

THE RESONANCE OF A TANGLE

This document contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. I affirm to the best of my knowledge, this document contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text. I certify that I have made all reasonable efforts to secure copyright permissions for third-party content included in this thesis and have not knowingly added copyright content to my work without the owner's permission.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mairin', with a long, sweeping diagonal stroke extending upwards and to the left from the start of the signature.

© Mairin Briody 2022 Except as provided in the Copyright Act 1968, this thesis may not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the author.

THE RESONANCE OF A TANGLE:

AN EXPLORATION OF PAINTING AND AGENCY THROUGH
MATERIAL EXPERIMENTATION AND IMPROVISATION

MAIRIN BRIODY
3911068

MASTER OF FINE ART (BY COURSEWORK)
24TH OCTOBER 2022

ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR: DR PETER WESTWOOD

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
Project Summary	4
Brief Description	5
Objectives	6
Rationale	7
Key Research Question	10
Methodology Report	11
• <i>The Tree Series 2021</i>	11
• <i>Despite the change of it's look, it still remains true to itself 2021</i>	14
• <i>The immense entanglement of everything 2021</i>	17
• <i>Drench 2021</i>	23
• <i>Pulling together. Falling apart (both can be true) 2022</i>	26
• <i>Resist. Restrain. 2022</i>	30
• <i>The Resonance of a Tangle 2022</i>	33
End Notes	37
Bibliography	38

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was created on the country of the Wadawurrung, Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nations. I acknowledge and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

Sovereignty was never ceded, colonisation has not ended, this always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

My supervisors Dr. Peter Westwood and Dr. Yu Fang Chi for your encouragement, challenges, support and humour. Thank you for patiently bringing me back to focus despite my several straying projects.

Dr. Steven Rendall, Dr. Jan Nelson, Dr. Martina Copley, Dr. Laresa Kosloff, Dr. Dominic Redfern, Torika Bolatagici, David Rosetzky, Dr. Sally Mansell, Dr. Michael Graeve, Ceri Hann for your feedback, interest, care and kindness.

My MFA peers for being weird and wonderful. For the trust, the laughter, the misery.

My extraordinary Eden, you inspire me to inspire you. I'm sorry I've been busy, there will be mini-golf!

Finally to my Matt, for love. Just love. All of it.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Resonance of a Tangle is a process driven and experiential painting project. Through material experimentation and improvisation, this project gives agency to the lived experience accumulated within my body. In doing so, I seek to investigate the potential of painting to be imbued with an agency of its own and ultimately, for agency to be transferred to the experience of the viewer.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The Resonance of a Tangle employs material experimentation to explore an expanded notion of painting. Through a process of improvisation, this project grants agency to the lived experience accumulated within my body. In doing so, I seek to transfer agency to the painting itself and ultimately to the experience of the viewer.

This Masters research draws on the writing of German art critic and theorist Isabelle Graw to investigate the expanded notion of painting. Using Graw's definitions for 'indexicality' (Graw 2014, 68) and 'vitalist projections' (Graw 2016, 79) I explore my response to Sonia Delaunay's 1914 painting *Electric Prisms*. This experience has propelled my research into the potential for painting to engage the experience of the viewer beyond the physical presence of the work itself.

French philosopher Alain Badiou writes that the 'real potential' of creative practice is the ability to reference an essence that exists beyond the physical presence of the work (Badiou and Tusa 2019, 45). In discussing poetry Badiou identifies this phenomenon as the 'unsaid', explaining that it is an essence that remains 'fugitive' to the words written on the page (Badiou and Tusa 2019, 44). British artist and writer Rebecca Fortnum argues that an artist seeks in their work something that is 'unknown' to them suggesting that this too is an essence that cannot be articulated (Fortnum 2013).

Improvisation and material experimentation have become integral to my practice and have moved my work into realms of the performative or experiential. *The Resonance of a Tangle* is influenced by the history and potential of painting as a vast idiomatic practice, it takes its cues from Canadian-American artist Jessica Stockholder, German artist Ulla von Brandenburg and American artists Ann Hamilton and Robert Morris.

OBJECTIVES

- Experiment with methods of tearing, folding and draping to explore the expanded potential of painting practice.
- Experiment with painting methods and materials to investigate the ways in which a painting can be imbued with the activity of the artist.
- Cultivate a process for improvisation to explore the potential for a painting to develop its own agency.
- Explore notions of the performative or experiential to investigate the capacity for painting to offer agency to the viewer experience.
- Experiment with reforming and reconfiguring a painting to explore the various ways a painting can hold a 'fugitive vitality' in its presence.

RATIONALE

The Resonance of a Tangle explores an expanded notion of painting by employing methods of material experimentation. This project utilises a process of improvisation to give agency to the lived experiences accumulated within my body. *The Resonance of a Tangle* seeks to investigate the transference of agency; from the artist to the painting itself and ultimately to the experience of the viewer.

Painting, Graw states, can no longer be defined as a picture on canvas (Graw 2014, 65). Graw offers instead, an expanded notion of painting that is “a production of signs that is experienced as highly personalised” (ibid, 65). Painting, therefore, becomes idiomatic in that it is identified by a series of signs that are associated with a painting practice. Importantly, Graw highlights that these signs must be ‘experienced as highly personalised’ meaning that there is a trace of the artist recognisable within the work. Graw defines this as ‘indexicality’ as there is a discernible physical connection between the painting and the artist (Graw 2014, 68). This is echoed in Badiou’s concept of the ‘immanent exception’ as being that which eludes immanent physicality but is nonetheless intensely present (Badiou and Tusa 2019, 45).

The strongest example I have of experiencing the ‘indexical signs’ of a painting happened when I saw a reproduction of Sonia Delaunay’s *Electric Prisms*. Delaunay had painted this piece in 1914 after witnessing newly installed electric lamp posts on an evening in Paris (Collings 2014). It was 2017 when I saw this picture and I could recognise, even in reproduction, the movement of Delaunay’s hand through the composition. But there was more than just the trace of the artist in that picture, I felt like Delaunay’s painting was speaking to me. At the time I had a newborn and the world seemed to have taken a dramatic turn for the worse in the six months prior to her birth (Laing 2020). I would drive to get her to sleep and increasingly found myself exploring the new wind farms that had been built around the edges of Ballaarat where I live. Looking at *Electric Prisms* I saw an image from the past that also encapsulated the present – I could see the connection between the lamp posts and the wind turbines, I could see the connection between the uncertainties of 1914 and 2017 – and beyond this I could see continuation, a future. Delaunay’s painting had a life of its own and it was speaking to me.

Graw has defined this phenomenon where a viewer experiences the agency of a painting as a ‘vitalist projection’ (Graw 2016, 79). According to Graw the reason a viewer can project vitality onto painting is specifically because of its indexicality – because it carries a

trace of the artist. In discussing poetry, Badiou explains the 'real potential' of a poem is to say what is 'unsaid' – it is not what is recorded on the page, it is an essence that remains 'fugitive' (Badiou and Tusa 2019, 44). I consider the paintings that I connect to, to have a fugitive vitality and it is *this* that I seek to achieve in my own.

Fortnum writes that “artists want to encounter, in their work, something that does not feel known to them” (Fortnum 2013, 70) suggesting that engagement with the 'unknown' is a process that must be prepared for. I encounter this in my own work when I don't overthink the outcome – for me, engaging with the 'unknown' means waiting for a response I *feel* and not think. Throughout the Masters Program I have cultivated a process of improvisation, embracing all the 'unknowns' and uncertainties that entails. Fortnum quotes Painter Beth Harland who explains “Foucault calls it 'working at the edge of an unthought, slowly building a language in which to think it'” (Fortnum 2013, 72).

Canvas is a malleable cloth. Painters learn how to manipulate canvas and traditionally put it under strain by stretching it over stretcher bars. However, if I'm improvising I find I want to move with the canvas; I want to fold, to drape, to roll, I want to gather it up, to twist it, to tangle in it. In my early experimentations I used primed canvas with acrylic paint, the application of these polymers makes the canvas rigid and angular. Dye allows the canvas to retain its malleability while providing a rich and vibrant colour. I paint, by hand, large rolls of canvas which I then tear into narrower strips that can be easily transported. Once onsite, I use these coloured canvas strips in place of a brushstroke, I use my whole body to create a composition.

The Resonance of a Tangle is influenced by the history and potential of painting as a vast idiomatic practice. In doing so the work moves into realms of the performative or experiential. I consider the expanded picture-making of Jessica Stockholder, the performative canvas installations of Ulla von Brandenburg, the experiential textile installations of Ann Hamilton and the embodied minimalist sculptures of Robert Morris. German art historian and curator Dorothea von Hantelmann identifies performative art as that concerned “with an artwork's effects on the viewer and with the situation in which it takes place” (Hantelmann 2014). Hantelmann suggests 'experiential turn' replace 'performative' as it is the experience of the viewer that is the subject – not a performance. Robert Morris is quoted as saying “I want to provide a situation where people can become more aware of themselves and their own experience rather than more aware of some version of my experience” (Hantelmann 2014).

My work is influenced by Morris in construction and execution, though there is a finality in his minimal soft sculptures that *The Resonance of a Tangle* purposefully evades. This

project cascades in complex compositions of colour, its edges remain raw and frayed, it reforms and reconfigures, it resists being fixed. I am concerned with the encounter of the viewer, but instead of the absence characterised by minimalism (Hantelmann 2014), my work is imbued with a vital yet fugitive presence.

Through the research and experimentation I've conducted during the Masters Program, I have arrived at improvisation as a catalyst for agency. We are living in an era of rising global fascism, unchecked capitalism and unmitigated climate collapse all while riding the final waves of a pandemic (Laing 2021, 309). My body, like all bodies, is marinating in the tangle of this uncertain time. Despite this, when I engage in a process of improvisation, I find something vital – an abundance I did not think I knew.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can methods of material experimentation explore an expanded notion of painting practice?

Can a process of improvisation imbue a painting with agency and in turn offer agency to the experience of the viewer?

METHODOLOGY REPORT

The Tree Series 2021

My process for making *The Tree Series* was the same as I had followed for my previous exhibitions, a series of small studies on paper followed by paintings developed out of those studies. The Tree Series is eight studies of acrylic on paper, 29x21cm and four paintings of acrylic on canvas, 37x27cm.

I had come to the Masters Program with a practice that involved reimagining the wind farms that surround my home in Ballarat, as contemporary interpretations of Sonia Delaunay's *Electric Prisms* from 1914. Delaunay's series of paintings from this period are famously inspired by the newly installed electric lamp posts in Paris (Collings 2014). I saw a synchronicity between the new electrical technology of 1914 and that of 2017, I saw the ways in which mass produced electricity had led to the crisis that dictated the need for wind turbines a century later, but also I could see the promise of the future that was embodied in the structure of both technologies. I could also sense a historical and social synchronicity between 1914 and 2017; for Delaunay by the end of that decade, Western Europe had plunged into the First World War. In 2017, prospects for global peace seemed grim – and still do.

Through the research and development of my previous body of work, I had come to believe a deeper philosophical dimension existed to Sonia Delaunay's works – more so than the rigid, scientifically driven theories that her husband Robert espoused.[1] As Pascal Rousseau writes;

“Sonia, who was able to switch from one language to another with the utmost ease and was conscious of the limits of language's influence on thought, was to find in colour an authentic substitute for the expressive deficiencies of language.” (Rousseau 2014)

I had come to believe that Sonia Delaunay's work was behaving as a key to unlocking some embedded knowledge in my brain/body. Delaunay's work was a signal, transmitting something vital about living on the precipice of annihilation and continuance.

Hilma af Klint's exhibition, *The Secret Paintings* was about to open at the Art Gallery of NSW and there was a renewed interest in early abstraction by women artists, and for the first time an overt emphasis on the 'spiritual' in art.[2] I began the Masters Program wondering if other women artists, early modern abstractionists, were also leaving signals



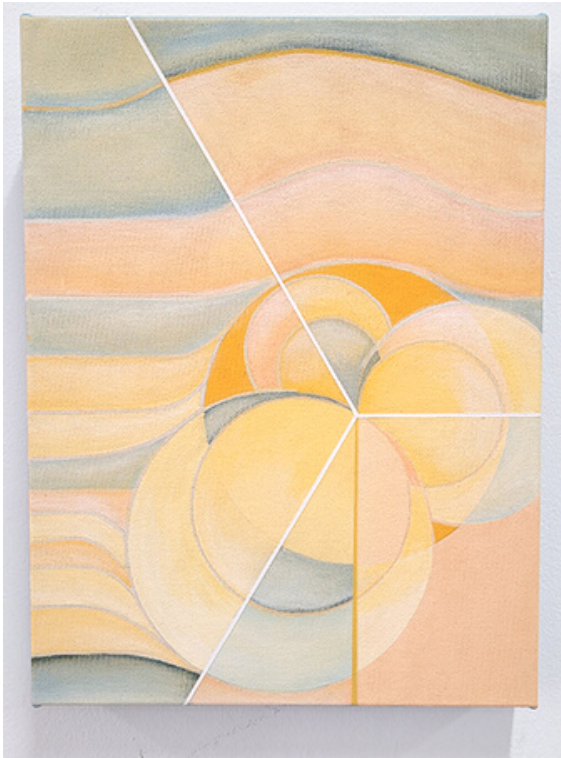
Mairin Briody *The Tree Series (Studies 1-8)*, 2021 Acrylic on paper, 29 x 21cm



Mairin Briody *The Tree Series 1*, 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 37 x 27cm



Mairin Briody *The Tree Series 2*, 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 37 x 27cm



Mairin Briody *The Tree Series 3*, 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 37 x 27cm



Mairin Briody *The Tree Series 4*, 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 37 x 27cm

in their work? Would I be able to pick up on any philosophical/spiritual messages? Could I translate them for a contemporary audience? I thought I'd begin with Agnes Martin since her works, like Delaunay's, seem to me to emit energy and movement.

I muted my colour palette and simplified my forms to achieve something of the 'shimmer' that is often attributed to Martin's paintings. In my group critique it was mentioned that everything I'd said to back up my work, wasn't evident in the work itself. It was clear that what I was trying to do wasn't working.

I had read an essay by Michael Newman called 'Phenomenology and Materiality in Agnes Martin' through which I came to visualise Martin's grid paintings as a strict structure, perhaps even a world order (Martin, Anastas, et al. 2011). Despite the fact that Martin refused to connect her work to her experience of the world – particularly her experience of mental illness – I began to wonder if this grid was how she managed to survive the world. Imposing order where there often is none.

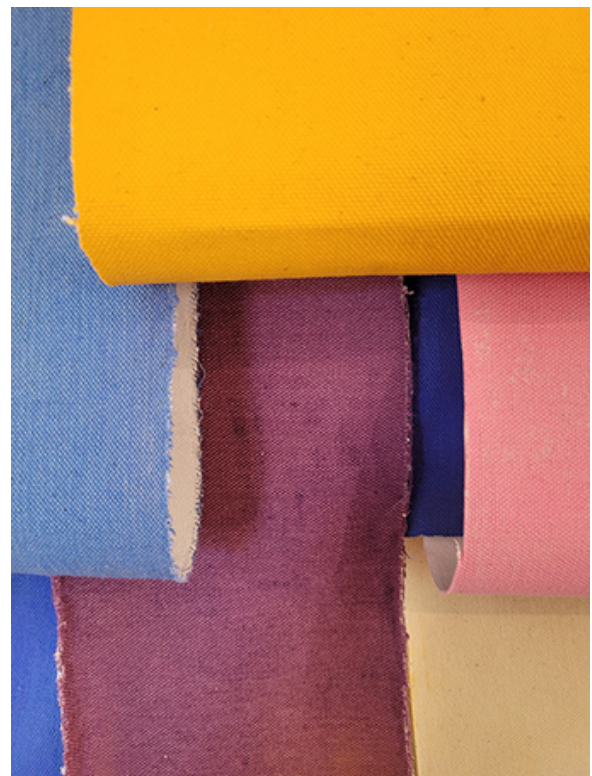
I wondered, how I experience and survive this world? I suddenly saw my own works as attempting to impose a structure. Where I had intended to emit energy and movement, I had in fact restricted it. By trying to connect to the experience of another artist, I had invalidated my own.

Despite the change of its look, it still remains true to itself 2021

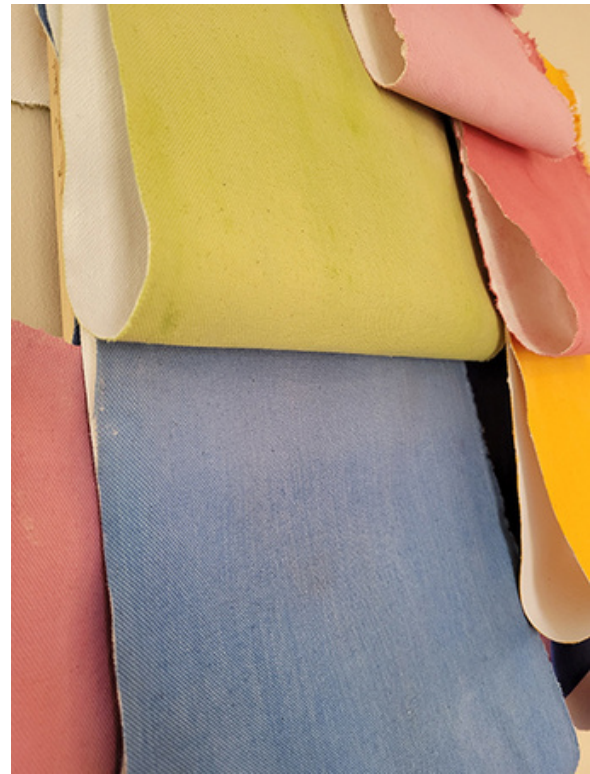
When I was studying Phenomenology in my undergraduate degree, I recall imagining a weave; the warp of understanding and the weft of interpretation. Together they weave together and form the fabric by which we experience the world. After *The Tree Series* I made a concerted effort to try to be authentic in what I was feeling about the world and my place in it. Which led to a bit of a crisis.

Through my work, I had been trying to emit energy and movement, calmness, optimism, resonance. But that was not what I was feeling. What I was feeling was something else. Something I couldn't describe. And I didn't know how to express that. So I sat in my studio and looked at my materials. I love the texture of canvas, the weight of it, the way it folds, how it tears, the sounds it makes, how I can manipulate it and stretch it.

I thought of a scene from the film *Chungking Express* where Tony Leung's character talks to his belongings as if housemates that he has a conscious relationship with (Kar-Wai 1994). The empathy he shows a tea towel! I looked at my canvas and thought about the way I relate to it, perhaps it is the fabric by which I experience the world? Perhaps I ask too much of it, forcing it around the shape of a stretcher bar, shrinking it, imbuing it with meaning it has no way of understanding or communicating itself.



Mairin Briody *Despite the change of its look, it still remains true to itself, 2021* (detail shots)



Mairin Briody *Despite the change of its look, it still remains true to itself*, 2021 (detail shots)

Despite the change of its look, it still remains true to itself is a composition of canvas offcuts that I've washed in acrylic colour and draped around a stretcher bar. I made this piece as an experiment and I didn't present it to group critique, but I did show it to my supervisor explaining that I only intended it as an experiment. My supervisor encouraged me not to discard it so quickly. And I'm glad I didn't, because there is something in it that I connect to.

This was one year into the pandemic, the climate crisis loomed large as it has for many years now, inaction by the government is maddening and at the time Brittany Higgins' case was just starting to hit the news. I wrote in my Methodology Report about this work;

"I've worked hard to gloss over the chaos, to impose an orderly resonance. But here I've [allowed myself] to just respond to the materials and go with the forms and shapes they naturally make. And in actuality, this doesn't look chaotic to me, it looks calm and kind and empathetic. Right now the world feels like it is quietly dismantling and maybe rather than try to change that, rather than make art try to change that, art can just be a witness to the unravelling - it could be empathetic to the weariness and the grief." (Briody 2021)



Mairin Briody *Despite the change of its look, it still remains true to itself*, 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 110 x 65 x 10cm

The immense entanglement of everything 2021

I came into this Masters Program believing that art should be didactic. In the book *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint*, author Maggie Nelson warns against the 'orthopaedic aesthetic' that assumes there is something wrong with the world that requires artistic intervention in order to correct (Nelson 2021). Instead Nelson invokes the philosopher Jacques Ranciere; "an art is emancipated and emancipating when ... it stops *wanting* to emancipate us" (Nelson 2021).

My work *Despite the change of its look, it still remains true to itself* is, in retrospect, the moment in my development when I liberated my work from this didactic role. Instead, I began to experiment with materiality as an element in and of itself. My aim became less about moralising to an imagined audience and more about communicating a feeling I was having trouble identifying.

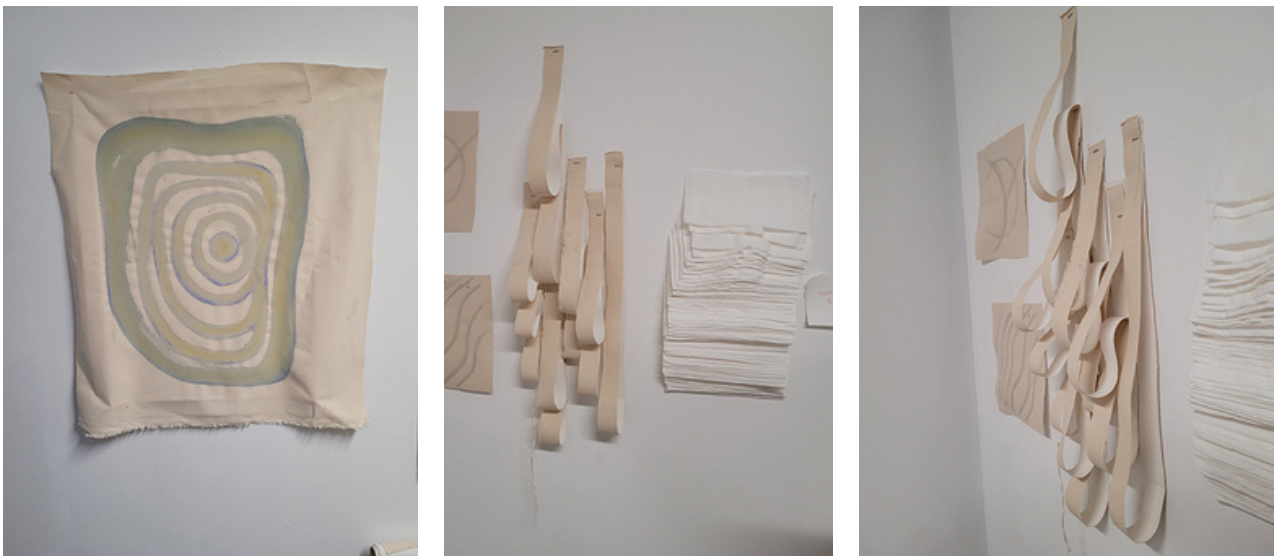
At the time I felt entirely lost and in conversation with another student, I admitted that my mind was in a mess and I didn't know what I was doing. That student was a couple of semesters ahead of me and advised that despite how I was feeling I should just keep making work through it. Even if I don't like it or it doesn't make sense.

The immense entanglement of everything came out of this period of feeling lost. I was looking at an early Ann Hamilton piece (*still life*) 1988/1991 in which Hamilton has stacked numerous, folded white shirts on a wooden table. The shirts, in their static accumulation, create a wave of movement across the surface of the table. Hamilton writes; "Tables are my blank paper, my landscape, my figure, a plane that implies the solitary figure and all that is social ..." (Hamilton n.d.). It's perhaps a weird thing to say about a table, but understandable. And if I'm honest, I think I have a similar affinity for canvas that is perhaps weirder and less understandable. To my mind, canvas is the weave of my interpretation and understanding of the world, how I envision the connectedness of experience and interaction. I wondered if canvas, arranged statically, could embody a similar energy and movement to Hamilton's shirts?

I started cutting strips of canvas and by stapling them to the wall, I discovered they made a falling structure that I could feel resonate in my body; my body moved instinctually with the fall of the canvas. At the time I wrote;

"I've come to believe I'm being driven by my anxiety and that that formlessness is what I'm trying to recreate. I have a need to understand; to make sense of things that maybe aren't sense-able - at least not to me. It's like an exploration of understanding, or the limits

thereof, through art. It's been suggested to me that I need to focus on one or two issues, not the *whole* of it all. But living right now is to experience everything, all the time. It's confusing and panicky. This is exacerbated by parenthood, but I'm terrified of what's coming. Not necessarily because of what might happen to me personally, but because of the knowledge that this society I'm a part of probably won't do the things that are morally or ethically right when we face the big problems we know are racing toward us. And I feel like the population is being prepared for that and it's creating a cognitive dissonance in me. How can I not address the whole mess of it all?" (Briody 2021)



Studio stills 2021

Funny Weather: Art in an Emergency is a series of reviews, interviews and stories by Olivia Laing that trace a modern history of artists that have directly addressed emergencies in their lifetimes. In discussion with Joseph Keckler, Laing remarks;

“Part of why I think it’s absurd to say that art can’t change anything is that I don’t think there’s a political realm that’s truly separate from the cultural realm or the emotional realm or the social realm. Which is what I was trying to get at with *Crudo*, the immense entanglement of everything.” (Laing 2020)



Studio stills 2021



Studio stills 2021

The immense entanglement of everything is a representation of the mess in my head and the mess that I experience of the world. There are no defined junctures in the tangle of canvas strips - except for the strips themselves. I improvised this composition by following the structures and forms my body resonated with. It is a work consciously liberated from the 'orthopaedic aesthetic' and yet it is intrinsically entwined by simply being in the world.

The group critique saw this piece as a figure and spent some time trying to categorise it as installation, sculpture, or painting. There were some cultural perceptions that I hadn't seen, one which was quite violent – being that they saw a figure hanging from the ceiling.

To me, this piece is a painting, it is an improvised gradation of colour in three dimensions. The formlessness of it appeals to me and I like that it defies categorisation. I have allowed this piece to evolve through material experimentation. *The immense entanglement of everything* is a result of feeling my way through.



Mairin Briody *The immense entanglement of everything* 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 250 x 50 x 50cm



Mairin Briody *The immense entanglement of everything* 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 250 x 50 x 50cm

Drench 2021

In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* Donna Haraway repeatedly implores the reader to cultivate a 'response-ability' within the realities of living and dying on a damaged earth (Haraway 2016). Haraway argues we will only be able to face the ecological urgency of this time if we train ourselves to be able to respond; that means not turning away from the trouble but staying-with, making-with, becoming-with (Haraway 2016). Cultivating 'response-ability' means getting comfortable with being uncomfortable; getting comfortable with the unpredictable; getting comfortable at the limits of my experience, language and understanding. For me, response-ability is a bodily response, it is a surrender of knowledge for feeling.

How I feel is not an easy question for me to answer. My emotional responses have been dysregulated by trauma. My recent sense of bodily autonomy has been shaped by pregnancy, childbirth, childbirth recovery and breastfeeding. I am constantly uncomfortable, I'm terrified of the unpredictable. I live in regional Victoria, a lot of my time is spent in travel to and from campus. Transporting artwork is a major logistical consideration and I'm a parent so time management is high on my list of concerns; I want to be present at home. I must be organised and ordered.

Drench is a composition of acrylic painted canvas strips, stapled in layers to a wall and allowed to drape, fall and uncurl to the ground. The process by which I created this piece was an experiment. I had packed up the materials from *The immense entanglement of everything* into a suitcase so I could transport them easily by train into campus. In discussions with my supervisor, I had decided to use my studio space as the container for my work, but beyond that I had no plan. On the train I vaguely listened to the audiobook for *Staying with the Trouble* and when I arrived at my studio I put on music – a technique I have used for a long time to distract the inner critic in my brain – and I allowed myself to feel my way into composing *Drench*.

It was improvisation with constraints. In this way I'm cultivating my response-ability within boundaries. By re-using materials I am reforming and reconfiguring the work. It resists becoming fixed and can respond to infinite spaces and restrictions therein. The work is response-able.

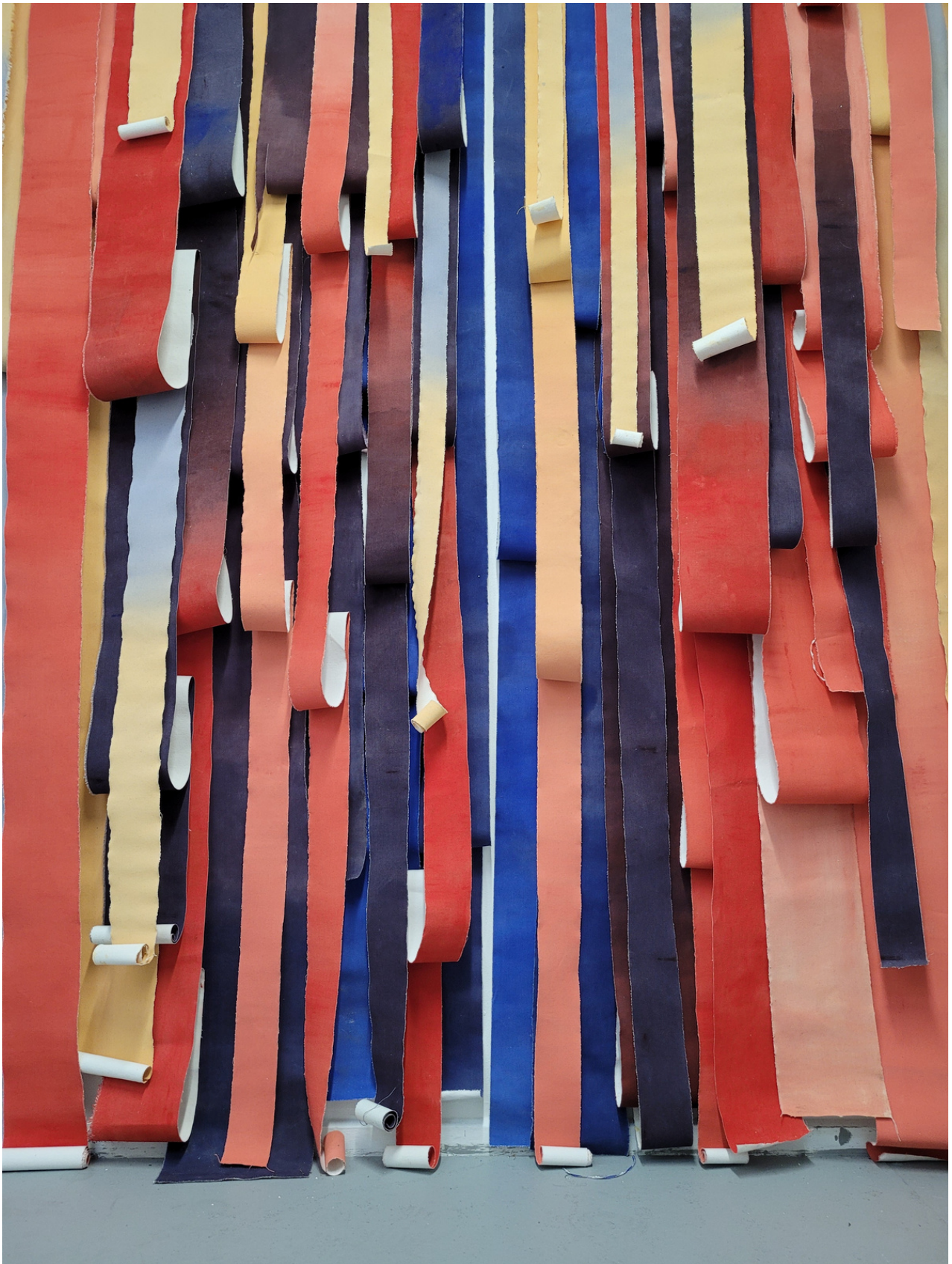
The group critique for this piece was online and at the beginning of a long lockdown due to COVID 19 that prevented me from going back to studio on campus for the rest of semester. Unfortunately, this meant I didn't ever get feedback on it in person. However, many people remarked that they wanted to walk into the artwork, to have it brush against

them. There was a lot of discussion about the title, and perhaps it was too emotive, too prescriptive. I think that is a correct assessment though I still like the title.

I thought of the curtain installations of Ulla Von Brandenburg; the works expand and contract the gallery space, creating voids, glimpses and sections that force the viewer to bend and rise with the fabric as they move. In discussing these works and my 'suitcase as artwork capsule' method, my supervisor suggested I look at the concept of 'worlding' and how this could develop the work further.



Mairin Briody *Drench* 2021 (details)
Acrylic on canvas, 270 x 210cm



Mairin Briody *Drench* 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 270 x 210cm

Pulling together. Falling apart (both can be true) 2022

Rebecca Fortnum explains that 'Artists want to encounter, in their final work, something that does not feel known to them' (Fortnum 2013). I don't feel like I really understand what the works I've been making are about, but I know they feel right. I know exactly when they are done.

Pulling together, Falling apart (both can be true) was developed over a series of iterations all composed within the confines of my studio on campus. For this work I sourced unprimed canvas and prepared it by painting it with dye in a soaking or staining technique. The dye allows the unprimed canvas to maintain its suppleness and movement. The consistency of the dye allows pigments to blend naturally or for me to create seamless gradations. There are inconsistencies however, with splashing, bleeding and reactivating remnant pigments on the surfaces the canvas is being painted on. I like these accidents. They aren't immediately distinguishable in the final compositions, but if a viewer looks closely, they'll find them. I like to think of it as a reward for spending time with the work.



Mairin Briody *iteration 1* 2022
Dye on canvas, 200 x 100cm

I don't like to over-think or over-intellectualise my colour selection. Although I have read and have knowledge about colour theory, I find my relationship to colour too personal to reduce it to theory. I dream in colour, I associate colour to all manner of abstract concepts, colour combinations I encounter in the world will stop me in my tracks, the gallery on my phone is full of colours that I've seen that make me feel ... something. Ali Smith quotes Sonia Delaunay;

“...it's just that I see colour contrasts everywhere in life [...] I do it all for the fun of it [...] Colour excites me. It's not that I'm thinking about what I'm doing. These things come from inside, gut-level.” (Smith 2015)

However, the selection of colours and painting is part of my preparation. It is only once onsite that I begin to properly consider the installation. If I have a bodily response to the colours in preparation, I will respond to them when it comes to installation. I use my canvas strips as I would a brushstroke. I recognize when I need a thinner stroke and tear the canvas down smaller. It is a very physical process in which I notice I move in empathy with the canvas, rolling, folding, reaching, tumbling (Briody 2021).



Mairin Briody *iteration 2* 2022
Dye on canvas, 270 x 200cm



Mairin Briody *Pulling together. Falling apart (both can be true)* details

Through the Masters Program, it has become clear that I make my best work when I can quiet my brain and let my body speak. Fortnum suggests the unpredictability of ‘not knowing’ is strategically employed by artists and is therefore a conscious decision, quoting Mike Jones “... the expertise of the procedure is located in the balance between the process of planning and intuitive action” (Fortnum 2013, 76). I prefer the term ‘improvised’ over ‘intuitive’; it is a conscious decision I make to distract my brain and engage with my body and feel my through a composition. I am actively training myself to recognize my responses and to trust my ability to intrinsically know what happens next. Perhaps this is what Haraway means by cultivating a ‘response-ability’?

In the final composition of *Pulling together. Falling apart (both can be true)* I painted the walls and included two small stretched paintings. My studio on campus is an approximately 3m cube, with white walls, a grey floor and steel mesh across the ceiling. As the composition was coming together, I had the sense that the structure of the walls and floor needed to be addressed, ignoring them like the white walls of a conventional gallery space didn’t feel right. Jessica Stockholder explains that their installations are “woven into the circumstance in which it is in” (Stockholder 2017). In *Pulling together, Falling apart* I felt the work needed to spill across the walls and the floor, it needed to impose itself on its ‘circumstance’, on the restrictions of the space.

In my Methodology report for this work I wrote;

Pulling together, Falling apart (both can be true) is an enormous tangle of vibrantly coloured canvas cascading from the corner onto the floor, up into the ceiling and folding back in on itself. All this chaos is contained within painted circles that cycle across the walls and floor. The cycle is echoed in two stretched canvases, one within and one without the installation.

I invited the group critique to enter the space and sit on and among the canvas. I felt like the conversation flowed quite easily, across vast themes – from playgrounds to psychedelia to shadows. I enjoyed watching people play with pieces of the installation, talking while holding strands. I found it quite affirming that people seemed to be so comfortable in the space. (Briody 2022)

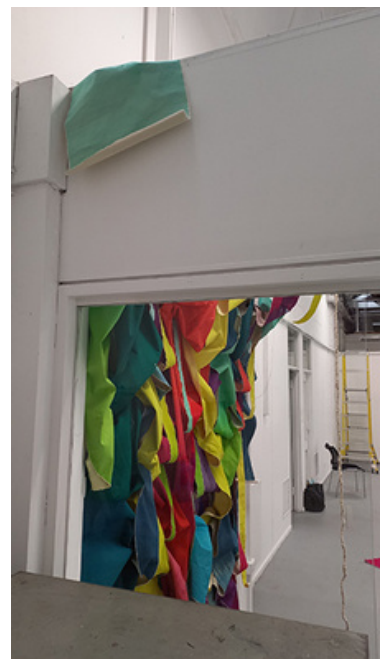


Mairin Briody *Pulling together. Falling apart (both can be true)* 2022
Acrylic and dye on canvas, 270 x 300 x 300cm

Resist. Restrain. 2022

I decided to try another experiment for my first group critique for Studio 4, I had my materials all prepared but I wanted to install in the big presentation area of the Gossard Building where our critiques typically take place. We can install in this space from 1.30pm the day before our presentation, I decided to use this as an opportunity to see what would happen installing in such a large area with limited time. Working with the process I have developed over the course of the Masters Program, I was interested to see if working in a public space would inhibit my response-ability. It didn't.

I was surprised by the finished work. I composed the piece into a corner of the room that is often unused – this was unplanned. I think this space is unused because it has a lot going on in it for a typical 'white cube' gallery space; a bulkhead, a window, a table, light switches. Despite the 'whiteness' of it all, it remains structurally complex. I saw these elements as creating interesting limits and tensions, so I decided to work with and within them. However, one part of the composition is discernable as a figure, I didn't see that until I had finished and stood back to take the whole in. In feedback, some members of the group suggested it had personality. Many commented on movement and having an urge to interact with it.



Mairin Briody *Resist. Restrain. 2022* (details)

In an interview with Art Review, painter Tala Madani remarks, “I’m mostly interested in ... art that excavates from the psyche, not the frontal lobe, not the intellectual, not the speakable, but the unspeakable” (Simonini 2021). I think this sentiment resonates with Fortnum’s ‘not knowing’; actively seeking the ‘unspeakable’ through the creative process. I purposefully engage with the unspeakable through improvisation in the hope that I may capture a fleeting moment of unknown bodily expression.

I’m left here meditating on the significance of limits and constraints in my work and a quote from Ali Smith on Sonia Delaunay;

Be pinned down and defined? Outlined? Fixed? Told we’re one thing rather than another? The fabric of things, and of us, is much richer via the wide-open, simultaneously winking eye of Sonia Delaunay. (Smith 2015)



Mairin Briody *Resist. Restrain.* 2022 (details)



Mairin Briody *Resist. Restrain.* 2022
Dye on canvas, approx. 350 x 350 x 350cm

The Resonance of a Tangle 2022

The installation is the work, it is the event of the making the art. I grant myself agency through improvisation to tell the stories my body wants to tell – even if I don't necessarily know what they are. At the beginning of 2022 I started trauma therapy, the anxiety and depression I have suffered from for approximately twenty years was re-diagnosed as post traumatic stress disorder upon the sudden recognition that my most debilitating symptoms only appeared after a sexual assault I'd experienced in the early 2000s.

One of the things I now understand about my trauma is that it robbed me of my agency (Van der Kolk 2014). My physical and emotional responses became so dysregulated at times that I couldn't sit at a table of more than four people and maintain control of my breath let alone my voice. Over the course of the past two decades, a rage has built in me that when triggered I cannot control, its sole purpose appears to be to demonstrate that I am a damaging person and everyone is better off without me. This is not true I know that, and my PTSD will not succeed in convincing me, but what it has convinced me of is that I cannot trust myself.



Mairin Briody *The Resonance of a Tangle 2022* (install stills)

Trauma has kept me stuck in a moment where I lost my ability to speak for and defend myself, and my body has been desperately trying to protect me from that moment ever since. It's important to state here that art is not therapy for me, seeing my psychologist is my therapy. What art does – in making it and in encounter with it as a viewer – is remind me that there is more to my lived experience than just that moment. I am a rape survivor, but that is not all I am.

Art is a tool for communication, for me painting is a cycle between 'indexicality' (Graw 2014, 68) and 'vitalist projections' (Graw 2016, 79); I speak to the painting, the painting speaks to me, and hopefully somewhere down the line – it speaks to someone else. As I have learned more about my trauma and trauma generally, I've come to recognise a universality to it. American philosopher Susan Buck-Morss wrote that the very experience of living in a modern urban world is traumatic for the body (Buck-Morss 1992). Trauma is acted out in myriad circumstances everyday but for me it is most evident in the prevailing response to a changing climate (Nelson 2021). We have – en masse – forgotten we have agency in this world and are seemingly resigned to it.

In my last group critique for the Masters Program I presented an iteration of the work that clung to and grew out of the line of conduit that runs vertically through the main wall of the Gossard presentation space. I used the same improvisation processes I have refined over the past year and organised to have two days installation to give me more time. In feedback students discussed the way the work created thresholds and barriers, it made them aware of the conventions and restrictions of viewing art. One student commented that the work appeared to be seeping across the wall and could imagine it extending across the floor, another wondered if the work was cascading down or crawling up. There were a couple of students that felt they were being absorbed by the piece. Some other words that were mentioned were 'spectacle', 'excess' and 'surplus'.

Badiou writes "the limit is a composition, not an intervention" (Badiou and Tusa 2019, 123) it is an opportunity, not an end. This doesn't mean to say that there is a limitlessness where we once perceived a limit; it means that that limit, that end, that constraint in fact presents a multiplicity of options. *The Resonance of a Tangle* defies limits, its edges remain raw and frayed, it reforms and reconfigures, it resists being fixed. Trauma robbed me of my agency, improvisation gives it back. Through my work I am reminded that I am more; 'spectacle', 'excess', 'surplus'. To paraphrase the American poet Walt Whitman "I am large, I contain multitudes" (Whitman 2000).

Robert Morris' 1967 sculpture *Untitled (Tangle)* is defined by its minimalist restraint, *The Resonance of a Tangle* is informed by Morris but it is an evolution away from minimalism

and restraint. It is 'fugitive'. At the end of the group critique, one student came to talk to me privately and asked if I was bothered by a student touching and lifting the canvas of the work. I told them no, because even though I make it, it's not mine. The painting has its own agency, how other people engage with it is not my concern – though I am always glad when they do.

And here I am back to Sonia Delaunay who wrote in her diary on 13 August 1904;

... we are monkeys who appropriate the customs of those who hold power in the countries we live off. To have one's own kingdom is foolishness – we must not be isolated. People should aim to unite, to amalgamate, they should not isolate themselves. (Rousseau 2014, 20)



Mairin Briody *The Resonance of a Tangle* 2022
Acrylic and dye on canvas, 350 x 300 x 250cm



Mairin Briody *The Resonance of a Tangle* 2022
Acrylic and dye on canvas, 350 x 300 x 250cm

END NOTES

[1] Robert Delaunay was interested in representing the mechanics of vision and vehemently rejected any mention of further interpretations. (Hughes, *Resisting Abstraction: Robert Delaunay and Vision in the Face of Modernism* 2014)

[2] Tracy Lock - a talk for AGSA 2021 exhibition *Clarice Beckett: The Present Moment* - mentioned the 'S' word, suggesting the term 'spiritual' had been a dirty word within the art industry until recently. <https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/whats-on/event-calendar/tuesday-talks-tracey-lock-discusses-how-clarice-beckett-aspired-to-paint-the-illusion-of-reality/>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Badiou, Alain, and Giovanbattista Tusa. 2019. *The End: A Conversation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Barrett, Frances. 2022. *Meatus*. ACCA, Melbourne.

Beech, Dave. 2009. *Beauty*. London: Whitechapel.

Benjamin, Walter. 1968. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, by Hannah Arendt, 217-252. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Benjamin, Walter. 1968. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, by Hannah Arendt, 253-264. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Bird, Michael S. 2005. *Sandra Blow*. Aldershot, England: Lund Humphries.

Bishop, Claire. 2005. *Installation Art: A Critical History*. London: Tate Publishing.

Bois, Yve-Alain. 1996. "To Introduce a User's Guide." *October*, Autumn: 21-37.

Bois, Yves-Alain, and Rosalind E. Krauss. 1997. *Formless: A User's Guide*. New York: Zone Books.

Briody, Mairin. 2022. *Combined Methodolgy Report S1 2022*. Melbourne: RMIT.

Briody, Mairin. 2021. *Combined Methodology Report S1 2021*. Melbourne: RMIT.

Buck-Morss, Susan. 1992. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." *October*, 3-41.

Clark, Ralph. 1787-1792. "Ralph Clark - Journal kept on the Friendship during a voyage to Botany Bay and Norfolk Island; and on the Gorgon returning to England, 9 March 1787 - 31 December 1787, 1 January 1788 - 10 March 1788, 15 February 1790 - 2 January 1791, 25 January 1791 - 17." State Library of NSW. Accessed June 22, 2022. <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/collection-items/ralph-clark-journal-kept-friendship-during-voyage-botany-bay-and-norfolk-island-and>.

Coleman, Claire G. 2021. *Lies, Damned Lies: A personal exploration into the impact of colonisation*. Sydney: Ultimo Press.

2014. *The Rules of Abstraction*. Directed by Graham Strong. Performed by Matthew Collings.

2021. *Can't Get You Out of My Head*. Directed by Adam Curtis.

Das, Jareh. 2021. "Making and Destroying Myths: Precious Okoyomon Interviewed by Jareh Das." *Bomb Magazine*. 14 April. Accessed June 22, 2022. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/making-and-destroying-myths-precious-okoyomon-interviewed/>.

- Debord, Guy. 1994. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books.
- . 1994. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books.
- Fisher, Jennifer, and Jim Drobnick. 2019. "Attending to Presence: An Interview with Ann Hamilton." *RACAR* 144-164.
- Fortnum, Rebecca. 2013. "Creative Accounting: Not Knowing in Talking and Making." In *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think*, 70-87.
- Gadsby, Hannah. 2018. *Nanette*. Performed by Hannah Gadsby.
- Gamble, Ione. 2022. *Poor Little Sick Girls: A Love Letter to Unacceptable Women*. London: Dialogue Books.
2015. *The Economy of Painting: Notes on the Vitality of a Success Medium*. Performed by Isabelle Graw. Accessed June 22, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JDthDEcmAs>.
- Graw, Isabelle. 2016. "The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy." In *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition*, by Isabelle Graw, 79-103. Berlin: Sternberg Press
- Graw, Isabelle. 2014. "The Value of Painting: Notes on Unspecificity, Indexicality and Highly Valuable Quasi-Persons." In *Joy Forever: The Political Economy of Social Creativity*, by Michal Kozłowski, Agnieszka Kurant, Jan Sowa, Krystian Szadkowski and Jakub Szreder, 65-75. London: MayFlyBooks.
- Graw, Isabelle, Niamh Dunphy, Brian Hanrahan, and Gerritt Jackson. 2018. *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Grosse, Katharina, and Ulrich Wilmes. 2011. *Katharina Grosse: eat, child, eat*. Berlin: Distanz.
- Grovier, Kelly. 2015. "An existential shudder from a pure white surface: Kelly Grovier on the art of Agnes Martin." *The Art Newspaper*. Accessed June 22, 2022. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2015/07/02/an-existential-shudder-from-a-pure-white-surface-kelly-grovier-on-the-art-of-agnes-martin>.
- Hallen, Cynthia L. 1997. "Cognitive Circuits: The Circumference of Dickinson's Lexicon." *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, Fall.
- Hamilton, Ann. n.d. *Ann Hamilton Studio*. Accessed September 1, 2022. <https://www.annhamiltonstudio.com/objects/stilllife.html>.
- Hantelmann, Dorothea von. 2014. "The Experiential Turn." *Walker Living Collections Catalogue*. Accessed Oct 17, 2022. <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn/>.
- Haraway, Donna J. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin, John Macquarie, and Edward S. Robinson. 1962. *Being and Time*. New York: Harper.
- Higgie, Jennifer. 2021. *The Mirror and The Palette; Rebellion, Revolution and Resilience: 500 years of Women's Self-Portraits*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

- Huber, Cecile. 2021. "Polymorph: Female Embodiment in Louise Bourgeois's Sculptures." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 49-61.
- Hughes, Gordon. 2007. "Resisting Abstraction: The Simultaneity of Robert delaunay's First Disk." *Art Bulletin*, June: 306-332.
- Hughes, Gordon. 2007. "Envisioning Abstraction: The Simultaneity of Robert Delaunay's First Disk." *The Art Bulletin* 2 (89): 306-332.
- . 2014. *Resisting Abstraction: Robert Delaunay and Vision in the Face of Modernism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kamp, Justin. 2021. "How Helen Frankenthaler's Colour-Soaked Canvases Won Over the Art Market." *Artsy*. 19 April. Accessed June 22, 2022. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-helen-frankenthalers-color-soaked-canvas-won-art-market>.
1994. *Chungking Express*. Directed by Wong Kar-Wai.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. 1995. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Laing, Olivia. 2018. *Crudo: Love in an Apocalypse*. New York: Picador.
- . 2021. *Everybody: A Book about Freedom*. London: Pan Macmillan.
- . 2020. *Funny Weather: Art in an Emergency*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- . 2021. "Group Think: Why Art Loves a Crowd." *The Guardian*. 23 May. Accessed June 22, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/may/23/group-think-why-art-loves-a-crowd-olivia-laing>.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. 1989. "Making Worlds." In *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, by Ursula K. Le Guin, 46-49. New York: Grove Press.
- Martin, Agnes, Frances Morris, and Tiffany Bell. 2015. *Agnes Martin*. New York: Tate Publishing.
- Martin, Agnes, Rhea Anastas, Lynne Cooke, Karen J. Kelly, and Barbara Schroder. 2011. *Agnes Martin*. New York: Dia Art Foundation.
- Matravers, Derek. 2013. "Intention and Interpretation: Louise Bourgeois's Maman." In *Introducing Philosophy of Art*, by Derek Matravers, 85-104. Routledge.
- Mayer, So. 2018. "Floccinaucinihilipilification." In *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture*, by Roxane Gay, 12. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1978. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Nelson, Maggie. 2021. *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint*. Toronto: McLelland & Stewart.
- Rousseau, Pascal. 2014. "'Voyelles': Sonia Delaunay and the universal language of colour hearing." In *Sonia Delaunay*, 70-87. London: Tate Enterprises Ltd.
- Russell, Legacy. 2020. *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. New York: Verso.
- Sillman, Amy. 2015. "Shit Happens: Notes on Awkwardness." *Frieze*. 10 November. Accessed June 22, 2022. <https://www.frieze.com/article/shit-happens>.

Simon, Joan. 2001. *Ann Hamilton*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Simonini, Ross. 2021. "The Artist is Irrelevant': Painter Tala Madani on Transgression, Nostalgia and Style." *Art Review*, 24 February.

Smith, Ali. 2015. "We Must Not Be Isolated." *Frieze*. 10 October. Accessed June 21, 2022. <https://www.frieze.com/article/we-must-not-be-isolated>.

2014. *Sonia Delaunay*. London: Tate Publishing.

Steyerl, Hito. 2017. *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*. New York: Verso.

2017. *The Surface as a Place of Imagination: Artist Jessica Stockholder*. Performed by Jessica Stockholder. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNmeTut96YQ>.

Stockholder, Jessica, Lynne Tillman, Barry Schwabsky, Lynne Cooke, and Germano Celant. 2018. *Jessica Stockholder*. New York: Phaidon.

2015. *Agnes Martin: 'Beauty is in Your Mind'*. Directed by TateShots. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/agnes-martin-1583/who-agnes-martin>.

2012. *Charline Von Heyl - 'I Want to Activate the Viewer'*. Directed by TateShots. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/charline-von-heyhl-15657/charline-von-heyhl-tate-liverpool>.

2017. *Judy Chicago: 'I'm an artist and a troublemaker'*. Directed by TateShots. Produced by Tate Shots. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/judy-chicago-20484/judy-chicago-im-artist-and-troublemaker>.

Van der Kolk, Bessel A. 2014. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Viking.

Von Brandenburg, Ulla, Stephan Berg, Iwona Blazwick, Maximilian Rauschenbach, and Lydia Yee. 2018. *Ulla Von Brandenburg: Sweets Quilts Sun Works*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Whitman, Walt. 2000. *Leaves of Grass*.

Zuvela, Danni. 2009. "A New Truth to Materials." *Artlink*.

