visual analysis of this imagery. Next, I investigated how to mimic these phenomena through a variety of brush techniques, with non-traditional paint applications tools, the use of mediums and through colour combinations. Following are details of my experiments and key findings into my paint materiality research.

I applied thick paint and carved it while still wet with different implements, such as forks, combs, and grooved implements (Figure 45), where the traces of these marks would be reminiscent of human machinery.

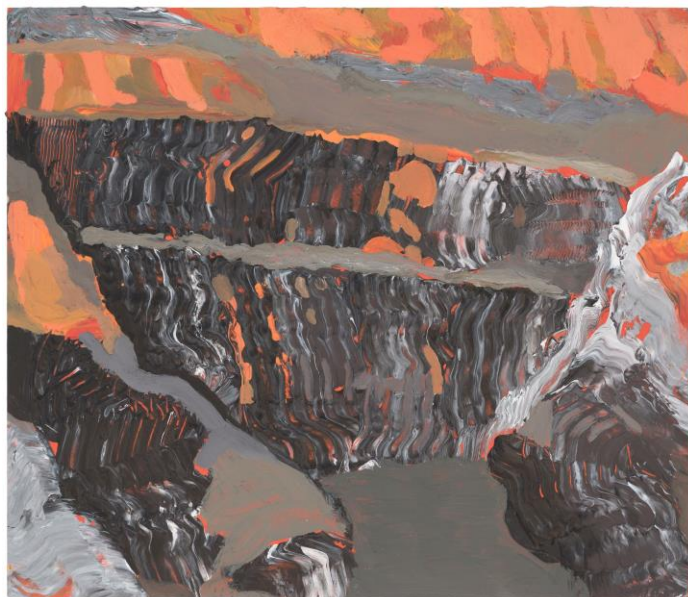
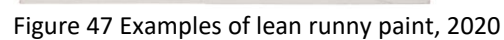


Figure 45 Examples of thick paint carving, 2020



Figure 46 Examples of stiff brushes, 2020

Using stiff brushes, I pushed unmixed paint around on board to evoke filth and disorder (Figure 46).



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All these techniques relied on careful colour choice as underlying paint was often revealed and colours melded and contrasted as the process was born out. I used accepted colour theory of complementary and harmonious colour schemes assisted by darker chromatic greys to add a complexity, attraction, and repulsion.

Using the collage composition of *Dirty interiors* (Figure 49), I queried some of the material conclusions in four small paintings (Figure 50).



Figure 49 *Dirty interiors*, 2020

In relation to colour, I chose yellow for the central lounge motif for its optimism and cheerfulness, attributes that fade when this pure colour is muddled with its complementary opposite purple. I used dull greys and muddled greens and purples across the four queries for their drabness and capacity to emulate decay. I also experimented with level of detail, medium enriched dripping paint, made various marks with brushes and thick paint, and scribed into wet paint using different tools.



Figure 50 Experimental paintings based on *Dirty interiors* collage, 2020
Toxic dump, 2020 and *Dirty interiors study*, 2020 (L to R, top)
Beheaded, 2020 and *Toxic site*, 2020 (L to R, bottom)

Key findings from my *Dirty Interiors* experiments and materiality investigations are numerous. Using thick paint, I could establish marks with non-traditional tools to represent the operations of a destructive machine. However, care was needed in this method as deep mark making would influence application of paint on subsequent painting layers. Stiff brushes could be used in a similar manner but not leave as heavy indentations. I determined a preference for my homemade mediums because of their speed of drying and personalised formulations, dependant on need. Using oily mixes would help create shinier surfaces which draws the eye by capturing light. Through the mixing of lean and fat mediums in paint I considered I could simulate a degraded Earth as the paint mixed in uncertain ways and evoked pollution and other elemental forces. Colours can invite viewers through harmonious and complementary colour schemes which can be accentuated using chromatic greys. However, colours need to be considered carefully as some of the paint application techniques reveal underlying colours. Refinement of my material techniques and further analysis is provided with specific works in Chapter Three.

During experimentation, I decided to make small paintings with the intentional strategy of creating a one-to-one relationship with the viewer. I argue, that unlike a large work that requires a viewer's distance, small works encourage viewers close examination, enabling an intimate engagement with the eyes and body. My works are small, but not miniature, all are less than 50 x 70 centimetres, and this size has been developed through three contributing factors. Firstly, fine brushes are used for delicate detail, to achieve a "curious looseness", a description used for 17th century Dutch painters, detailed in Chapter Three.⁷² It follows that a small brush size has, to a degree, dictated the size of the work. Secondly, cues for support size have been taken from early Dutch flower painters whose works are small and who have influenced my work. Roelant Savery's 1615 painting *Flowers in a stone niche* (Figure 51), held in the collection of the Mauritshaus in the Netherlands, is a detailed piece. This work features more than twenty flowers and several faunal species yet measures only 45 x 63 centimetres which includes the painted stone niche surround.

⁷² Taylor, *Dutch flower painting, 1600-1720*. 96



Figure 51 Roelant Savery, *Flowers in a stone niche*, 1615

Finally, I have made small paintings in a desire to pull the viewer closer to my work, to explore the fine details present and become absorbed by the artist's labour and potentially ponder the work's meaning. The Australian artist Fiona Hall uses this luring strategy to draw the viewer close to problematic issues. Hall states that her pieces work "In the way that the appearance and perfume of a flower strategically lures a pollinating insect".⁷³

Additionally, I am focussed on choosing painting materials that are not harmful to the environment. I trialled canvas of various weights and materials, different wood and paper supports. I chose finely sanded wood panels which are formaldehyde free and accredited with the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC).⁷⁴ The wooden panel's smooth surface is ideal for detailed brushwork, paint material methods and craft techniques.

⁷³ Kendrah Morgan et al., *Fiona Hall: big game hunting* (Bulleen, Vic: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2013). 11

⁷⁴ "What is forest management certification," 2020, accessed 23/12/2021, <https://fsc.org/en/forest-management-certification>. Forest management certification is a process that confirms a forest is managed in such a way to preserve biological diversity, benefits the lives of local people and workers and ensures economic viability.

As part of my historic research into collage I realised this aesthetic has a strong base in craft techniques used in the home. This understanding was informed by a comprehensive publication from the exhibition *400 years of Collage* at the National Galleries of Scotland which detailed collage from the 1700s to the present day. Works ranged from decoupage and quilting to technical innovations, such as Photoshop.⁷⁵ Additionally, craft techniques speak of domestic activities, thereby referencing concerns in Chapter One which regard the domestic space as a site of the Anthropocene. I sensed a strong correlation between domestic space, craft, collage, and the language of still life. Subsequently, I have sought to use craft techniques in my artwork, such as stamping and interior decorative paint techniques, like *trompe l'oeil*.

Using the craft *trompe l'oeil* decorating method, I investigated the concept of using a table shape to portray not just a piece of domestic furniture but also a landscape. The table, a common still life trope and place of household activity, includes activities such as eating, studying, conversing and play. Thus, I was interested in making a link with these interior practices and that of the landscape, the origin of resources for our lifestyles and initial place of destruction. My work, *Life on the table* (Figure 52) felt like a breakthrough and stemmed from the ledge, ginger pot and train experiments, particularly Figure 38 and was also motivated by the collage, *On the l-edge* (refer Figure 21).

In this painting I was intent on creating a faux wood technique from *Paint Effects*, a home decoration manual.⁷⁶ This *trompe l'oeil* technique, which required diverse types of brushes and paint applications, did not just look like grained and knotted wood but had hints of a landscape. As the technique was performed, I purposely tweaked it so the result could be read either way: table or landscape.

⁷⁵ Elliott et al., *Cut and paste: 400 years of collage*.

⁷⁶ Emma Callery, *Paint Effects* (London: Tiger Books international, 1990). 87 - 93



Figure 52 *Life on the table*, 2020

The phenomenon of seeing two interpretations in one image is called an ambiguous illusion and is influenced by habits of the mind: our experiences, memories, perceptions, and desires.⁷⁷ Studies have shown that our brain is constructed to find meaning and structure around us through the functions of the lower perceptual brain and then the higher cognitive brain. The table or landscape was also suggested by placing the teacups and teapot alongside oil derricks on the same space. Thus, these images and the way the shape is painted can be interpreted as either the near table where we eat, study and converse or a far-off vast landscape.

⁷⁷ Susana Martinez-Conde et al., "Marvels of illusion: illusion and perception in the art of Salvador Dali," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* (2015 Sep 29 2020-02-03 2015), <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00496>. 1

I made two key findings in making this work. The first is that the table shape can be used to house and connect ideas that are distant from each other, as discussed in my *Niche* series. The second, that the table could be an active player in my visual painting language, rather than a silent and passive still life component on which to place objects. *Life on the table* was instrumental for spawning the *Table* series detailed in Chapter Three and spurred on my use of the human figure.

Experiments: human figure

I use the human figure to highlight the origins of environmental destruction associated with the Anthropocene, which would not exist if it were not for Anthropo or humans.⁷⁸ Prior to depicting human figures, I used industrial machines, in the act of digging and dumping the Earth to express my concerns. The images of machinery were used to create a literal link between cause and impact of environmental destruction, as seen in my *Paper collages* series and first paintings (refer Figure 29). In these works, the presence of humans is pervasive but not concrete. I decided to look for human figures working in industry with physical movements akin to machines. This interest was extended to people cleaning up unnatural and natural disasters, such as oil spills and bushfire. According to climate scientists, anthropogenic climate change is enhancing weather events and making them more extreme, such as the devastating Black Summer fires.⁷⁹ With a variety of human figures from these scenarios I made paintings with people interacting with still life objects.

The foreground figure seen in the experiments of *Hi-vis vessel* and *We soil, we clean* (Figure 53) is an image from the internet of an oil rigger manipulating a large mechanical device on an oil drilling platform.

⁷⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, "*anthropo-, comb. form*" (Oxford University Press).

⁷⁹ Nerilie J. Abram et al., "Connections of climate change and variability to large and extreme forest fires in southeast Australia," *Communications Earth & Environment* 2, no. 1 (Dec 2021 2022-03-16 2021), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-020-00065-8>. 10 - 12



Figure 53 *Hi-vis vessel*, 2020 and *We soil, we clean*, 2020 (left to right)

But instead of the device the figure grabs at a household jug. Similarly, this figure and another engage closely with domestic artefacts in *We soil, we clean*. The figure in orange is from an oil spill clean-up crew. But instead of cleaning an oil soaked coastline they spray a vase clean. By linking the two figures with the hose I am insinuating their actions are linked: one in acquisition and the other in removal. Further, I argue that the human figure when placed at the same scale as objects in a still life composition become an active participant in the arrangement. Moreover, with this position I aim to imply our intricate association with these domestic artefacts. In other words, I endeavour to link our lifestyles, and by inference our domestic spaces, with that of environmentally destructive practices.

Continuing with this line of thought I queried how figures might reside alongside still life objects, not just interacting with them. In *Cleaning up the table* (Figure 54) the two figures have been taken from a news article about cleaning the ocean shore after an oil spill in Santa Barbara. I placed these figures on a receding shape, one I aim to read simultaneously as a table and a body of water, the near and far, as in my explanation of *Life on the table* (Figure 52). The figures are using buckets to clean amid still life objects of potted plant and lemons. In using both the figure and common domestic objects I aim for a cross-pollination between human activities, concern for the environment, and the domestic space of the table.



Figure 54 *Cleaning up the table*, 2020

I queried these ideas in several works by using different household objects and their signification and considering my use of colour to enhance the composition. Additionally, I investigated taking people out and depicting mining machinery instead. I also worked with the scale of motifs and changed the materiality of the table surface to elicit the turmoil of a denuded state of nature (Figure 55).

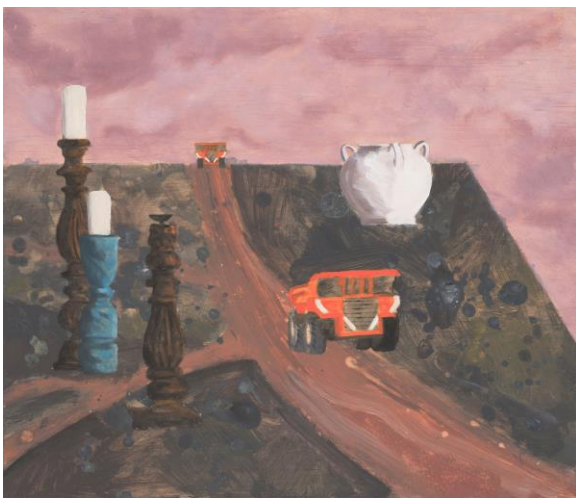


Figure 55 *Mining the table*, 2020 and *Mining life on the table*, 2020

After several experiments I felt there was something missing from these works. I wondered how I could facilitate a storytelling aspect in my compositions, one that was not expected and easily interpretable.

Storytelling

This section details my storytelling approach which aims to blend realities to provoke a sense of narrative. The origin of my paintings are often based on information from scientific literature, current affairs or a documentary relating to a transgressed Earth.⁸⁰ I use this information to create stories using objects and collaged imagery which connects either directly or by degrees to this inspiration. The experimental painting *Flood* (Figure 56) is an example of using ideas from scientific literature combined with an historic woodcut, domestic pattern and found imagery.



Figure 56 *Flood*, 2020

⁸⁰ Rockström et al., "A safe operating space for humanity." The Planetary boundaries that have been transgressed because of humans include - climate change, biosphere integrity, biogeochemical flows, or land-system change.

I was inspired by the Bureau of Meteorology's (BoM) and Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) report *State of the Climate*. This report states that with Anthropogenic climate change, rainfall is expected to become "more intense short-duration heavy rainfall events throughout the country".⁸¹ *Flood* heralds the coming of floods and home inundation



Figure 57 1884 reprint of 'chapbook', 2014 and Visual diary entry, 2020 (left to right)

Flood's visual composition began from a woodcut print about an extreme flooding event from 1607 in England (Figure 57). I married visual elements from this image, such as the high horizon line and simple graphics, with floating objects from recent extreme flood events and a vase of flowers. The background is a wallpaper design aimed at evoking the domicile space. At the time of making this composition I had been using imagery of people engaged in flippant activities and the two figures came from a retro beach photograph (Figure 57). I stripped the figures and painted them holding up the flood scene suggestive of a banner, an advertisement or theatre backdrop. Thus, the image of the flood is being proclaimed by the figures as something worth examining.

⁸¹ BoM and CSIRO, *State of the Climate*, (Australian Government, 2020).

Flood illustrates my process in making compositions analogous to storytelling. Similarly, the American Painter Rob Rey discusses his interest in storytelling.

I've always had a drive to make art that has a deeper meaning or message...
 ... So, in search for that meaning in my paintings I started out interested in
 ... how humans have evolved to be so affected by the stories we tell
 ourselves, how stories have shaped our view of the world and the society
 we live in. I think that humans have not only evolved to be affected by these
 stories but that we have evolved a deep desire for them.⁸²

Like Rey I endeavour to relay something deeply meaningful. For me it is my concerns about Anthropocentric change to the Earth system, observed in a rapidly changing adverse climate system and biodiversity loss at levels equal to a mass extinction.⁸³ In crafting my paintings, I envisage each fragment of a composition, whether realistic or abstract, like that of characters and situations in a story. Individually a fragment relates to a pool of ideas or sphere of knowledge and is contextualised through its association with other fragments. Moreover, as a united group they contribute a meaning or story not usually associated with them as individual entities.

I have sought to tell these stories through the synthesis of still life painting, based on three-dimensional forms, and collage, a realm dealing with flat materials. In my experiments I have wrestled with these opposing systems, as the artifice afforded by painting allows for a wide range of possibilities. These two formats play off each other due to abutting edges, expectations of perspectival representation such as volume and flatness and differences in scale and lighting. I posit that the tension created by these incongruous elements creates an ambiguous space and my different ways of negotiating these opposing systems invites curiosity in varying levels. Over time my paintings have become less about creating a three-dimensional space and more about the artificial world my paintings inhabit: the story I am creating.

⁸² Rob Rey, "Using art to tell stories with Rob Rey," interview by Antrese Wood, *Savvy Painter*, 20/2/2020, 2020, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/5ywEfLIRdjWLOEGzigsLXO>.

⁸³ Elizabeth Kolbert, *the Sixth Extinction, An Unnatural History* (Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014). 265 - 268

In some of my works the two-dimensional space of collage drives the painting's story and the traditional three dimensionality of still life painting is pushed back. An IKEA advertisement triggered thoughts and several artworks about how our lifestyles are infiltrating the environment (Figure 58). I used imagery from home decorator magazines contrasted with images from oil spills, such as those from the bulk carrier Exxon Valdez and Deepwater Horizon.⁸⁴ These environmental disasters are the two largest oil spills in history and serve as tangible examples of the damage these energy sources and extractive industries cause. In response my work, *Discordant dining* (Figure 59), features depictions of a cane dining suite situated in the Gippsland Ash forest, a hotspot of deforestation and home of the critically endangered Leadbeater's possum. The interruption of a table in the forest is magnified by an image from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon drilling platform fire. Atop the table is also a tugboat spraying water aimed at quelling the blaze. Dotted amongst the fernery and trees are everyday people collecting oil-soaked animals and debris from the Exxon Valdez crude oil spill.



Figure 58 IKEA advertisement, 2020

⁸⁴ The bulk oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* ran aground in Prince William Sound, Alaska in 1989. The accident caused 11 million gallons of oil to spill into an ecologically sensitive area and is one of the largest environmental disasters in U.S. History. Deepwater Horizon was the largest offshore oil spill in U.S. history and occurred in 2010. It happened when an explosion caused the drilling platform to sink and started a catastrophic oil leak that was unable to be capped for three months. Approximately 134 million gallons of oil was spilled into the Gulf of Mexico during this time. "Exxon Valdez," NOAA, Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program, unknown, accessed 19/6/2022, <https://darrp.noaa.gov/oil-spills/exxon-valdez>. "Deepwater Horizon," NOAA, Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program, unknown, accessed 19/6/2022, <https://darrp.noaa.gov/oil-spills/deepwater-horizon>.

This work pulls together three different containers of information via the imagery of a dining table, forest, and environmental disaster. My aim in binding these containers within one space is to link them spatially, metaphorically, and conceptually. My underlying story for this piece is that our lifestyles are essentially polluting nature though the effects of this are removed from our immediate domestic environment.



Figure 59 *Discordant dining*, 2020

Select paintings with a similar theme and appearance can be found in Appendix B - *Collaged paintings*. Upon reflection, I felt these paintings were too removed from the still life genre and were dominated by collage: straying from my central research concern of how the language of still life painting might be utilised to convey anthropogenic environmental destruction. Therefore, my key findings from these works determined that collage could contribute to creating a story but, if the composition became overly burdened with collaged imagery, they risked becoming dense and difficult to interpret. Hence, I decided to make compositions simpler and refocus back on the tenet of still life and the thematic concerns of domestic spaces and connections with the causes and impact of the Anthropocene.

Conclusion

The progression of my experiments shows how an expanded still life painting vernacular was continuing to build by synthesising the language of still life with collage. My painting experiments with structure, style, subject, and storytelling uncovered several key findings that I continued to pursue in developing this visual language. My primary finding was visually connecting the human domestic interior to human causes of environmental destruction: the near and far in a metaphorical relationship within the painting frame. This finding, of near and far, was made in several separate areas that provided the potential to form a strong conceptual relationship when united. They included: still life structural elements to create connections using either a portal or platform; traditional and craft techniques that portray the domestic and the destructive; use of the human figure in the same scale as still life objects; and, a storytelling technique that embraces connections using still life and collage. Other key decisions made during research involved the size of paintbrushes, supports, and environmentally sustainable product use.

Chapter Three details the progression of my paintings in further establishing the connections between near and far. The *Diorama* series is discussed which utilises the still life scaffold of the table and the human figure to explore our central role in the Anthropocene. Importantly, flowers start to emerge as a primary still life motif which continues across my other two research series: *Table* and *Dark*.

Chapter Three: Flowering of still life

Introduction

This chapter outlines how cut flowers becomes the central motif of three series of paintings: *Diorama*, *Table* and *Dark*. Made in the last stages of my research, I will show that flowers are a powerful device because of their widespread appreciation, symbolism, and beauty. Cut flowers are also chosen for their demonstration of human caused destruction, as a luring device and for their entrenched place in the domestic space. I argue that linking the domestic space with drivers of the Anthropocene is an important way to consider human disturbance of the Earth.

Firstly, I will detail the *Diorama* series, showing how these paintings are based on arrangements of observed three-dimensional space and flat collaged imagery. I posit that these two perspectival systems jostle with each other to create an ambiguous and engaging visual field that explores the near and far. Following, I will discuss the *Table* series which I worked on concurrently with *Diorama* and reveals my collage making method by physically painting collage construction items in the painting language. I hypothesise these painted items link imagery by physically and metaphorically binding the near and far, or the domicile and site or driver of environmental crisis. I will detail how the table platform acts as a compositional ploy to transport the collaged imagery into a conversation about the domestic space and anthropogenic environmental destruction. While these paintings are more collaged in their appearance, the flower motif is clearly present.

In contrast, my final series *Dark*, unambiguously revels in the floral arrangement and are a result of *Diorama* and *Table* works. These paintings meld images of endangered species alongside large lush seasonal displays of home-grown flowers. Two contemporary artists, Cindy Wright and Christina Lowry, will be discussed followed by an examination of early 17th century Dutch flower pieces for their influence on my paintings.⁸⁵ Part of this discussion will

⁸⁵ Segal, *Flowers and nature: Netherlandish flower painting of four centuries*. A flower piece is the name given to a still life that predominantly comprises flowers in a vase or other vessel. The flowers may also be strewn on a table, bound together as in a posy or flowers that feature in a festoon, swag or wreaths. 15 - 16

include my findings on using non-traditional painting techniques and hobby craft processes to imply environmental issues and the domestic space.

Flowers

I am the lover's gift; I am the wedding wreath;
I am the memory of a moment of happiness;
I am the last gift of the living to the dead;
I am a part of joy and a part of sorrow.⁸⁶

Flowers became a dominant still life motif in my painting because of their innate qualities, underlying meaning, and universal and personal attraction. Flowers are fecund, they are a fundamental part of most plants' natural reproduction cycle and are therefore recognised for their life-giving properties. How ironic that humans cut flowers down to display their beauty thereby effectively depriving them of their *raison d'être*. Extending this line of thought, I have used cut flowers to denote how nature's capacity to give life is being destroyed and eroded through human-caused environmental degradation, such as species loss. Moreover, flowers symbolise fleeting beauty and transience and are used widely in *vanitas* paintings.⁸⁷ This shift of meaning from life giver to mortality is an underlying theme I explore in my paintings.

Regardless of historic moment, geographic location, or culture, flowers are used as universal tokens of reverence, affection, and human connection. In many ceremonies, flowers are used to denote love, devotion and commemoration for people, religion, and nature. For example, flowers are given in solace and moments of joy, worn at graduations, adorn marriage festivities and given as thanks. The religious practice of prayer and worship or *Puja* literally means *the flower act* and has been in widespread use for thousands of years in Eastern religions.⁸⁸ Indeed, flowers appeared in Christian manuscripts and Renaissance religious artworks to symbolise Christian stories and figures, such as the *Portinari altarpiece*

⁸⁶ "The song of the flower XXIII," Unknown, accessed 14/1/2022. excerpt

⁸⁷ Segal, *Flowers and nature: Netherlandish flower painting of four centuries*. 30

⁸⁸ "Significance of flowers in a puja," Eshwar Bhakti, unknown, accessed 25/4/2022, <https://pujayagna.com/blogs/pooja-havan-yagya/significance-of-flowers-in-a-puja>.

by Hugo van der Goes of 1475-76 (Figure 60 and Figure 61), centuries before they made their way into autonomous still life.⁸⁹ Thus, flowers are seen as containers for love and admiration, and for worship.



Figure 60 Hugo van der Goes, *Poltinari altarpiece*, 1476 – 78



Figure 61 Hugo van der Goes, *Poltinari altarpiece* (detail of flowers), 1476 - 78

In the 17th century, the Dutch nation became a mighty trading power leading to many private individuals accumulating great wealth and new-found social status. Still life paintings are an artefact of this time and portrayed the intimate relationship between objects, the culture and societal change that occurred in the Netherlands. The flower paintings of the

⁸⁹ Ekserdjian, *Still life before still life*. 21 - 22, 26 - 27

early 1600s carried a double meaning. Not only do they comprise religious overtones, they also signalled a burgeoning marketplace. Dutch Golden Age flower painters, such as Ambrosius Bosschaert, the Elder, understood this fascination and were paid handsomely for their paintings that provided citizens with a perpetual display of these coveted items.⁹⁰

The fascination with, and desire for, goods has persistently increased since the 1600s. Vast environmental destruction has occurred through the adoption of fossil fuel energy in the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s and increased sharply with the Great Acceleration in mid-20th century.⁹¹ As detailed in my Exegesis Introduction, this consumption along with other factors, such as colonisation, has seen the Earth transgress into an Anthropocentric era. I argue that flower paintings are rich in connotation as they are a model for the misuse of natural resources not only in the flower industry but also in the business practices of many large corporations.⁹² Moreover, they are also reminders of the historic link with transience, fleeting beauty, and bearers of moral messages.⁹³

Through the depiction of flowers in my paintings I aim to utilise their beauty, symbolism, and recognition, to camouflage less palatable ideas. I argue that flowers can act as the lure while my other painting tactics, such as collaged images of environmental catastrophe, act as the sting. As the Art Historians, Sterling and Ekserdjian claim, nascent Dutch flower still lifes are all about dominating the eye as they are painted with meticulously observed detail.⁹⁴ Likewise in finely painting flowers in my works that are beguiling and attention seeking, I aim to entice a viewer to search for visual reward and in doing so make connections with collaged images.

On a more personal level, the flower motif aligns with my personal passion for gardening. This is a vexed issue for me as I also see my garden as an exotic cultivated space highlighting the globalised world where humans have moved, used, and altered Earth's systems. My

⁹⁰ Taylor, *Dutch flower painting, 1600-1720*.126

⁹¹ Steffen et al., "The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives." 848 - 853, "Environmentalism: Big Business Threatens the Planet, Despite Boasts of Sustainability," Ecowatch, 2018, accessed 16/6/2022, <https://www.ecowatch.com/big-business-sustainability-2532429601.html>.

⁹² "The environmental impact of cut flowers? Not so rosy," TED, 2021, accessed 16/6/2022, <https://ideas.ted.com/the-environmental-impact-of-cut-flowers-not-so-rosy/>.

⁹³ Taylor, *Dutch flower painting, 1600-1720*. 77

⁹⁴ Sterling, *Still life painting from antiquity to the present time*. 47 Ekserdjian, *Still life before still life*. 26

garden is a contrived space, devised by my predilections for growing flowers, fruit and vegetables and inspired by the cultural system which I inhabit. This constructed habitat is a metaphor for the Anthropocene. Looking at my garden from another angle, the inhabitants, such as birds and insects, and the seasonality of the garden, raise my awareness of nature's ebbs and flows. Thus, the entirety of the garden supports my interest in the greater natural world. In this way, flowers are a motif that has personal investment as well as metaphoric potential.

Diorama series

The *Diorama* paintings continue my examination of co-locating imagery related to domestic vernacular alongside imagery associated with environmental issues: the near and far side-by-side. I will examine a revised painting methodology that mixes two-dimensional images with three-dimensional objects in traditional still life arrangements. As part of this discussion, I detail my endeavours to create juxtaposition and raise curiosity through these opposing perspectives.

A renewed interest in flowers as a still life object occurred as a long COVID winter was displaced by spring flowers in my garden. I was immediately drawn to their uplifting presence, and these seasonal flowers became a central motif of the *Diorama* series. These paintings differ to previous works because I paint from observation a still life arrangement in actual space rather than paint from a flat collaged composition. The photographed diorama for *Spring fire season* shows such an arrangement (Figure 62). Working with this approach provided opportunity to explore the space created by objects in the round: their form, shadows and the diffusion of light understood through the familiar parlance of traditional still life paintings. I incorporated flat printed images, mostly of human figures, to interrupt the predictable still life arrangement. By including the printed images, I introduce multiple perspectival systems into the one work. They jostle with each other to create an ambiguous and engaging visual field that brings our domestic space in contact with events happening in another space and time, such as in the work *Spring fire season* (Figure 63) and in the photographed diorama for *Rescue* (Figure 64) and the subsequent painting (Figure 65).



Figure 62 Diorama for *Spring fire season*, 2020



Figure 63 *Spring fire season*, 2020



Figure 64 Diorama for *Rescue*, 2020



Figure 65 *Rescue*, 2020

Setting up collaged human figures as objects within this arrangement allowed these works to move into a theatrical space where the cut-outs assumed the role of stage props and lighting could be used for dramatic effect. Thus, two distinctly different spatial modes, afforded by real objects and collaged imagery, converse like characters in a play or story. The actual objects and collaged 'characters' are also individual containers of information with their own history, signification, scale, and perspective. Consequently, an ambition of these painting was aimed at creating uncertainty and curiosity through these two perspectival systems. I hypothesise that melding them into one frame and forcing a dialectic interaction makes connection between the domestic space of still life painting and issues of the Anthropocene.

The flora, fauna and figures in these works are portrayed in a realistic, yet loose manner. A hyper-realism sensibility is not my aim in depicting imagery. Neither am I intent on producing loose and expressionistic paintings. Rather, I have sought to render depicted images with enough detail, so they are interpretable. Thus, the handling of paint has the detail required but also moments of gesture and loose suggestive marks. My painterly research was partly influenced by the nascent Dutch flower painters and critics. Paul Taylor's comprehensive book, *Dutch Flower Painting 1600 – 1720*, reveals their attitudes. The Art Critic, Karel Van Mander, describes paintings that show the attribute of *netticheyt* (neatness or fine detail) as providing "sweet fodder for the sight".⁹⁵ Given the difficult subject of human induced environmental destruction across my still life painting language, an alluring painting is a characteristic I am aiming for. However, can neatness be attained without an associated tightening in the painting: a tightening or stiffness that may also lead to a lifeless and dull painting? As the 17th century Art Critic, Gerard de Lairese, puts it "at the expense of the imagination".⁹⁶ This view was supported by contemporaries of Lairese, Philips Angel and Samuel van Hoogstraeten, also painters and writers on art who looked upon *netticheyt* as easily slipping into *nette stijvicheyt* (neat stiffness). Jan Breughel, the Elder's painting *Bouquet in a clay vase* (Figure 66), has a curious looseness about it. In this work the paint handling (Figure 67) is quite fine and neat but gives way to softer and looser techniques.

⁹⁵ Taylor, *Dutch flower painting, 1600-1720*. ⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Taylor, *Dutch flower painting, 1600-1720*.⁹⁶



Figure 66 Jan Breughel, the Elder, *Bouquet in a clay vase*, 1609



Figure 67 Jan Breughel, the Elder, *Bouquet in a clay vase* (detail), 1609

Based on my investigations, my painting technique has culminated in a “curious looseness” across the *Diorama*, *Table and Dark* series.⁹⁷ In my painting *Notice* (Figure 68) I handled the paint techniques using a variety of brushes, mediums, and a layered painting process. Using fine soft haired brushes alongside thicker bristled brushes, I strive for a likeness but not a stiffness. Clarity and neatness have been achieved in the crispness of the yellow line and protective suiting which stand out from the muddled purple drapery (Figure 69). In the shadows and some flowers, I have incorporated a looser gesture by using a dripping lean mix and bigger brushes (Figure 69). This dripping evokes a sense of degradation and loss of control which mirrors environmental damage and ecological systems breaking down.



Figure 68 *Notice*, 2020

⁹⁷ Taylor, *Dutch flower painting, 1600-1720*. 96. Philips Angel discusses works in general by Gerrit Dou who uses a curious looseness with a certain drawing hand. Dou, according to Angel uses a loose, lively, sweet flowing brush that doesn't suffocate with a stiff, neat, and bad workmanship.



Figure 69 *Notice* (detail of neatness (left) and looseness (right)), 2020

A selection of works produced in this series are documented in the Appendix C, *Diorama* series. In Figure 69, I have painted the hardware clamps that were used to hold the collaged figure and hose reel upright. It occurred to me that these attachment devices could also be used to span the divide between disassociated ideas. Therefore, I use these construction devices with this metaphorical intent in the *Table* series discussed next.

Table series

The *Table* series of paintings continues use of a collage construction methodology and investigations of the still life trope of table. This domestic object references the ‘low plane’ reality that Bryson discusses as intrinsic in the still life genre.⁹⁸ Collage construction items began appearing in my painting language to build connections between the domestic space and Anthropocene drivers. I speculated that showing these items helps reveal the intangible links between human caused environmental issues and the domicile space, such as drought alongside a vase of flowers as pictured in my work *Withering* (Figure 70). This hypothesis

⁹⁸ Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting*. 14 The term “low plane reality” is used by Bryson to discuss still life paintings and how the objects depicted discuss the inescapable routines of creaturely existence and the domestic space of everyday life, such as eating and drinking.

also considers the cognitive theory about psychological distancing to climate change that I discussed in the Experiments: ledges and niches section of Chapter Two.⁹⁹



Figure 70 *Withering*, 2021

Withering has a foreground shape that, due partly to the vase of flowers, is reminiscent of a table where you eat or a desk where you study. Both are places of thoughtful reflection and reside in a present frame of mind and an interior space. However, in this painting, the table acts as a simulacrum as it is painted to suggest a heavily fissured dry landscape stricken by drought, a situation that will worsen with climate change.¹⁰⁰ Upon the table are three groups of human figures clad in bright yellow protective suits, associated with emergency response.

⁹⁹ Spence, Poortinga, and Pidgeon, "The Psychological Distance of Climate Change." 958. Construal Level Theory is a cognitive theory that posits the psychological barriers to climate change action are associated with distance in four areas – geographic (how far the issue is), temporal (how far in the future the problem is), social (identification with others, are they part of 'your' group), and level of risk (how likely does the problem seem to be).

¹⁰⁰ BoM and CSIRO, *Short State of the Climate*. p 22 - 23

One figure is pinned to the drought landscape and another group of figures are paperclipped near the horizon. The latter group is working with coloured pie pieces that may be associated with the large pie chart. This pie chart has been extracted from a Government report about Murray-Darling water resources.¹⁰¹ A flower arrangement is partially obscured by the pie chart which is held in place with a painted pin.

The original collaged composition is evident in the painted pins, paperclips and residual white paper outlining the human figures. I argue that holding the original collage and painting together in this way makes tangible the connections between abstract ideas. These pins and paperclips have been used to fix the human figures to the pie pieces and drought-laden tabletop, and the pie chart to the flower arrangement. To put it another way, I have connected the domestic space with the Murray-Darling basin statistics, and a state of emergency to both drought and river system governance. Furthermore, the white edges of the human figures demonstrate the “cut and paste” manoeuvre I used when building the original collage. I have painted the white edges endeavouring to show that the human figures clad in hazard suits, a piece of clothing associated with rapid emergency response, are also connected to drought, the flower arrangement, and the tabletop. Therefore, I am aiming to make associations between all these pinned and paperclipped images and the concept of an immediate emergency.

Moreover, by placing all these items onto the space of the table: that everyday place of daily routine and reflection, they are brought into the realm of our home and daily thoughts. Therefore, the psychological mindset that distances people from drivers of the Anthropocene are drawn together and brought closer through the painted collage construction items on the table.¹⁰² I use the pins and paperclips, depicted images and table

¹⁰¹ Interim Inspector-General of Murray - Darling Basin Water Resources 2020, *Impact of lower inflows on state shares under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement*, (Canberra: Australian Government, 2020). 7 Pie chart represents a summary of issues raised by stakeholders during the inquiry.

¹⁰² Liselotte J. Roosen, Christian A. Klöckner, and Janet K. Swim, "Visual art as a way to communicate climate change: a psychological perspective on climate change-related art," *World art (Abingdon, U.K.)* 8, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/21500894.2017.1375002>. 91 Art and psychological distancing is discussed in this paper which asserts that visual art seeking to communicate about climate change needs to go beyond clichéd images such as polar bears, by presenting this issue through mental imagery in which associations are more personal and local.

scaffold to signal that environmental catastrophe is happening now, locally, at our table, and our comfortable domestic spaces are contributing to it.

The table shape is also used as a method to engage the viewer using simple compositional principles. In my painting *Sellout* (Figure 71) a receding table shape dominates the composition and creates a high horizon line which flattens the pictorial space. The high horizon line provides a mechanism to project objects, like the tipping vase of flowers, out of the pictorial frame and towards the viewer, thus implicating them as a participant within the space of the work. The same table format is evident in Osias Beert's painting (Figure 72) of 1610 – 1620. Early Dutch still life, like Beert's, provided thoughts about table perspectives and their presentation to the picture plane. Based on my analysis I determined to use the tipped table perspective as a ploy to engage with viewers of my paintings. Another artistic ploy I use is the leading lines made with the table's left and right sides, which are used to draw the viewers eyes into the painting's pictorial space. These mechanisms have been employed with the intention of engaging a viewer and keeping them involved in the work.



Figure 71 *Sellout*, 2021



Figure 72 Osias Beert, *Flowers in a lacquer basket and in a glass vase*, 1610 - 20

I continued to develop the still life trope of table for its possibility to slide between two different interpretations based on my paint handling and the relationship of objects residing in the still life painting. I argue this tactic creates a metaphorical relationship between two distinct yet connected ideas: the domestic and drivers of the Anthropocene. The familiar form of a table is used to locate the scene in the home amongst daily routine, somewhere close and personal. However, *Sellout's* table reveals itself as thickly painted, gouged and scraped back by implements. The table has been subverted and is no longer based on reality. Rather it is a re-presentation, a notional table which also suggests a heavily degraded landscape devoid of everything except the painted extraction machinery that has carved it up. These two interpretations, one of table and the other of landscape, places this compositional element into an unsettling place of ambiguity, an uncertainty that is magnified through alternative readings of each object present on the table. Each is isolated and unrelated and yet linked through their relationship as residents on this structure, making them participants in the same spatial realm. Adding to this unity are the shadows cast by the human figures that touch the vase and table structure. These visual tactics are employed to connect unrelated ideas together in the same setting. In my final series, *Dark*, I continue to experiment with the table but in a different guise.

Dark series

The *Dark* series concentrates on using flowers as a central motif to metaphorically link the here and now against my claim that human induced environmental destruction is perceived as over there and in the future. This series draws on early Dutch flower pieces and I argue that these historic works provide a suitable format to interrogate the drivers of the Anthropocene as a signifier of natural resource exploitation. I assert that my *Dark* paintings, assist in forming connections between local environmental issues and distant drivers of human caused environmental destruction through imagery and beguiling arrangements of flowers. I augment this line of thought with a discussion about my culmination of using non-traditional techniques, including craft methods to imply a domestic space.

Two artists discovered late in my research, Cindy Wright and Christina Lowry, use the Dutch Golden Age preoccupation with floral still life to discuss environmental issues and current affairs. The Belgian artist, Cindy Wright, has an interest in *vanitas* and painting about environmental issues. Some of her very large oil paintings are highly reminiscent of Dutch *Pronkstilleven*.¹⁰³ In *Into eternity* (Figure 73) Wright has realistically painted against a dark background, floral specimens in a field of bubbles, decaying leaves, and plastic detritus. These plastic products contrast against the transient nature of the soap bubbles and flowers, both favourite *vanitas* motifs. The title of this piece, *Into eternity*, also suggests the long-lasting quality of plastic and subsequent environmental issues.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Sam Segal et al., *A prosperous past: the sumptuous still life in the Netherlands, 1600-1700* (The Hague: SDU Publishers, 1988). 15 – 16. The Dutch word *pronk* has several meanings, but when used with *stilleven* – *pronkstilleven*, it refers to display and showing off, ostentation, gaudiness, splendour, and sumptuousness. 17th century Dutch *pronkstilleven* displayed arrangements of oriental carpets, silks, fur, expensive handcrafted items, such as goldsmiths work, glassware, fine porcelain, and exotic treasures such as rare shells.

¹⁰⁴ "Why we need to fix the plastic pollution problem," 2022, accessed 27/4/2022, <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/why-we-need-fix-plastic-pollution-problem>. According to the United Nations Environment Program plastics alter habitats and natural processes, cause human and species health issues and impacts millions of peoples' livelihoods, food security and social wellbeing.



Figure 73 Cindy Wright, *Into eternity*, 2021

Australian artist, Christina Lowry, creates photographs and her most recent work is highly evocative of the Dutch *vanitas* and flower still life tradition. Lowry has appropriated the compositions, symbolism, and visual language of 17th century Dutch still life to examine the COVID 19 pandemic, as seen in the giclée print *Long Covid* (Figure 74). Lowry says she is captivated by the philosophy behind memento mori and that “beautiful floral images that feature animals and insects” speak about the “reminders of our life and death”.¹⁰⁵ Both these artists are recrafting the 17th century Dutch still life to frame 21st century concerns. Wright and Lowry use a high level of verisimilitude, whether painting or photograph. The scale of objects is conventional, and they use lighting and dark contrasting backgrounds to add drama.

¹⁰⁵ "Blog/ New Work," <https://www.christinalowryartist.com/>, accessed 16/4/2022.



Figure 74 Christina Lowry, *Long Covid*, 2021

In the *Dark* series I targeted my investigations to the early Dutch period at the turn of the 17th century which gave rise to the emergence of a particular style of flower painting, called a flower piece. The prominent painters associated with this period are: Ambrosius Bosschaert, the Elder; Jan Brueghel, the Elder; Jacob de Gheyn and Roelandt Savery (Figure 75).¹⁰⁶ The paintings by these artists were innovative and highly prized in their time: like a tulip, and emblematic of colonial power.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Meghan Siobhan Wilson Pennisi, "*The Flower Still-Life Painting of Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder in Middelburg ca. 1600-1620*" (Dissertation, Northwestern University, Illinois, 2007), Proquest. 168

¹⁰⁷ Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting*. 104



Figure 75 Examples of early Dutch flower still life, by painters (L-R): Ambrosius Bosschaert, the Elder; Jan Brueghel, the Elder; Jacob de Gheyn; and Roelandt Savery, 1605 - 1625

An arrangement of flowers in a 17th century still life painting did not just depict beauty and painterly virtuosity but also the colonial mindset. For example, Ambrosius Bosschaert, the Elder's *Flowers in Chinese vase* of 1620 (Figure 76), depicts over 30 varieties of exotic flowers. These flowers, vase and shell were acquired through trade predominantly via the Dutch East India Company. According to Bryson the flower still life also relayed ideas about the limitless power of humans over nature, through scientific knowledge, the usurping of natural cycles and the economic wealth gained through the great expansion of global trade. Bryson concludes his analysis "The flower pictures reveal a good deal about the ways in which the Dutch viewed and understood their affluence...the feeling is evident that not much is owed to nature".¹⁰⁸ This attitude is still evident today in the growing resource extraction that supports global trade and consumer culture at the expense of the environment.

¹⁰⁸ Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting*. ¹⁰⁹ Essay Three, *Abundance*



Figure 76 Ambrosius Bosschaert, the Elder, *Flowers in a Chinese vase*, 1609

Whereas Dutch still life painters were predisposed to symbolise their societies prowess over nature and vast accumulations of wealth, my concerns lie with critiquing contemporary issues about human-caused environmental destruction. I undertook analysis of these painters' works to assist in formulating my own flower painting experiments. From these paintings I took the formal qualities and high contrast foreground over a dark background, flat flower arrangements where each flower is portrayed in its own space, and the use of faunal species to assist with interpretation. Paul Taylor's previously mentioned book and Sam Segal's *Flowers and Nature, Netherlandish Painting of Four Centuries* were invaluable guides in these analyses.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, *Dutch flower painting, 1600-1720*. Segal, *Flowers and nature: Netherlandish flower painting of four centuries*. Segal, *Flowers and nature: Netherlandish flower painting of four centuries*.

Segal defines a flower still life as,

a painting of mainly inanimate objects, flowers or herbs, with the occasional addition of small living animals which play a subordinate role in the composition. The flower still life occurs in a variety of forms, the most prevalent of which is the 'flower piece': a bouquet, usually in a vase or other container.¹¹⁰

Using Segal's definition, I have sought to realise the flower piece in a contemporary context. Resulting works are called the *Dark* series and they also harness my findings about still life scaffolds, paint application depicting the domicile and destructive, and storytelling compositions.

My *Dark* series predominantly showcases seasonal floral arrangements which I subvert through collaged images to develop an expanded still life painting language that connects the domestic space with the impacts and drivers of the Anthropocene. However, as the Anthropocene is a large and complicated theory, I wondered how to make it more tangible. The Australian social researcher, Rebecca Huntley, provided some clues about how I might do this with her discussion about making climate change more relevant. Huntley refers to a study that concluded "Objects of care... may bridge the psychological distance...of climate change."¹¹¹ I gave considerable thought to what might consist of an object of care or "anything that matters to people".¹¹²

I have produced the *Dark* series with stories in mind about endangered species, local to my home, based on the concept of "objects of care". *Still life, Corroboree frogs and stacks* (Figure 77) contains depictions of the critically endangered Corroboree frog, the object of care with representations of the distant issue: collaged coal plumes and coal stacks masquerading as a vase.¹¹³ The main motif of a large arrangement of winter flowers from my

¹¹⁰ Segal, *Flowers and nature: Netherlandish flower painting of four centuries*. 15

¹¹¹ Huntley, *How to talk about climate change in a way that makes a difference*. 221

¹¹² Huntley, *How to talk about climate change in a way that makes a difference*. 219

¹¹³ "Southern Corroboree Frog," 2019, accessed 27/4/2022, <https://www.zoo.org.au/media/3059/southern-corroboree-frog.pdf>. 2 A striking small yellow and black frog that is critically endangered and native to Kosciuszko National Park. There

garden represents the present moment. In other words, this scene is happening here and now. This endeavour aligns with Norman Bryson's view that still life "centres on the body" with its "disinclination to portray the world beyond the far edge of the table".¹¹⁴ However, I have undermined this idea of proximity by adding the coal stacks, plumes, and frog in the same space of the flower arrangement. In other words, although the frog and coal stacks happen in diverse geographical locations and time, they are also part of the situations where we live: part of our connected world. My approach recalls Margit Rowell's definition of still life being a system of objects that form an organic whole.¹¹⁵ I argue that through the closed composition these three entwined figurative elements of flowers, frog and coal become an organic whole and through this intimate connection forge a relationship between cause and effect.



Figure 77 *Still life, Corroboree frogs and stacks*, 2021

are now thought to be 50 – 100 individuals in the wild. The main threat to the Southern Corroboree Frog is the Chytridiomycosis disease as well as climate change and habitat disturbance from feral animals.

¹¹⁴ Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still life painting*. 71

¹¹⁵ Rowell, Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), and Hayward Gallery., *Objects of desire : the modern still life*. 8

My *Dark* paintings use large, sumptuous arrangements of flowers to draw attention demanding a closer inspection of my work. As discussed in the Flowers Section, I theorise that creating an atmosphere of curiosity promotes a prolonged enquiry where revelation of less palatable ideas and relationships may surface. I also made some changes to my composition process in two distinct ways. Firstly, I carefully selected flowers from my garden based on their colour and shape. I then laid them out flat on a black surface and photographed them (Figure 78), providing each with its own autonomous space, as seen in historic Dutch flower pieces (Figure 75). Strong light to cast shadow and an all over softer diffused light effect was used to provide me with two lighting versions of the one arrangement. Secondly, I intentionally de-emphasised the stark collage aesthetic of the clips and clamps present in the *Table* series. In *Nature morte, Mountain pygmy possum with concrete silos* (Figure 79), the cut edges of the collaged possum, Bogong moth and silos have been removed and all elements in the flower arrangement are painted as if coalescing and existing in the one space. Thus, I argue that by using evocative flower arrangements and subtle collage techniques I have created a work that is engaging and delicately connects the flowers from my garden with the concern for endangered species in my region, with the concrete silos portraying a highly used destructive material.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Jonathon Watts, "Concrete: the most destructive material on Earth," *The Guardian* (<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/25/concrete-the-most-destructive-material-on-earth>), 25/2/2019 2019. When all production stages of concrete are considered, this product is the third largest emitter of CO2. Concrete contributes to climate change, biodiversity loss, ,



Figure 78 Late winter display of seasonal flowers from my garden, digital photograph, 2021



Figure 79 *Nature morte, Mountain pygmy possum with concrete silos*, 2021

The *Dark* series used a non-traditional still life painting language to evoke environmental destruction. In the painting *Still life, flowers with coal-truck and finch* (Figure 80), as with all works in this series, I have used several unconventional paint techniques. These techniques require constant reappraisal as processes reveal underlying layers. For this piece I started with an acrylic base in a black hue and followed with a lean mix of almost black oil paint.



Figure 80 *Still life, flowers with coal-truck and finch*, 2021

While the dark oil layer was wet, I held the painting vertical and dripped on more lean oil paint so that it slid down the face of the board, grabbing the still wet dark layer. This action reveals the underlying acrylic ground and makes the surface look degraded and disturbed as if it is moving to a state of decay. In the next layer I used an expressive spatter effect aimed at creating an atmospheric quality that I liken to vaporous pollution, ever present but usually hard to see. The spatter also provides depth and an active element in the background having

been applied to a still wet underlayer. I typically utilise split complimentary paint colours that will harmonise with the main motifs to make the painting enticing to the eye. I am tactical with the placement of drips and spatter in the overall composition but in some respects the paint's action is out of my control (Figure 81). In *Still life, flowers with coal-truck and finch* I have used these material effects to add to the reading of the finished painting.



Figure 81 *Still life, flowers with coal-truck and finch* (detail), 2021 showing material techniques, drips and spatter

The hobby-craft techniques I employ include stamping and stencilling and are applied to evoke a domestic space. In my paintings the doily or wallpaper design element is a significant mechanism to link everyday human activities with disturbance of the Earth. A doily is an openwork decorative textile often associated with providing a resting place for something precious, like a fine porcelain ornament. The negative space of the doily makes it ideal for use as a stamp or stencil. As a stamp (Figure 82) the doily produces a positive image and may be applied like a relief print or pressed into wet paint and lifted off to expose the coloured layer underneath. Using the doily as a stencil produces a negative impression. Either way the doily motif creates a place upon which the flower arrangement can reside, like the still life trope of ledge or table. The embossed wallpaper (Figure 83) is used in a similar way to the doily, but I generally use it as a background motif (Figure 83) not a still life

structure. Both the wallpaper and doily are used to imply a domestic space which provides a mechanism to discuss drivers of the Anthropocene.

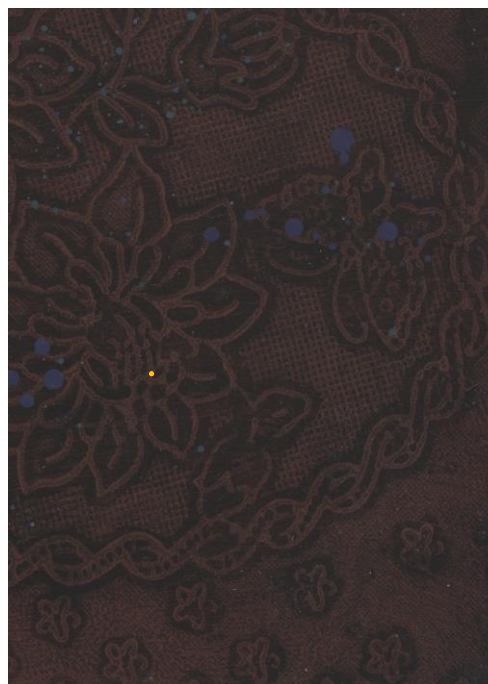
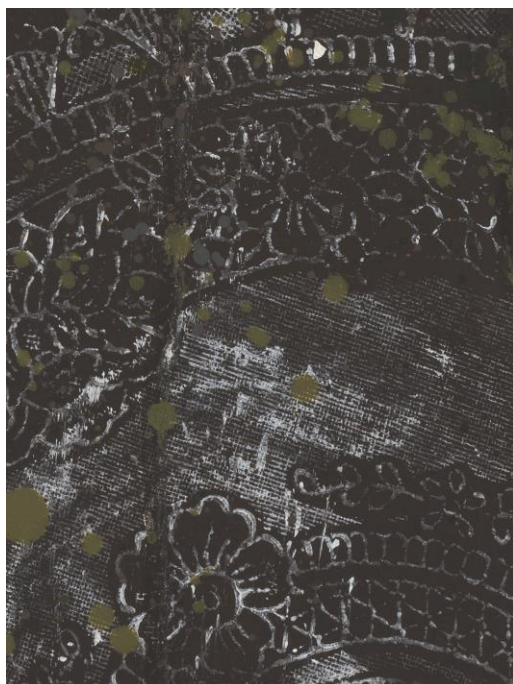


Figure 82 Plastic doily used as a stamp in underlayers of paintings, 2022

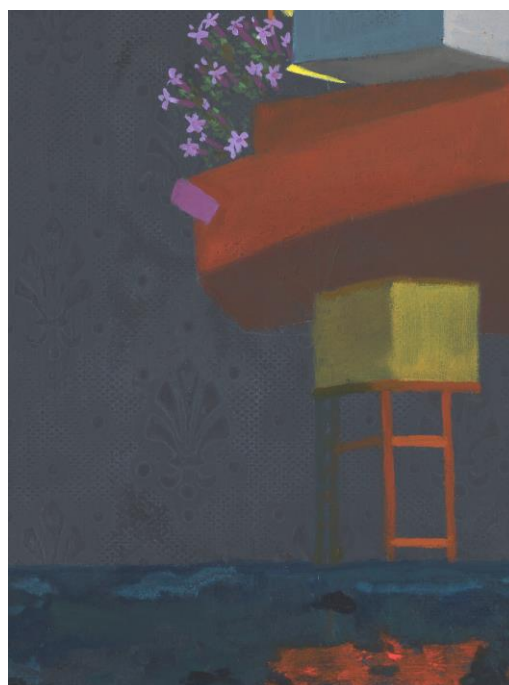


Figure 83 Example of embossed wallpaper and *Still life with Sun moth on oil platform*, 2021 (detail of wallpaper print technique) (left to right)

For *Golden wattle song in an exotic garden* (Figure 84) I painted a doily with oil paint and stamped the shape onto the materiality ground layers after they were dry. I used a red earth colour to imply a landscape and then used 'neat but loose' brushwork to render the floral, faunal, and farm imagery. The fusing of hobby-craft painting techniques, usually associated with the amateur and by extension the 'low' space of the home, with more skilled painterly approaches has allowed an idiosyncratic style to emerge that connects the everyday with environmental destruction.



Figure 84 *Golden wattle song in an exotic garden*, 2021

The Dark series further underlines the concept of connecting divergent spaces using multiple perspectives. Just as in the *Diorama* series I use shifting viewpoints and scales to create ambiguity and provoke curiosity. As an example, in the painting *Golden wattle song in an exotic garden*, the flower arrangement is up close and modelled with light and shade. It has

a shallow depth of field as in the floral still life painting of Ambrosius Bosschaert, the Elder (refer Figure 76). In this composition I have painted two viewpoints, one that is flat, with little depth that depicts the flowers and silo straight on. The other viewpoint looks down onto the doily shape and bird's nest. I have used this juxtaposition of perspective to think about the different ways of seeing a subject. The straightforward view is shallow, illuminated, and easy to read, while the other way of looking is to peer down, to bend over, as if at work, to investigate, to analyse and reason its' being. I suggest that these different perspectives also add a curiosity to the painting, one that may encourage sustained viewing.

Conclusion

The distinct yet related series: *Diorama*, *Table* and *Dark*, are the culmination of my research and use the key compositional elements of the table space, collage, and a variety of painting techniques.

The *Diorama* suite of paintings heralded the use of seasonal flowers sourced from my garden as a primary motif and critiquing tool of the Anthropocene. The flower motif became particularly important in my compositions for their historical reference, universal power, and personal interest. A strong collage aesthetic was apparent in the *Table* series which featured a table shape painted like a traumatised landscape to elicit both the internal domestic and the external degraded nature. This multiple reading is considered a key discovery and was used to stage human figures and other still life objects to bring environmental issues into a more familiar place: the home.

With the *Dark* series the domestic space became a residual component. Craft and artisan techniques evoked anthropogenic environmental destruction and the domicile, thus linking two disconnected spaces. Large showy flower arrangements on dark backgrounds allowed a story to unfold about local endangered fauna and aspects of anthropogenic environmental destruction. In these final works, I synthesised the language of still life with collage to create a metaphorical connection between the domestic space and causes or issues related to human-caused environmental destruction, the near and far in a still life arrangement.

Conclusion

My practice-led research asked in what ways can I use collage to rouse the potential of the inoffensive and overlooked language of still life and challenge viewers about anthropogenic environmental destruction.

The synthesis of still life and collage is valuable because it brings together still life's familiarity and symbolism associated with objects with collage's juxtaposition and social critiquing capacity. I initially gravitated to mixed media collage as a tool to contrast ready-made cultural, natural and design imagery whilst acknowledging traditional still life tropes. Through these collages I discovered a process that was an effective vehicle for constructing compositions as it encouraged play, chance, and revelation. These collages focussed on domestic nomenclature alongside human causes of environmental impacts and became the basis for my investigations into painting.

In this studio-based research I developed an expanded still life painting language that placed the domestic space in dialogue with human caused environmental destruction: the near and far, side by side. I started formulating this language from an experimental painting phase. Key findings included using the structure underlying a still life, that is the ledge, niche and table and material qualities of paint to evoke destruction and the domicile. The depiction of human figures acting as objects and agents in the still life arrangement and making compositions with a story in mind were other key findings. One work, *Life on the table* (refer Figure 52), cemented my decision to use the table structure as a platform to connect diverse imagery, and to make this motif an active player in the painting's interpretation. I argue that pooling diverse imagery into the one space created a frisson of connection that negated the psychological distancing issues of "them, there and then".¹¹⁷ It was during this phase of my research that I started using small wooden boards and fine brushwork detail to create intimate work. I posited this scale induced the viewer to come close and inspect the work like a "...flower strategically lures a pollinating insect".¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Marshall, *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*. Chapter 13

¹¹⁸ Morgan et al., *Fiona Hall: big game hunting*. 11

These key findings contributed to an expanded still life painting language that culminated in my painting series: *Diorama*, *Table*, and *Dark*. These series drew together motifs of seasonal flowers from my garden, events happening in our connected world, and a collage visual language aesthetic. The *Diorama* series was based on traditional still life setups with collaged materials to mesh here with there. The *Table* series showed the constructed composition within each painting to reinforce the connection between near and far. I argued that the table acted not only as a scaffold but, through the way I applied paint, became reminiscent of a human-degraded Earth. In my final series, *Dark*, the use of craft techniques and home decoration became apparent. I argued these imply a domestic space and assist linking everyday human activities with the Anthropocene. This linkage was also created through careful blending of floral arrangements with less pronounced imagery of human-caused environmental destruction. In this space of inquisition, I endeavour to establish connection between the here and now, with over there and the future.

The synthesis of still life and collage in my paintings provide a valuable mechanism to critique the Anthropocene using an idiosyncratic painting language. These paintings combine disparate imagery and material approaches, each with their own interpretations, to create stories about human-induced environmental destruction. I argue this combination offers a way to understand large abstract concepts of the Anthropocene in a novel way. This language is successful because it entices a viewer through a blending of realities and sustains their interest through complex interrelations and differing material approaches. I argue that making paintings with an expanded still life language provides a viewing experience that works as vehicle for reflection, and maybe even revelation.

Subverting the still life genre with its connotations of transience and moral duty with a collage aesthetic has been a fruitful platform to raise these existential concerns and add to the contemporary visual dialogue concerning the Anthropocene. My research has shown how the boundaries of still life painting can be broken down and external elements introduced to discuss current environmental concerns. I consider this a valuable and personal way to introduce ideas about human-caused environmental damage to my community.

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All photographs by Brenton McGeachie, unless otherwise stated. Full details regarding select works from a series are detailed under each work.

Appendix A *Paper collage series*

Series: *Paper collage one*



Spectators, 2020, Paper, acrylic paint, 30 x 21 cm



The chop, 2020, Paper, wallpaper, acrylic paint, 30 x 21 cm

Series: *Paper collage two*



Dust bomb, 2020, Paper, photograph, wallpaper, acrylic paint 30 x 21 cm



Turbulent times, 2020, Paper, wallpaper, acrylic on paper, 30 x 21 cm

Series: *Paper collage three*



Blurred ever presence, 2020, Paper, photograph, card, acrylic paint 30 x 21 cm



Unfamiliar home, 2020, Paper, acrylic on paper, 30 x 21 cm

Appendix B Collage paintings



Paper based collage used for *Garden and home intersection*, photograph by artist



Garden and home intersection, 2020, Acrylic and oil on panel, 45 x 60cm



Paper based collage used for *Tropical garden and home intersection*, photograph by artist



Tropical garden and home intersection, 2020, Acrylic and oil on panel, 31 x 44.5 cm

Appendix C *Diorama* series



Diorama based collage used for *Flood and oil riggers*, photograph by artist



Flood and oil riggers, 2020, oil and acrylic on board, 60 x 45 cm, photograph by artist



Diorama based collage used for *Fire and snowdrops*, photograph by artist



Fire and snowdrops, 2020, Oil and Acrylic on board, 60 x 45 cm, photograph by artist

Appendix D *Table series*



Cleaning amongst the spring flowers, 2022, Oil on board, 50 x 40 cm



Flooded by thoughts, 2022, Oil on board, 40 x 50 cm

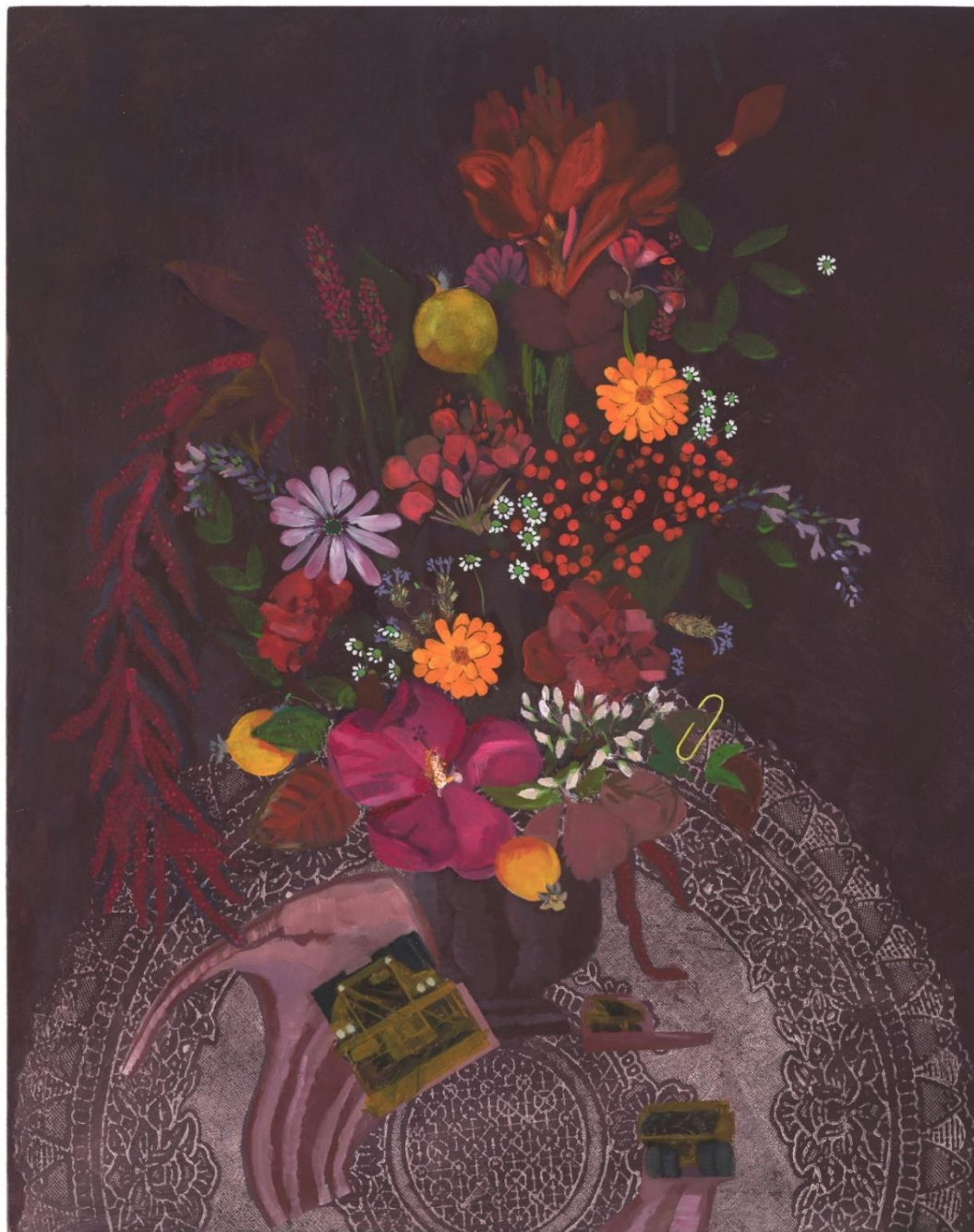


Slippage, 2021, Oil on board, 40 x 50 cm



Micro petal clean-up, 2022, Oil on board, 41 x 30.5 cm

Appendix E *Dark series*



Digging deep in the autumn garden, 2021, Oil on board, 50 x 40 cm



Still life with Sun moth on oil platform, 2021, Oil on board, 41 x 30.5 cm



Hives of industry and the sweeping winds of change, 2022, oil on board, 41 x 30.5 cm



Nature morte, spotted quoll amongst the freesias and derricks, 2022, oil on board, 41 x 30.5 cm