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MASTER OF FINE ARTS
RESEARCH PAPER

THRESHOLD

By

Marcelle Mansour

Painting

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

2014
This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney.
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And last but not least my appreciation goes to my beloved sons and daughters and beautiful grandchildren.
Dedication

To all who search for the splendor of light

To my sons and daughters, and grandchildren

To the future world generations

I dedicate this to you to give you a spiritual path, now and always

A way to be a proud citizen, a person who loves, who forgives, who heals

Through the Light that inhibits in you

To find a way to be enlightened always.

Marcelle Mansour
Every time I think of the work that I am doing in this project, I think of this photograph that I took in the Cross City Tunnel. The concept of being in a tunnel is not itself very mystical, it’s just that as the artist Bruce Nauman says, “The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truth” and I believe the light shining in this tunnel is a revelation of the truth which is a path itself.

Marcelle Mansour, 2012
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Abstract

Research Work

*Threshold* is the topic of my research. It aims to establish the authenticity and the validity of spirituality within contemporary political art where its purposive function via revealing the invisible truth and healing role is emphasised. The research draws upon the concept of phenomenology to understand the powerful relationship of our body in the world and space, and discusses its theoretical framework as relates to spirituality through the philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and other theorists’ analysis: Axel Madsen (1930 –2007), Michel Henry (1922–2002) Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Elizabeth Grosz; to see the ‘visible in the invisible’ – as in Vassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935). It examines the artworks of the contemporary artists who informed my studio work, Light and Space artists Robert Irwin and James Turrell and their conception of light perception as body lived experience which affects their viewers’ conscious in reshaping their reality through the perceiving mind as an incarnated body. As well as the spiritual and socio-political artists; Bill Viola and Joseph Beuys who ‘metamorphosing’ their viewers ‘inner life’ in order to re-think their worlds.

Creative Work

The Creative work consist of a series of identical vertical three-dimensional rectangular units, made in a modular ‘given’ way from pine timber, measuring 44x33x14cm, (based on the 'holy icons’), installed on a wall spaced at equal intervals. These units are filled with artificial lights. Light is the material of the work, and perception is the medium. The shifting colours of light create a dynamic movement and contemplative environment. The format is light, constructing a unique effective form which is paintings of changeable colourful light. As the light keeps moving and changing, viewers look into each unit in particular, and at the atmosphere in general, to perceive the presence of the invisible in the powerful light. This directed perception and embodied lived experience art becomes a reflexive act, more human, sensuous, rational, divine and mystical, making the body as a medium of transformation.
Introduction

“Successful works of art enhance, destroy, or transform common assumptions, perceptions, and categories, yielding new perspectives and changed insights, although they sometimes reinforce conventional assumptions as well...They can transfigure experience and perception, calling attention to aspects and meanings previously slighted or overlooked. They participate in our continual remaking of a world.”¹

Murray Edelman

I am an Australian Palestinian immigrant, who was born in Gaza, Palestine to Palestinian Christian Eastern Orthodox parents.

Recent archeological discoveries reveal that Gaza is the fifth oldest city mentioned in the Bible, one of the earliest Christian cities before the advent of Islam and “one of the oldest cities in history [referred] to in the tenth chapter of Genesis: It was in Gaza that Samson loved Delilah and was betrayed by her and where he pulled down the temple killing himself and 3,000 Philistines.”²

In so far as its Christian origins are concerned, archaeology shows that some of the earliest Christian churches are in Gaza- for example there are the remains of a sixth-century Byzantine church dedicated to John the Baptist located on an Israeli military installation in the Gaza Strip.

Another very important ancient city, Jerusalem was the capital of Palestine, before 1948. Jerusalem has an ancient presence of the three largest monotheistic religions in the world: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, with their central theme of one God who is invisible and hallowed. Despite the fact that the three mystical traditions also have the important ‘Aleph’, letter in their alphabet and all have religious sites in Jerusalem. These homogenous elements within cultures are unfortunately outweighed by perceived differences.

In 1947, the United Nations recommended the partition plan of Mandatory Palestine into two states and the internationalisation of Jerusalem. The minority of Jewish

people received the majority of the land and the new State of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948. There was no Palestine and no internationalisation of Jerusalem either. In the same year, the Palestinian exodus occurred when Palestinians were displaced from their homeland, into refugee camps (on a temporary basis) resulting in the loss of their homeland Palestine. This traumatic event (known in Arabic as Nakba, meaning ‘catastrophe’), was followed by the 1967 Six-Day war ‘Naksa’ (meaning “Setback”). As a result, Israel occupied both the West Bank which was previously annexed by Jordon and Gaza which was controlled by Egypt.

My parents were exiled from their homeland (Jaffa, Palestine) following the upheaval of the Palestinians in 1948. They settled in Gaza, where I was born, and lived during the course of my childhood and youth. It was there that I witnessed the Naksa Six-Day war and the occupation of Gaza by Israel in 1967.

As a proud Australian citizen, I have never forgotten my roots, neither my Palestinian identity nor my late father’s memory. I still remember his words clearly: “My family and I were born and grew up in Jaffa, Palestine. We had a beautiful home there with land and green pastures, but we have become alienated from our home after the Israeli occupation in 1948. We left everything and went to Gaza as refugees on what we thought to be a temporary basis....I have kept the keys of my house because I was told that we will soon return, but the land was lost.” "Similar words are echoed by the contemporary Australian Palestinian author and journalist Hani Elturk who stated in his book “[these] migrants never thought they would permanently leave Palestine. They regarded their immigration as only temporary or a short Diaspora, after which they would return home.” There is a spiritual bond between Palestinians and the motherhood of Palestine. This is a bond which has existed for centuries, because the Palestinian people have inhabited Palestine from about 5000 BC.

Memories of my childhood in Gaza include neighbours who were a mixture of Palestinian Christians and Muslims who all lived in peace. At that time, Christians represented ten percent of the population.

Israel regards Jerusalem as its own ‘eternal capital’, as do Arabs. This is the main thrust of the conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims. Jerusalem is also considered by many to be one of the holiest sites in the world and the ‘centre of the

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4 Ibid., 13-22.
world 5 for the presence of God and knowledge\textsuperscript{6}, “the navel of the world.”\textsuperscript{7} Scriptures also mentioned to found a “New Jerusalem.”\textsuperscript{8}

At the age of sixteen I embarked with my family on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land Jerusalem. I remember when my sister, my brother and I visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher; we knelt humbly in front of Jesus’ Tomb with candles alight and said our prayers. The feeling of that moment of spiritual and community connection remains strong and I believe resides within the core of my being.

Gaza is currently and effectively the world’s largest open air prison. Around 1.5 million of Gaza’s residents are Palestinian refugees from 1948, 1967 and other conflicts— including the November 2012 Gaza Crisis and the current Middle Eastern crises in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt. This in addition to the thousands of Palestinian refugees (in Israel/Palestine) who are still living under total blockade, illegal imprisonments, checkpoints and roadblocks, and also the illegal Israeli settlements and outposts. All these factors create a situation that represents a tragic reality of an extended occupation. From about the year 2000 to July 2003, the first segment of the “separation barrier” was built. The border of Jerusalem and Bethlehem is a concrete wall that is eight-meters high.

In Gaza, things have deteriorated politically, especially with the rule of the fundamentalist Islamic political party Hamas and the (PIJ) Palestinian Islamic Jihad. More fundamentalist Islam has taken root. Palestinian Christians now representing less than one half percent of the people in Gaza, and are encouraged to leave the country (Only 1,500 people). Palestinian Christians are currently facing problems such as forced conversions to Islam, prevention of mixed schools and threats to close schools that do not apply Islamic law.\textsuperscript{9} In Egypt and Syria churches have been destroyed, and bishops kidnapped.\textsuperscript{10} Christians have been killed in the Syrian village of Maaloula which is on a UNESCO list of tentative world heritage listed sites (residents speak Aramaic, the language of Christ.\textsuperscript{11}

During his recent visit to Sydney, The Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia, from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Atallah Hanna) stated that: “Eastern

\textsuperscript{6} Holy Bible, 1 Timothy 2:4 (Nashville, USA: Thomas Nelson Publishers Inc., 1982).
\textsuperscript{8} Holy Bible, Revelation, 21:2 (Nashville, USA: Thomas Nelson Publishers Inc., 1982).
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
Christianity is not imported,”12 “Palestine is the cradle of Christianity which was centered in the triangle of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria.”13 Palestinian Christian Arabs are not strangers to Palestine. Our history is deeply rooted in this area of the world.14 On the other hand, our numbers are dwindling due to the occupation and the bitter reality it is causing.”15 “Christianity is a reminder that Jesus Christ was born, lived, crucified and resurrected there in Palestine.”16 “Jesus was Palestinian.”17 “....and the city of Jerusalem is what we always think of and to pray for peace “18 

It is painful to know, that Australian Palestinian Christian immigrants are banned from visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre by the Israeli authority.

As an Australian Palestinian immigrant, I have a point of view that has been shaped by the impact of conflict and displacement but also a great love and sense of connection to my motherland. The impetus driving my work comes from a strong desire to see my motherland restored, without the horror of occupation and terrorism, to be transformed by the light of democracy and humanity. Professor Edward Said (1935-2003) who was a Palestinian writer, critic and theorist stated that “Humanism is the only, and I would go so far as saying, the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history.”19 In Said’s view of humanism, that is he called the ‘universal human condition,’20 is in opposition to the barbarous occupation which is building a de facto reality on the earth.

Inspired by my Palestinian and Eastern Christian Orthodox backgrounds and the Byzantine icons technique, in 2011, I accomplished my MSA project Light in Spiritual Monochrome, which involved producing light in metallic/gold leaf paintings. This project was only the seed of my work which I have intended to extend and perfect further within my higher studies. It was only the beginning of the path which I have

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16 Marcelle Mansour, “His Eminence Archbishop’s Dr. Atallah Hanna’s Message to Australian Immigrants During His Visit in Sydney,” El-Telegraph Arabic Newspaper, no. 5700 (2013).
18 Mansour, “His Eminence Archbishop’s Dr. Atallah Hanna’s Message to Australian Immigrants During His Visit in Sydney.”
started, as the image of Cross City Tunnel photograph shows. My artwork (I was told by my supervisor Dr. Debra Dawes) has the feeling of the simplicity and spirituality of Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematism21 (1879—1935). I explored the mystic alchemy of the transformative process of materials into symbolic immaterial meaning. This kind of work is exerted to affect the human mind so that it may change people’s visions. My inspiration was light illuminating from Byzantine icons when reflected on gold leaf. The word icon comes from the Greek word ‘eikon’ which means “holy image” signifying the divine in pictorial form.22 The gold leaf in the icon is a sign of the presence of God23 which reminds me of the words in the New Testament: “I am the light of the world.”24 It is the simplest, form of religious self-awareness... that Christian Easterners had for a long time and represented divine persons in pictorial form.25

In my Master of Fine Arts (MFA) research paper and creative work (2012-2013) I focus on ‘light’ namely through a phenomenological engagement, using light as a tool and perception as a medium. Exploring the notion of light and phenomenology as it relates to spirituality and showing spirituality as a vehicle for immortality and transformation, I will discuss here in this context, the spiritual iconoclastic works of Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) who was inspired by music, and Kazimir Malevich’ Suprematism of sensational infinity of zero form.

Spiritual abstraction emerged in the early twentieth century as a kind of iconoclastic reality. It has been a hundred years since then. I have questioned here; Are there any spiritual artists today? Is it more difficult than ever? Is there any notion of spirituality in phenomenological art? What is Phenomenology of Perception exactly? Can perception see the invisible or reveal the hidden truth? What makes the invisible visible in art? And what is my role as an artist in this context towards my Palestinian cause? Is it possible to attain peace through art? Is it possible to integrate spirituality with politics in art today? How is it possible to extend from microcosm to macrocosm?

Throughout the chapters of my research, I will show how spirituality is validated and relevant to contemporary art today. I provide a comprehensive summary of what Kandinsky believed composed spiritual art, when he wrote his acclaimed essay ‘On the Spiritual in Art’, a century ago. But some believe that art faces an identical problem as

23 ibid. at p.6
it did in the early twentieth century: that is, how to reconsider what Kandinsky called, the ‘inner necessity’?
Donald Kuspit, an American art critic and professor of art history and philosophy, believes for example the “spiritual crisis of the contemporary artist is greater than Kandinsky’s,”26 perhaps due to the ‘over-materialism’ of the contemporary society. Kandinsky and Kuspit in effect seem to be inviting contemporary artists to reconsider spirituality in art for many reasons.
In a well-known article, the French writer, poet and the founder of Surrealism, Andre Breton, praised Kandinsky “as one of the most exceptional, greatest revolutionaries of vision”27. Kandinsky’s art, and his essay, raise the specter of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Mind, 1807 where the ‘spirit’ knows itself through ‘sense-experience’ (or ‘spiritualised sensing’28.) According to Kuspit, this spiritual impulse was “the all important spark of inner life producing mystical and artistic experience where colour and feeling were inextricable: sense experience was spiritual experience. The external visible phenomenon of colour seemed to be a spontaneous manifestation of the internal invisible phenomenon of feeling.”29 Colour appeals entirely to the optic sense. What mattered for Kandinsky was what he called the “spiritual eyes”30; that could intuit inner necessity”31, or the ‘spiritually concealed’ within the material. As he famously wrote, “I want people to see finally what lies behind.”32 To Kandinsky art had to have a sense of creative purpose that would confirm that it was humanly transformative. The answer was that the non-objectiveness of art was the refuge of the spirituality that the material world repudiated and shunned.
In this vein Kuspit asks about today’s artists: Who among them is willing to affirm the spiritual and to convince others that art is, in a way, made for that purpose? Then he states “I think it is more difficult than ever to be a spiritual artist, but in my opinion, it is the only kind of heroic artist that makes sense in threatening modern times, as Kandinsky makes it clear.”33
In this way the three monotheistic religions of the world largely share the central theme of an invisible, abstract, iconoclastic God who is represented in an “infinitely varied

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
forms.” These ‘forms’, when shared, create an openness to the world, which can create communities of ‘believers’, and which can give the reflection of change through an exterior macrocosm (e.g. through the state).

Therefore this research addresses how contemporary art; can play an effective role in changing the world (or a macro-community) opinion about a micro-community which is perhaps misunderstood (Palestine). I want to explore the possibility of transition from microcosm to macrocosm? Or in the Kandinskian mode, how can we reflect change from the microcosm to macrocosm?

In my creative research I am focusing on ‘light’ as a metaphor for transformation through phenomenal spiritual iconoclastic painting. Light as a focal point, a metaphor of an imaginative journey where I explore the invisible which persists to be deus absconditus, and that is in my view akin to the ‘unknown’ ‘Nakba’. In this vein, of bringing peace, I want to use spirituality through phenomenology towards socio-political change.

In Chapter One of this paper, I will focus on the notion of ‘light’ through a phenomenological engagement. I will provide a concise background about the emergence of contemporary artists in ‘Light and Space Movement’ which exploded in the mid 1960s and early 1970’s. I will examine some artworks of two contemporary light artists, Robert Irwin and James Turrell. Here; I will describe my approach to my research through the traits of these artists who influenced my work, the importance of light art in my subject and how it is relevant to the core of my topic. I will refer to the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and perception, together with other theorists’ analyses and investigate if there is any notion of spirituality in contemporary phenomenological art. These theorists are discussed in Chapter One. I will explore if perception can reveal the invisible and I will ask how and why and what makes the invisible visible in art? I will also analyse how the comprehension of this kind of art was not simply a construct of any system of mathematics but a search for truth, via light perception for a different state of being that causes the observer to find a work compelling.

‘In Chapter Two, I will focus on the topic of transformation and rebirth through spiritual art. I will discuss the ‘transformation and transfiguration' process based on spirituality. I will examine works of Bill Viola’s and Joseph Beuys’ and their philosophical and political insights. In my work, I will seek transformation in the viewers mind and aspire to effect socio-political change via art as a tool for spiritual

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34 Ibid.
political influence to help in supporting the notion of peace solution for Palestinian-
Israeli conflict, and establishing a civil democratic state of Palestine and Israel, in
secularity and spirituality to foster harmonious co-existence.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss my artwork and the development of my ideas from flat
gold leaf tangible paintings, to three dimensional artworks and then the focus on the
actual light as a medium, particularly, on the movement of the shifting colourful light
as a metaphor of transformation, with the intention to explore how the transformative
process of materials can express immateriality, rebirth, Immortality, the divine mind
and spiritual sense. The use of light through alchemy and symbolism in my works is a
metaphor of transformation.
Chapter One

Light of Phenomenology and Spirituality

“Light is not so much something that reveals, as it is itself the revelation.”36

James Turrell

"Perception does not give me truths like geometry but presences."37

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

This chapter draws upon the concept of phenomenology to understand the powerful relationship of our body in the world and in space. It is the core of my art research, discussing light and phenomenology as it relates to spirituality. I draw mainly on the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) who was a French phenomenological philosopher and an essayist. I also refer to other philosophers and theorists to affirm the spiritual sensing and invisibility in Phenomenology and the phenomenality of non-intentionality. These are: Axel Madsen (1930–2007) a Danish-American biographer, theorist and critic, Michel Henry (1922–2002) a French philosopher and novelist, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) a German philosopher who is considered the central figure of modern philosophy, and Elizabeth Grosz, an Australian philosopher who teaches in the Women's Studies and works on French philosophers including Merleau-Ponty.

The artists I have chosen to examine are those of two contemporary light artists; Robert Irwin and James Turrell, and their context in light perception and phenomenology as body lived experience. These artists emerged in the Light and Space Movement which originated in Southern California in the mid 1960s and early 1970s, influenced by John McLaughlin (1898-1976), who was an American abstract hard-edge painter and a pioneer minimalist. The history of modern art has encompassed a progressive reduction of imagery through the Suprematist Malevich who wrote in 1915, “objects

have vanished like a smoke.”38 It is Suprematism that provides the most important frame of reference for the phenomenal art of Light and Space Movement.39

This movement can be seen as a major development in the history of modern art and is related to optical, minimalism and geometric abstraction with attention on meaning experienced by the viewer’s sensual body. It is also characterised by a focus on perceptual phenomena, such as light and the use of other transparent or reflective materials. The nature of the work reflected in the title of the exhibition at the University of California and Los Angeles (UCLA), Transparency, Reflection, Light, and Space, introduced the emerging movement in 1971. The show presented the work of emerging light artists such as Robert Irwin and James Turrell who used ‘phenomenological’ ‘experimental’ art.

The terms of phenomenology are defined as: “Phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought.....imagination, emotion, desire....to bodily awareness.”40 The structure of these forms of experience typically involves what Edmond Husserl (1859-1938), founded; the “intentionality” school; the directedness of experience towards things in the world, the property of consciousness of something.41

In relation to the above definition, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and his analysis of perception is pivotal. Merleau-Ponty studied the ‘essence’ of perception and ‘consciousness’ of the world ‘already there’42 with questions such as what is the Phenomenology of Perception exactly? To Merleau-Ponty, the revelation of the structure of perception and its ‘primacy’ and ‘facticity’ was the central theme of our existential bodies reflecting on phenomena and forming an ‘embodiment’43 of consciousness where, not appearance, but the illusory phenomenon itself became the
truth.’

“A movement, trying to understand the way man thinks and to redefine his relations with himself and the world.”

This practice comes near to an enlightening description of phenomenology proposed by Madsen: an attempt to understand fundamentals, for example ‘thinking’ through description and without analysis. That is observation constituted meaning. This was an intuitive grasp of one’s sense of being through a primal intuition or the ‘inner mind’, suspending all judgments.

Similarly Henry’s phenomenology of art, like that of Merleau-Ponty, “does not thematise art as an empirical object in its own right, but discloses the phenomenology of art. What art makes visible is not the mere form of phenomena, but the very manifestation of their appearance as such.” According to Henry, Western philosophy acknowledges only the visual appearing of objects. This “ontological monism” is biased in equating phenomenology with visibility and thus with truth. It means not what ‘appears’, but how appearance is possible and describable, as opposed to the Western ‘ontological monism’, (or Husserl’s appearances via the primacy of intentionality.) To Henry, appearance ‘manifested’ itself incessantly (pathos) and was unexplained by intentionality. An auto- manifestation which was ‘non-intentional sensuality is absolutely immanent that means ‘God.’

In supporting this concept, Henry elaborated by referring to Meister Eckhart (c.1260 – c.1327) who was theologian philosopher. He distinguished between two ‘eyes of the soul’ being inner and outer. The inner eye perceives God (i.e. God is ‘without image’ akin to Kandinsky’s ‘inner revelation’) where the inner ‘non-intentional tension of life itself is disclosed’ because it captured the inner pathos of life itself and which is a manifestation hidden from ontological monism. Thus art is an” intensification” of life. All art is “abstract art,” The inner structure of the ‘auto-manifestation’ is disclosed

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44 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception 296.
46 Ibid.
47 “Phenomenology.”
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Pathos is plural of Patho meaning to awakening emotions in the audience so as to induce them to make the judgment desired.
52 intentionality : since it is precisely not a manifestation of something it remains invisible within the horizon of intentional consciousness because it was always there was immanent and self-evident ("epreuve de soi") and phenomenological.
53 Welten, "Michel Henry (1922-2002)."
54 Ibid., 142.
55 Ibid.
through art. The disclosure is a function of colours, forms, and tonalities (or Kandinsky’s ‘inner pulsations’ of what is ultimately life itself) which makes the ‘invisible visible’. Thus, tautology could be perceived via ‘noema’ and ‘noesis’ as a formulation where “Interior = Interiority = Life = Invisible = Pathos.” Art can help us to undo alienation from our original, nonrepresentational life experience. This is the purpose of cultural critique where the healing role of art is emphasised. (See EndNote for ‘Noesis and noema.’)

Art can help to perceive the invisible by disclosing the hidden truth. Merleau-Ponty stated that perception reveals the mystery of the world. It implies to reveal ‘truth’, and since ‘truth’ is ‘invisible’, he believed that ‘truth’ was not a function of the ‘inner’ observer but of the world upon the observer. “Truth does not ‘inhabit’ only the ‘inner man,’ [...] man is in the world, and only in the world he knows himself,” This relation of reason to fact, or eternity to time, like that of reflection to the unreflective, is this two-way relationship (thought-to-perception relationship) that phenomenology has called Fundierung (founding) where perception constitutes the world and vice versa.

Using the Christian communion as an example, this inverse relationship is like the sacrament, which constitutes “the real presence of God. [It is occupying all depth and breadth of space and [communicat[ing] to those [inwardly prepared] who eat of the consecrated bread [which suggests a sensation and which] is literally a form of communion.” “For God, who is everywhere, breadth is immediately equivalent to depth.” Hence God is everywhere (depth/breadth equivalence) where upon reflection depth became invisible, even if ‘seen’ as the union of soul and body allowing one through perception of God, to love others as oneself. From this equation then, it may be concluded that depth = inner = invisible = God.

In a similar vein, Kant stated that the invisible is unknowable and unprovable, and it can be revealed only through our inner faith. In Critique of Pure Reason, Kant

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56 Ibid.
57 Smith, "Phenomenology."
58 Welten, "Michel Henry (1922-2002)," 142.
59 Ibid., 143.
60 meaning to perceive Noesis and noema from the Greek verb noéō (νοέω), think, intend, whence the noun nous or mind. The intentional process of consciousness is called noesis, while its ideal content is called noema.
61 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception. xii.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 298.
64 Ibid., 246.
65 Ibid., 298.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 297.
68 Ibid., 95-110.
69 Ibid., 418.
analysed metaphysics (that which “lies beyond our ability to perceive”)70 and thought that the true nature of reality was ungraspable,71 as were the soul and God72 which existed73 and that mind structured reality into perceptible reality.74 The reality beyond ‘noumenal world75 would lead to “Universal Truth,”76 which is the source of the human understanding and all basis in the meaning.77

Although Merleau-Ponty agreed with Kant on matters being beyond the realm of an observer’s grasp,78 to him the ‘real thing’ was ‘externally ordained’ (holy) and always beyond perception and ungraspable79 and perception ‘did not fathom reality’ but ordered it imperatively, hence creating ‘imperatives’ (meaning and norms) which only free beings could be subject to,80 and these ‘constraints’ within the phenomenal world made perception possible.81

This investigation of the invisible ‘truth’ takes on contemporary validity through the generative analysis in Grosz’ Volatile Bodies, Corporeal Phenomenology. Grosz clarifies “Merleau-Ponty’s claim that phenomenology wanted to understand the relations between consciousness and nature and between interiority and exteriority. In effect, it is an attempt to understand corporeal embodied consciousness-interiority and exteriority viz.82 and via the medium of perception itself: the body, which was a ‘perceiving mind in an incarnate body’ (or a ‘midway point’ between mind and body)83 correlative to perception.84 Merleau Ponty claims that the body is neither an object nor subject; it is a condition, defined by its relations with the objects.85 It is a phenomenon experienced by me and thus provides the very horizon and ‘perspectival’ point which places me in the world and makes relations between me and other objects possible. Grosz explains that philosophies commonly forget the insertion of the mind in the

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 93.
84 Ibid., 86.
corporeality in relation to our body, and correlatively, with perceived things. This idea is intensified in Merleau-Ponty's last book *Visible and the Invisible*: “Perception is midway between mind and body and requires the functioning of both.”

The objective identity of visible and invisible and their presentment are verified through exploration: It is a transition from a phenomenology of consciousness allowing the ‘existence of existence.’ Accordingly, using light in my topic here is vital. Light can be seen and observed, (through body senses and intellect), to perceive the ‘presences’ of the ‘invisible.’ Merleau-Ponty gives the example of seeing what appears to be stone, which is in reality a patch of sunlight.

The notion of light has inspired many artists since the time of classical Greek Sculpture. Light has also been used as a symbolic tool in art - and an extremely powerful one which also has associations to spiritual beliefs since the ancient times. “Light has many historical meanings, from cosmic to alchemy, as well as in the sense of life/death, plus the philosophical influence of the Orient.”

Contemporary light artists experimented and built structures with which to examine ‘more “real” truths’ within immaterial, objectless reality. Light and dark, sunlight and shadow, fire and scrim were their original materials. Irwin and Turrell are such artists who use ‘experimental, situational, site-specific, ambient, phenomenological, or “simply light and Space” art and incorporated into their work the latest technologies. At present, exploded knowledge of technology, has transformed our thinking. In addition, increased interest and tolerance for Eastern philosophies have led to a deeper understanding of humans as metaphysical beings. These expanded attitudes have resulted in an expanded art; it is no longer an art of illusion or even of abstraction but one that is possibly more human than either of them, because it takes form only through the viewers directed perception and lived experience.

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87 Ibid., 67-68.
89 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 343-44.
91 Ibid.
93 "Excerpt From: The Art of Light and Space".
94 *The Art of Light and Space*, 9.
95 Ibid., 10.
96 Smith, "Phenomenology."
Artificial lights are used by contemporary artists, inspired by the influence of Mark Rothko’s large luminous colour fields. Rothko (1903-1970), an American painter, who was known for the strong effect of light emanating from the very core of his paintings where he employed shimmering colour to convey a sense of spirituality.97 When Irwin saw Rothko’s expressive power, he quoted “they are like church stained glass windows.”98

On the other hand, the perceptual spaces created by James Turrell contained no messages in light except for the pure luminance epiphanic intensity. Turrell’s art operates within a considered attention to self; a contemplative attitude with content reduced to visible light making light ‘visible’. In that enactment, are revealed themes, involving a viewer’s ability to ‘see’. More than direct meditation, the art involved aesthetic processes with an approach toward Eastern thought, work, and meditation, sense of body, mind and soul.99 In Turrell’s installations, the purposive control of light makes the perception of art visible and the work becomes, “a reflexive act,”100 and as quoted; “The art is cerebral, but it also possesses a great beauty. It is sensuous as well as it is intellectual, and, some would say mystical as well as rational.” 101

Irwin’s and Turrell’s works of Light and Space used materials which included dielectric-coated luminescent materials, Plexiglas and neon lights. They explored ‘transparency and the seeming immateriality of these materials made them ideal for light, space and colour.”102 They used these on a ‘trial and error’103 basis, until they could reach a stage of complexity where the observer became part and parcel of the work ‘observed,’104 letting go of the rational, structured reality, entangled in a different perceptual state. The presence of light, the sense of colour, and the feel of space merged, to found a far more realistic sense of view than any literal representation could construct, making the two “as much philosophers as artists.”105 Irwin for example has said:“Any one of us, when we sit down…and ask ‘Why am I here?’ ‘What do I mean?’ ‘What is my life about?’ That is the whole point of being a philosopher…. examining your existence.”106

98 Doyle, “Artist Profile: Robert Irwin”.
99 Butterfield, The Art of Light and Space, 73.
101 Ibid., 209.
102 Ibid., 9.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
As Rothko held, there was kinship between the philosophers and artists such that they were “preoccupied with the same essential concerns of time and space, life and death [reducing all] perceptions of actuality to the most basic level to which humans relate: sensuality.” 107 In that sense the painter was a philosopher constantly ‘adjusting eternity’, ‘specifying the moment’ and reflecting ‘the understandings of his times’. 108 Similarly Turrell held that he was interested in ‘magic’ that was real, working directly with that power. 109 In Madsen’s phenomenological terms this was to understand thinking and relations of the subject to the world. 110 Irwin and Turrell, whilst collaboratively (scientist Edward Wortz), producing works via the Experiments in Art and Technology Program, 111 thought that perception did not provide one with truth as would geometry, but with ‘presences’ which could be ‘felt’ through other senses. 112 Therefore, the comprehension of art was not simply a construct of mathematics but a search for different states of being.

Irwin’s work examined perception as did Turrell’s. Irwin “began with material that [dissolved] into light. Turrell however took the light itself and made it material.” 113

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107 Kuspit, “Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art”.
109 Butterfield, The Art of Light and Space, 68.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid., 9.
112 Ibid., 8.
113 Ibid., 68.
Robert Irwin

Robert Irwin has been a pivotal influence in contemporary art as an artist, theoretician, and teacher. As a painter, he has always raised questions and posited theories about the nature of art itself. He began to question the “why” of the mark and of the art. His curiosity, which continues to be the prime catalyst, led him to this questioning of his powerful energy for his investigations.114

Irwin began by ‘dismantling the act of painting’ questioning neo-traditional methods and believing that ‘seeing’ was a social and cultural construct where the observer’s ‘eyes’ and ‘senses’ were ‘trained’ to see in a specific way.115

In *Dot Paintings 1964-1966*, example, *Untitled 1965* (fig.1)116, Irwin’s Light and Space involvement became pronounced. The paintings were not exactly about what was to be observed but how it was being observed and analysed. The observer was imbued with a sense of ‘presence’ rather than a sense of image or any physicality where he says” two plus two actually makes five,” where objectivity was minimised and the focus was on the energy of the addition. 117

![Figure 1. Robert Irwin, *Untitled (Dot Painting)*, 1965. Oil on canvas. 42 x 43 in. (106.7 x 109.2 cm).](image)

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114 Ibid., 18.
115 Ibid.
In *Disc Paintings, 1968* (fig.2)\(^{118}\): Irwin began Disc paintings in 1965. Light became an integral aspect of the medium with “transparent layers of color [subtly blending] from white in the centre to gain both interacting hues and a value [changed] at the edge” \(^{119}\) making the discs slip out of focus “with only a floating band of color remaining and representing a real ‘presence.’” \(^{120}\) The convex shape of the spun aluminum disc is held away from the wall by a cylinder, causing it to project into the viewer’s space, (fig.2) using light directly in the creation process.\(^{121}\)

![figure 2](image)

Figure 2. Robert Irwin, Untitled, 1968. Cast acrylic, Diameter: 60 in. (152.4 cm.)

Irwin tried to “de-materialise the work of art” to escape the ‘bonds of the painting frame,’ and to draw the viewer into the work ‘referencing only the self.’\(^{122}\) These ‘perceptual ambiguities’ questioned the nature of perception itself, it becoming the subject\(^{123}\): the viewers questioned what they actually saw, concentrating on the landscape or ‘the world.’ \(^{124}\)

*Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow & Blue 2008*, (fig.3)\(^{125}\) the work was made of six pairs of painted panels of primary colours: red, yellow and blue that mounted on the floor and on the ceiling of the train terminal. This caused the shapes of the panels to recede into perspective as the visitor walked towards the work; they therefore appear as trapezoids rather than rectangles. Irwin accesses the reality that what we know differs from what we see and the “laws” of perspective are not real laws and therefore we realize that

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{119}\) Ibid.

\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{122}\) Doyle, "Artist Profile: Robert Irwin".

\(^{123}\) Ibid.

\(^{124}\) Ibid.

things in life look different to what they are. Irwin is an artist who is a thinker and wants to teach his viewers their assumptions and perceptions.\textsuperscript{126}

![Image of Robert Irwin's work](image.jpg)

**Figure 3.** Robert Irwin, \textit{Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow & Blue}, 2008. Linear polyurethane paint on 6 aircraft honeycomb aluminum rectangles, overall installed 10-1/2” x 54 x 22 : aluminum rectangles: 16” x 22” each.

The work's title \textit{Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow & Blue}, 2008 is the same title as Barnett Newman's painting, 1966-67, where the painting is not primary, what is primary is “our state of consciousness and the shape of our perceptions,”\textsuperscript{127} Importantly light art has a humanistic or a ‘divine’ healing concern.\textsuperscript{128} In achieving this, Irwin ‘fabric’ is light itself \textsuperscript{129} and the surroundings from which the art “draw all of its cues.” \textsuperscript{130}

As seen in (fig.4) \textsuperscript{131}: \textit{Irwin's Untitled, 1971} is Irwin’s preparatory drawings and notes which refer to as \textit{Slant/Light/Volume}, Site-specific, and a core concept of the artist’s

\textsuperscript{126} Doyle, "Artist Profile: Robert Irwin".
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Martin Buber, "Robert Irwin: Doors of Perception," \textit{Art in America} December 1999.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
practise. In the 1970s, he repeatedly worked with translucent scrim. In Irwin’s hands, scrim becomes a formally divisive yet supremely gentle and ethereal (dare one say spiritual?) agent of transformation. Irwin states: “If you can’t experience the works they have no meaning.”¹³² I am reminded here with Merleau-Ponty’s quote: “The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world.”¹³³

Figure 4. Robert Irwin, *Untitled*, 1971. Synthetic fabric, wood, fluorescent lights, floodlights 96 x 564 in.

In the 1970s Irwin transitioned from painting to installation and dealt directly with light and space. This was executed in both indoor and outdoor sites. Irwin acquired his knowledge through trial and error, for example he said when he asks questions he acts as a philosopher. Irwin was curious about exceeding his limits when it came to the art of light and perception always asking questions about the functions of art and was concerned about the ‘how’ factor in order to educate his viewers.

Irwin orchestrates the act of perception, as did the work of fellow artist James Turrell by exploring how phenomena are perceived and altered by consciousness.

¹³² Ibid.
James Turrell

James Turrell’s artworks as he preferred to call them ‘paintings’ rather than sculptures because of his use of light,\textsuperscript{134} on the other hand, require more ‘analysis’ because it requires one to ‘see oneself seeing’. Turrell’s light images directly engage the subject of perception, with no object and no image except space alone.\textsuperscript{135} Turrell’s art is spiritual insofar as he followed in the footsteps of the likes of Kandinsky and Malevich. Although he changed the mode of painting by \textit{freeing} the “light and color from the painted surface,”\textsuperscript{136} allowing visual entry “into the metaphysical space itself.”\textsuperscript{137}

For example \textit{The Afrum}, 1967 (fig.5) seemed to be 3-dimensional cube of light hanging, seemingly with weight, but ‘mysterious and enigmatic’, it was in fact an intense light beam from a xenon projector through a masked plate giving it shape and realism but with a \textit{presence},\textsuperscript{138} possessing “real” reality.\textsuperscript{139}

![Figure 5: James Turrell, The Afrum I (White), 1967. Xenonlight Projection Piece,16/2 in x 19/2 (43 x 50 cm) Installation Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1976](image)

\textit{Skyspace I}, 1974 (fig.6)\textsuperscript{140} was one of the six of Turrell’s works (1972-1974), commissioned by Count Panza, Italy. Turrell put together a small room with pure white walls and a square cut through the centre of the roof to reveal the sky portraying “a shimmering cube of sky that was an improbable shade of ultramarine blue. As time passed, the sun cooled, the sky grew paler, and the view featured a cloud-filled sky. Eventually that sky changed too and began to pull tight and flat over the ceiling, until nothing was left of its former colour and shape. Later in the day it became pale.

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{footnotesize}
\texttt{http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/ecopsyc/courses/turrell/turrellaspen.html.}
\textsuperscript{135} Butterfield, \textit{The Art of Light and Space}, 68.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{140} Nancy Spector, "James Turrell," Guggenheim Museum, last accessed October 29, 2013
\texttt{http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/4089.}
\end{footnotesize}
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membrane that capped the ceiling like a flat silver scrim.”141 In Turrell’s own words the “effect was overwhelming that I was reminded of ‘divine light’”142 proving that light was the “most spectacular experience, [an] apparition properly celebrated [in] early religious ceremonies [and] Turrell’s art rescues light from oblivion.”143 Turrell skyspaces create harken back to ancient building techniques that deployed natural light—and the cycles of the cosmos—to create symbolic architecture.”144

Figure 6. James Turrell, Skyspace, 1974

With his work reflecting ‘perceptual purposes’, his projection pieces including The Afrum have some iconicity and are “iconic”145 in the original sense of the Greek word ‘icon’ meaning “image”146. The Projection Pieces are ‘images’ without referents, in this context, we are reminded of the word “object” which comes from the past participle of the Latin verb obicere meaning an impediment.147 But because they are composed of light, Turrell’s images circumvent the physical nature thus the “art creates objects that exist only in the senses.”148 In terms of specific religious symbolism to his work, his upbringing the influence of Quakerism has had an impact on him in the sense of “the notion of not making graven images”149 and the Quaker ‘search’ for the ‘inner light’.150

141 Butterfield, The Art of Light and Space, 74.
142 Ibid.
143 Adcock, The Art of Light and Space 209.
144 Spector, “James Turrell”.
145 Adcock, The Art of Light and Space 16.
146 Greek root verb “eikenai” meaning ‘to resemble’.
147 Adcock, The Art of Light and Space 16-17.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid., 211.
Turrell Bridget’s Bardo’s (Gansfeld Piece) 2008, (figs. 7, 8 and 9), viewers are immersed in a bath of changeable colourful pure light. Turrell described this as ‘feeling with your eyes’ and a spiritual experience.


Figure 8. James Turrell, Bridget’s Bardo, (Gansfeld Piece), 2008.

Figure 9. James Turrell, Bridget’s Bardo, (Gansfeld Piece), 2008.

150 Wilson, “The Art of Light & Space”.
Turrell’s *Live Oak Friends Meeting House 1995 (fig. 10.)* Turrell began meeting houses in 1980’s such as *West/East First-Generation Environmental Sculpture, 1981.* He designed the ‘meeting’ house (a Quaker spiritual house – first he thought of Rothko Chapel-) with a ceiling opening to the sky carrying his grandmother’s words “to go inside and greet the house.” The *Oak Friends Meeting’s House* was built in 1995 (fig. 10.), designed on the theme of enlisted spiritual buildings with “Skyspace.”, with relaxing ‘golden wood’ “pews.”

In relation to this work – a house with three-room building with a Skyspace in the meeting room - Turrell held that there was “truth in light [and] light [was] aware” of our presence and it (light) could be felt physically and that all “or most spiritual experiences [are] described with a vocabulary of light.” Because he believed that we created “our own reality” and that art changed “our sense of reality”, Turrell’s works in light and space impinged the eye, body, and mind with the power of ‘spiritual awakening.’ Informed by his studies of perceptual psychology, his work does permit us to view ‘ourselves seeing’ because the more we perceive the more we do create our own reality.

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156 Outdoors, “A Houston ' Best Kept 'Secret - the Oak Friends Meeting Invites Us to View the James Turrell Skyspace.”
157 Ibid.
158 Butterfield, *The Art of Light and Space,* 80.
159 Whittaker, “Greeting the Light: An Interview with James Turrell “.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
164 Outdoors, "A Houston ' Best Kept 'Secret - the Oak Friends Meeting Invites Us to View the James Turrell Skyspace.”
Turrell’s Roden Crator (fig. 11)\textsuperscript{165} was conceived in 1972 and began to be implemented in 1974.\textsuperscript{166} Turrell acquired the crater in 1997 located outside Flagstaff, Arizona. He is turning this volcanic crater into a huge naked-eye observatory. With its vast east and west spaces and its incandescent ‘celestial vaulting’ as seen in William Blake’s etchings and in Renaissance paintings represents the ‘yield to vision’\textsuperscript{167} proving Turrell’s ‘shamanism’ in unearthing the fact that “the light in the human mind is not gone.”\textsuperscript{168} Turrell’s interests in the “duality of light, visual perception, dematerialisation, the physical property of light, as well as the spiritual quality of light, [encoding the light with meaning]”\textsuperscript{169} come to fore proving his “spiritual turn of mind”\textsuperscript{170} and the claims that his canvases are “mystical canvases”\textsuperscript{171}

![Image](image_url)

Figure 11. James Turrell, Roden Crater, 1979. Ariel Photograph 1997

Wild RC8 camera image 23” x 23 ¾”

In the end the two artists’ work brings into view the ‘reductive’ modes of modern art with its emphasis on the ‘inner necessity’ of perceiving the ‘truth’ of light: that which makes the ‘invisible visible’ and that which allows the viewer to reflect and to perceive him or herself, altering his or her ‘reality’.”\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{166} Butterfield, The Art of Light and Space, 82.
\textsuperscript{168} Butterfield, The Art of Light and Space.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Butterfield, The Art of Light and Space, 28.
This chapter has discussed the theoretical framework of phenomenology as relates to spirituality through the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and other contemporary theorists’ analysis where I affirm making the invisible visible in art. To Merleau-Ponty, revealing the mystery of the truth was not through the appearance, neither describing nor analysing, rather via describing, where the illusory phenomenon itself became the ‘truth’ To Madsen, through a primal intuition or the ‘inner mind’ suspending all judgments. To Henry, It is not the visibility of the world but the ‘pathos’ of the non-intentional auto-manifestation of the inner pulsation that is manifestation hidden from ontological monism. To Kant, the holy invisible was beyond our perception to be understood and can be revealed through our faith or the interior ‘Universal Truth’. Finally, Grosz confirms revealing the invisible can be attained through the unity of interiority and exteriority via insertion the mind in the corporeality of our body.

This chapter has also showed the notion of light in art as a material and perception as a medium, operated by two contemporary light artists, Robert Irwin and James Turrell. Their works bring into view the ‘reductive’ modes of modern painting and sculpture. I have examined their works in relation to the perceived world and the ‘inner necessity’ requirement of perceiving the ‘visible’ and the ‘invisible’. Irwin’s curiosity in art is always “in the realm of pure research,” where he is questioning its functions and purposes, as well as its ability or inability to function inside or outside the “system.” 173 Asking important questions: What is the function of art? What is that I see? 174 In Turrell’s installation, the purposive control of light makes not only perception but also the perception of art visible, and the work becomes a reflexive act, for his work reflects his interest in emphasising their ‘perceptual purposes’ within a contemplative attitude. The content of the art is reduced to visible light where there is ‘truth’ in light affecting our senses and making us figuring out how we create our own reality. In short the two artists’ works address the body as a medium of perception through lived experiences via light. In the next chapter, I will discuss how art can touch human souls, hoping to effect to influence the viewers’ minds, through making the body as a medium of transformation.

173 Ibid., 29.
174 Ibid., 53.
Chapter Two

Spiritual Transformation in Art Within Socio-Political Spheres

One of the great achievements of modern art and philosophy... has been to allow us to reconsider the world in which we live, yet which we are always prone to forget.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

“Proceeding from a notion of the finitude of Being, Jean-Luc Nancy has sought to rethink our experience of history, or what I might call the passions of historically defined existence: among them, freedom, love, community and religion.”

Christopher Fynsk

In Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy The World of Perception, he proposes to re-discover the world and ourselves. In The Inoperative Community, Jean-Luc Nancy provides a radically different model of community than that of conventional political philosophy. He suggests “rethinking our experience and our history”, similarly Murray Edelman, in From Art to Politics perceives reality as a social construction with opinion and is subliminally forged with art through “the perceptual and conceptual frames... that shape our realities and worlds... [constructing and] reconstruct[ing] perceptions and beliefs that underlie the political actions in the news”. In James Elkins’ words art “often challenge[s] our accepted perceptions and enable[s] us to see the world anew by representing a particular vision of ‘reality’.”

By examining the thoughts of these four contemporary theorists, we may find that art has the ability to change people’s perception, where viewers re-think, re-discover, ‘re-vision’ and re-perceive. Therefore art may ‘heal wounds’ and ‘return what was lost’.

It is worth noting the macrocosm of community and the microcosm of individual because “a work of art is always a social production, never an individual enterprise.”

In the same vein, Nancy’s assertion that a community is embedded by its opening out

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176 *Nancy, The Inoperative Community* viii.
179 *Edelman, From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions* ix.
and openness to the world, instead of an attempt to remain insular and defined by something other than said openness. This in fact can reflect the notion of change according to the forces exerted from exterior macrocosm (nature, government.)

Through my research I explore the contemporary art’s role in changing the world opinion about a minor community which I say is globally misunderstood: Palestinians – and I ask, how can we ‘extend from microcosm to macrocosm’?

Understanding *transformation* requires understanding of our own *history* both as individuals and as functioning members of the greater social sphere, for we are affected by our present and by our future. The interaction between our *inner life*—the life of our subjectivity and individuality; and our *outer life*—the life of our community and our social cohesiveness, within a transformative process bonds us together as human beings.

Since the anticipation of transformation is a primary aim in my research, I explore the possibility of affecting the ‘souls of viewers’ as active members of various socio-political spheres and seeking to influence their perception and their ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ lives. This approach encapsulates the exercise of meditation, contemplation and *silent conversation* in order to experience the divine power of love or the “outpourings of Divine Light.”

We have seen that works of art can make the body a medium of perception through lived experiences via light; this chapter explores the artworks of spiritual and socio-political transformation in the light of two contemporary artists: Bill Viola and Joseph Beuys.

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In reference not only to spirituality and ‘spiritual sensing’ but to the renewal of birth through spirituality, Bill Viola’s work is extremely important since it is imbued with transformation (and ‘transfiguration’) based on Christianity and of water. The work usually included images of bodies submerged in water “floating inertly beneath the surface calling to mind such events as birth, baptism, ritual cleansing, [rebirth, thereby making the body] the medium of transformation.” Viola’s work was also imbued with the sense of life, death, and renewal and he often used water to ‘wash away’ the old by breaking ‘the threshold of perception’ and to bring to the fore the spiritual sense of rebirth, and ultimately the transformation of the soul.

Viola emphasised transformation in a material sense as a transfiguration of the object as perceived subjectively, in a spiritual sense. He had previously said “[t]ransfiguration is a word that means transformation, [metamorphosis]. The idea of metamorphosis is an essential part of human beings. Every seven years, all the cells of your body are changed. They're all new. We are literally not the same person from year to year”.

But Viola took the issue of transformation from the physical to the spiritual. Hence the body is not only the medium through which transformation occurs. It is also “the register of transcendence [with the descent] into water [becoming] the operation of mythic transformation, the manner by which the body is turned into a medium for spiritual experience” and the transfiguration process which “represents the most important capacity of human beings to completely transform their inner selves. All revolutions start in the human heart inside and then they move out.”

As we can see in The Passing, 1991 (fig.12,) Viola created a penumbral world between consciousness and sub consciousness, dreams and reality. These fleeting thoughts were brought more clearly into focus of Viola’s family and, in turn, connected up to the passage of cycles of birth and death. Viola evocatively captured in black and white...
images exploring the transformation between the idea of the real and the surreal\textsuperscript{189} using depictions of a newborn, or Viola’s deceased mother, and himself, under water. This conveyed a sense of altered reality and time where the transformative spirit of water revolved on the transcendental and of the ‘mystical inner constructive process’ or ‘other worldliness’.

As Kandinsky’s subjectivity centered art (constituting subjective ‘experience’ of alternate reality)\textsuperscript{190} so too does Bill Viola, in this work at least, \textit{literally} pass on to the viewer his subjectivity, for example the fundamental material and immaterial ‘experiences’, including ‘visions’ of his life.\textsuperscript{191} Viola has thought hard about traditions of mystical or religious work in which artists tried to ‘paint the invisible’, and transformation in rebirth.

Viola also pondered the mystical question of ‘why’, or that of the experience of suffering and its exploration in the context of the abandonment that we can all experience.\textsuperscript{192} He presented it in a positive illumination, where in effect it becomes a redemptive tool within the objective body of the human person,\textsuperscript{193} with the individual becoming concerned with the ‘other’ more than with his or her own soul and therefore becoming

\textbf{Figure 12: Bill Viola, \textit{The Passing}, 1991.}

Video, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, photograph: Kira Perov

\textsuperscript{190} Kuspit, “Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art”.
\textsuperscript{192} Townsend, \textit{Spirit and Medium}, 104.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
Viola consistently investigated new ways to manipulate viewers’ perception. His early work of *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House, 1982* (fig. 13) is important as it foreshadows Viola’s later creations, combining philosophic inquiry with captivating physical environments. This work of Video/Sound installation was displayed at the United States’ 46th Venice Biennale. There was a wood chair with headphones fronting a monitor. Viola appearing tired is seated in the chair and has an ‘intimate relationship’ being at ‘eye and ear level’ with the viewers (hearing his breath). He is then struck by a silhouetted figure that emerges from the shadows with the silence being disrupted irregularly by an echo suggesting ‘execution or torture’, with the artist alone.

In his work, Viola explored the phenomena of ‘sense perception’ as a language of the body to discover self-knowledge. Viola incorporated several philosophies: mysticism, poetry, philosophy, Eastern art, shamanism, Sufism, and Zen Buddhism. In this, he tried to draw “attention to the upset ecological balance of nature by focusing on the connection between our inner and outer lives, on the conception of the self as part of the whole.”

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194 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
The *Unspoken*, (Silver & Gold), 2001, (fig. 14)\(^{199}\) is one of Viola’s series of black and white video projected diptych on one gold and one silver-leaf panel mounted on wall. *The Unspoken* focused on the range of emotional states expressed by two people with similarity to sacred paintings of the Renaissance. In Christian icon paintings, gold symbolised the holy celestial light where a person is not merely depicted but is literally present and the silver panel alluded to Christian mysticism and the *Veil of St. Veronica*, which is said to have carried the mark of Christ’s face. I am reminded of the Byzantine Icon “*The Holy Mandylion of Christ*\(^{200}\) (Napkin Icon)” (fig. 15.)\(^{201}\) The portrait on the silver panel bears a resemblance to the imprint of the face of Christ visible on the cloth veil, thus the *Unspoken* becomes a compelling meditation on worldly suffering and spiritual hope. As Viola stated, “[a]rt can have a healing function. What is on the screen can be part of a life process that enters the body, and you can take these things and use them.”\(^{202}\) Both the above artworks are becoming timeless and eternal because of its universal theme.

![Figure 14: Bill Viola, Unspoken (Silver & Gold), 2001.](image)

Black-and-white video projected diptych on one gold and one silver-leaf panel mounted on wall,
Overall dimensions 24 1/2 x 76 x 2 1/4 inches; 62.3 x 193 x 5.


\(^{200}\) Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, 235.


\(^{202}\) Wang, “Bill Viola: Unspoken at James Cohan Gallery Shanghai”.
The image of the ‘Holy Face’ was found hidden inside a wall in 545 and transferred to Constantinople in 994.
Bill Viola’s *Ocean without A Shore*, (fig. 16)**203** which takes its title from the Andalucian Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), explores the threshold between life and death, or he stated, ‘the presence of the dead in our lives’. The installation is emblematic of Viola’s considered attention to human beings undergoing various states of transformation and renewal.”**204** *Ocean without a Shore* was originally installed in a 15th century chapel for the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007 and directly incorporated the Church’s internal architecture. Viola said: “the work means a kind of infinite sea that exists both inside and outside human beings. It had to do with the idea of the dead coming back to our world, spending a short time and going back to the land of shadows.”**205** Viola became aware that we need to use our time on earth wisely because our bodies will perish and our deeds will be eternal.**206**

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 16: Bill Viola, *Ocean without A Shore*, 2007. 
*Video and Sound Installation, running time: approx. 90 minutes*

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**203** “Bill Viola, Ocean without a Shore,” NGV International.


**206** Ibid.
Viola’s works of series of *Transfigurations* 2008 (fig. 17, 207 18208 and 19209) are an extension of *Oceans Without a Shore* and were selected in *Mediations Biennale 2012*. These continued the heritage of his work, depicting the art of the unknowable and spiritual in art.”210 These clips of black and white videos showing people coming through the water fall and having this exerting experience which in turn influenced the viewers. The works focused on the moment of each viewer’s perception and decision. In the artist’s mind, transfiguration was a “mind and body experience where the inner self is completely transformed.”211 They depict persons who are gradually drenched in water before vanishing into blackness:

“The title of the series, “*Transfigurations*” (that include images of *Acceptance, Three Women* and *Visitations* as parts of Transfigurations, pictured below) refer to a rare process whereby both the substance and essence of an entity is reconfigured. In physical terms, a transfiguration is a change in form, a remodeling of appearance. The word derives from the ancient Greek ‘metemorphothe,’ or ‘metamorphosis,’ suggesting a complete reformation. However, the word takes on its fullest meaning in the spiritual context when it refers to the moment when a person is transformed not by external means but from within. The resulting change is absolute and thorough, affecting the heart and soul of the subject.”212

I am reminded of the *Christ’s Transfiguration* as depicted in the Byzantine icon shown in (fig. 20)213, (the event when Christ appeared before three apostles in ‘glorified form’). The Synoptic scriptures relate that “Jesus took the three apostles Peter, James, and John, those he was closest to, and led them up a high mountain. There he was transfigured into blinding light; both his face and clothing changing before their eyes.”214 In the book of Matthew his face is said to have ‘shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white’. Mark comments that his clothes were ‘such as no one on earth could bleach them’ and Luke describes how the transfiguration took place whilst in prayer:

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207 Ibid.
208 Chicago, "Bill Viola, Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House, ".
211 Garcia, "Viola Explores Life, Death in Transfigurations".
214 Ibid., 68.
“And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white”. The Latin word transfiguration refer to ‘a change to another form’, while the Greek word metamorphosis means to ‘progress from one state of being to another.’ Therefore Transformation is said to a revelation of Christ’s divine nature. In this process of transfiguration, Christ lets his disciples catch a glimpse of a supernatural light with its transforming power – they were not blinded by natural sunlight, but by the uncreated light that has its source in God’s own being. Because of his divine identity, Christ is himself that light.

Transfigurations present the capability of human being to totally transform their inner selves. Viola explores the phenomena of sense perception as a path to self-knowledge. His works concentrate on universal human experiences—birth, death, the unfolding of consciousness—and have roots in both Eastern and Western art as well as spiritual traditions, including Zen Buddhism, Islamic Sufism, and Christian mysticism.

Figure 17: Acceptance  Figure 18: The Three Women  Figure 19: Visitation, Video still

Bill Viola, as parts of “Transfigurations” (A black and white video), 2008

215 Ibid. 216 Ibid. 217 Ibid. 218 Viola, "Bill Viola: Transformation from within at the Zen Center, San Francisco".
So not only is Viola’s ‘theology’, in line with that of Kandinsky from the perspective of transformative ‘alternate reality’, his work is also distinctly iconoclastic reminiscent of a devotion to the “sacred paintings of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance [portraying itself to be] an intense examination of the complex human physical and psychological condition, becoming both timeless and eternal because of its universal theme.”

Concerned with the ‘other’, this focuses on the human experiences of consciousness of despair and redemption. It is an invitation for refining the human’s sense of love.

In terms of philosophy, Viola’s transformative processes mimic Jean-Luc Nancy’s “sense of the mystery and profound depth” in *God, Justice, Love, and Beauty*, also philosopher-theologian Blaise Pascal ‘evocation of the mystery of the Redeemer’ and Immanuel Kant’s distinction between noumenal and phenomenal, moral and natural, creation and production, thought and cognition. These concepts are common to tradition of the three great monotheistic religions of the world (Justice in Judaism, Love in Christianity, and Mercy in Islam. As Nancy said “I can understand why people would want to take a little of this and a little of that, why they would like one aspect of one religion and another aspect of another religion. At that point there is no contradiction.”

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219 Wang, "Bill Viola: Unspoken at James Cohan Gallery Shanghai".
221 Ibid.
222 Ibid., 31.
Joseph Beuys

As mentioned in the introduction of this research, Kandinsky has been variously described as one of the “most exceptional, greatest revolutionaries of vision,”\(^{223}\) and Kandinsky's very famous and influential essay, *Geistige in der Kunst* (“On the Spiritual in Art”\(^{224}\) published in 1912, which is perhaps an analysis of the ‘spiritualised sensing’ espoused by Hegel (1770-1831), in his *Phenomenology of Mind* propounded the idea that the spirit “knows itself most through sense experiences”\(^{225}\) and a more intense idealisation in art was possible in terms of the interface between the spiritual and the *alchemical aesthetic*, or ‘aesthetic order of perception’ in transforming the perception of different states and ‘kinds of being’ unrelated to simple chemical processes of the body. This was essentially a methodology which Joseph Beuys labeled the ‘metaphysical occurrence’ in the human being\(^{226}\) (it is of interest that Beuys, Viola, and Kandinsky inter-relate significantly.

For Beuys, spirituality was Christian-based and there was little or no possibility of social change in a purely objective and materialist world, hence he thought that with materialism in art, there was little possibility of experiencing freedom as offered by Christ).\(^{227}\) He states:

“If you come in a space with a big flame of fire you will get burnt, and you cannot say: ‘This is the symbol of a flame’, because you will die of the heat of this flame. So is Christ not a symbol for something. It is the substance in itself. It means life. It means power, the power of life... Without this substance of Christ the earth would already have died.”\(^{228}\)

During the Second World War, Beuys flew in the German *Luftwaffe* and his plane was shot down. It is said that Tartars found him and kept him alive by wrapping him in animal fat and felt until soldiers brought him to a hospital. Thereafter Beuys watched

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\(^{223}\) Kuspit, “Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art”.
\(^{224}\) Ibid.
\(^{225}\) Ibid.
\(^{228}\) Ibid.
his country and Europe fall into ‘dark times.’ He believed that Western society was ‘wounded’ and morally bankrupt.229

Beuys’ work is at times described as prophetic. The prophet is one who, as Bruggemann says, embodies an “alternative consciousness” in such a way that he “serves to criticise in dismantling the dominant consciousness” and “energise persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move.”230 Beuys’ main concern was to evoke an alternative consciousness. His works are viewed as incentives for the transformation of the idea of social sculpture. They incite thoughts about how the concept of arts can be extended to the unseen materials that can be used by every individual in shaping and transforming thoughts, and the world.

Beuys believed that human freedom began with the recognition that “everyone is an artist, who - from his state of freedom – [learns] to determine the other positions in the total artwork of the future social order.”231 For Beuys, there was no hope for social change in a materialist world and, thus, no possibility of experiencing the freedom that Christ offered. He called religious activity “the thought process which surpasses everything.”232 This is why Beuys urgently appealed to humanity to restore their connection with a spiritual reality.

The wound is a potent and pervasive theme in Beuys’ work. Show Your Wound, 1974, (fig. 21233), touched on death and the possibility of regeneration and rebirth, and exhorted Germans to “show your wound.” In his famous I Like America and America Likes Me, the wound notion reappears. Beuys is able to tame the wild wolf, that actually lays harmlessly upon his lap. The wound is recognised and healed. It becomes “reconciliation between the New World and the Old World, between different races, animal and man, nature and culture.”234

229 Ibid.
234 ”The Wound and the Coyote: Joseph Beuys’ Spiritual Vision.”
So, what are our wounds, and how might art be brought into service of healing them? It seems that for Beuys, socio-political change was important in transforming the world and created a ‘transfiguration’ within any society.

In contemporary art today, I am drawn to the ‘Transfiguration’ artworks of the artists: Bill Viola, (fig. 11); and Ai Wei Wei, figure 22.²³⁵

“for the 2013 Venice Art Biennale, German Pavilion, Ai Wei Wei’s Work ‘bang’ employs 886-three legged wooden stools made by traditional craftsmen whose expertise is now something that is rare to find, and has installed an expansive rhizomatic structure which speaks of the increasing volumes of organisms in our world’s megacities,”²³⁶ and “[t]he single stool can be interpreted as a metaphor for the individual, and its relation to an overarching and excessive system in a postmodern world which is developing faster than it can keep up with.”²³⁷

²³⁶ Ibid.
²³⁷ Ibid.
In Beuy’s “Sonne Statt Reagan” his ‘active performance art’ suggested that art may exercise a healing effect (on both the viewer and the artist) in the context of psychological, social, and political spheres.

In his 1965 solo performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, (fig. 23) “taking the role of shaman artist that connects sound, silence to spirituality” in which ‘alchemy’ materials (gold leaf and deceased animal) of spiritual significance poetically “suggest the healing potential of art for a humanity seeking self revitalisation and a sense of renewed hope in the future [where] alchemy ‘represents conductivity and is associated with transformation of human conduct through the principles of socialism, cooperation and brotherhood.” This was particularly true for Beuys who

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239 Art-Story, “Joseph Beuys”.
“came of age in the immediate postwar period, when many Germans were just coming to terms with many traumatic aspects of their recent past.”244

In his final speech in January 1986, he said that Lehmbrock had taught him not only to understand “sculpture in spatial terms, but also to take spiritual power as the fundamental motive behind the act of giving form. Beuys connected this notion to his own ideas about political reform and social evolution.”245

(It is noteworthy that the word ‘alchemy’ is Arabic in origin, derived from al-kimya, meaning “chemistry” (or ‘spagyric art’ in a reference to Greek words meaning ‘to separate’ and ‘to join’). Alchemical terms are metaphors having a philosophical metaphysical religious meaning as per the biblical verse “the words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.”246)

In relation to the rapidly changing sphere of Western economy, Beuys thought that art ought not to be considered a product of pure economic rationalism. He said “I would allow the artistic principle and the economic principle to completely flow over into each other...our basic production then is the quality of human consciousness and human thought”247 and that “[i]ntuition is a superior form of thinking, an enlarged consciousness in which one realises that man is free.”248

Figure 23: Joseph Beuys, How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare, Performance, 1965.

244 Art-Story, "Joseph Beuys".
247 Wijers, "Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy".
248 Ibid.
In this vein artists need to create the change through arts with the ‘natural gift’ of art helping human evolution along “the liberating and spiritualising force.”

This chapter has examined the ideas suggested by four contemporary theorists to ‘re-think’ and ‘re-discover’ ourselves and the world, so that we may shape our realities. It has also discussed the artworks of two contemporary artists: Viola and Beuys - in terms of preparing viewers to spiritual and socio-political transformation, hoping to influence their intellect, their ‘inner life’ and ‘outer life’.

In the next chapter I will explain my artwork development and how I investigate that light and various materials can be a tool to effect the viewer’s perception, seeking their transformation.

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249 Finley Eversole, *Art and Spiritual Transformation, the Seven Stages of Death and Rebirth* (Rochester, Vermont, USA: Inner Traditions, Bear & Company, 2009).
Chapter Three

Light of Light

The development of my work

“…. and [Turrell] helped Chuck Close lie down to experience the phenomenon. Staring up, Close was struck in equal parts by the power of the illusion and its subtlety. ‘He’s an orchestrator of experience,’ Close said, ‘not a creator of cheap effects. And every artist knows how cheap an effect is, and how revolutionary an experience.’”

I have attempted to use light as a material to impinge the medium of perception. Light is a magical elixir that we experience to recreate our reality in the world through our sensory body.

Marcelle Mansour, 2013

The major objective of this paper is to inform my own practice, in terms of this research, I commenced in 2011 when I produced my Master of Studio Arts (MSA) project, Light in Spiritual Monochrome, (fig. 24), which involved producing natural light in metallic/gold leaf paintings on pine timber boards. This was the starting point where I shifted from the representational to abstract. I was told by my supervisor Dr Debra Dawes that my artwork had the feeling of the simplicity and the spirituality of Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematism, defined as an altogether new and direct form of representation of the world of feeling. Malevich stated “I have transformed myself into the zero of form” and he portrayed his work Black Square as “sensation in infinity” explaining that “this desert is filled with spirit of nonobjective sensation which pervades everything.”

3.11.
The inspiration for my previous MSA artwork was *Light in Spiritual Monochrome when reflected on gold leaf*, making the ‘invisible perceivable’. Using light as ‘material’ is a tool of subjective and mystical experience of what I call the ‘illuminating light’, because I believe ‘eternal light’ leads to ‘thought’ by moving viewers from the physical to the spiritual realm.

This is where the ‘invisible becomes visible’ as light ‘shineth in darkness’\(^{253}\). The ‘light-darkness dualism’ reveals the ‘light of the world’ emanating from the light of the artwork. This helps transform the viewer, thus “*while ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light*”\(^{254}\). This occurs through the contemplation of the illuminating light that is a ‘spiritually silent conversation’ which gazes through light into the next world, forming an infinite revelation of ‘eternal light’. This meditative eye gaze contributes in helping to constitute the transformation in people’s souls, hearts and minds which may lead to healing.

![Light in Spiritual Monochrome](image)

*Figure 24. Marcelle Mansour, Light in Spiritual Monochrome, 2011.*

*(gold leaf on pine) 40 x30 x1.8 cm each at SCA Gallery*

Needless to say my work involves philosophical-theoretical and indeed, political engagement as an immigrant who experienced change of space, society, body politic and what it means to be an artist. As part of my journey I explore the natural world of light as a focal point, a metaphor for an imaginative journey.


One of my research aims is to see how light and various materials can be a tool to effect change in the viewer through perception. The phenomenological perception of concepts of ‘truth’ and ‘presence’ is appealing to me because perception of ‘non-objects’ or nothingness may depend on the observer’s point of view and a viewer’s perception of reality.  

Hence I made my works have both an iconic (‘iconoclastic modernism’) and a sense of spirituality, at the same time sensuous, as well as intellectual. In Turrell’s own words: “art is cerebral, but it also possesses a great beauty. It is sensuous as well as it is intellectual, and, some would say mystical as well as rational.”

The development of my work

My work was previously limited to flat paintings, but I wanted my art to communicate more by expressing my thoughts and feelings. I began some Eastern forms of cut felt material, fixed on matboard and timber board and observed how the natural light can be filtered with the intention to incorporate it with the artificial light. See Diptych (fig. 25 and 26), *The Puzzle of the Labyrinth*, searching the way and the “confusion of our lostness.” I also produced a considerable number of geometric artworks with the theme of change.

![Figure 25 & 26. Marcelle Mansour, Diptych, *The Puzzle of the Labyrinth, I & II* 2012. Painting. Felt on matboard and pine timber, 40x30x1.8cm each.](image)

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256 Adcock, *The Art of Light and Space* 208-09.

Then, I produced 3D geometric works, *Symmetrical I & II*, (fig.27 & 28) where I cut white matboard systematically to see how natural light falls off on timber and how the shadow and the sun changes colour and travels into all opposite directions.

I found this 3D geometric effect gave more meaning to my expression, but as my ideas were still forming I thought of using real light as a medium, using physical-electric light to focus on the light, and its transformative aspects. I hence commenced experimenting to achieve more transparency and luminosity, literally, to ‘illuminate more light’. I used an installation room to experiment in light and objects. I installed a considerable number of commercially available fluorescent light fixtures, *Untitled, 2012* (fig.29) vertically on the floor, around the walls, where the light is constantly switched on. I also installed smaller lights and crystal objects, including a crystal quartz rock and scrims of gauze and silk. I have supplemented the work by using readymade objects and natural materials. These preparations have provided me with the opportunity of testing various light reflections and objects to achieve the perceptual feelings and the effects I sought. I consequently found only one part appeared to be useful.
Comparing the works of my first and my second semesters in 2012, I have concluded that some works are more expressive of my thoughts and feelings than the others, but I remained unsatisfied with the results. I continued experimenting with light installation, developing further ideas, I felt the concept of the 'light' tool needed to be dominant in my work.

I decided not to use the static light textures, alternatively, I thought of the multi-coloured light with its effect of movement depicting transformation thematically with dynamic energy was the right method. I experimented with my new idea of using light as medium and observing the changing colour and its dynamic movement (fig.30).

I also equipped my work with a range of different objects and materials to help me experiment more efficiently as my curiosity increased. I obtained made-to-order clear
acrylic cubes to recreate the three dimensions in light. I also used some metallic steel pieces, or acrylic/glass/crystal shapes to focus on the true sense of light as well as its dynamism and movement of its colourful energies.

So far, my art uses manufactured, battery operated light together with specific objects such as glass, crystal and installations. It focuses on perception, exploring the meaning of Kandinsky's ‘inner’ life, and the emotionality of light as a metaphor of the mind’s gaze, conveying the meaning of immateriality, immortality, eternity and invisibility of the metaphysical world.

The concept of the installation as expected was adjusted several times to fine-tune the result.

One of my artworks blends words in the light such as ‘...Love Your Enemies’. The work generally expresses and captures the passion behind each component of installation conveying to the observer that which “lies behind my painting”\(^\text{258}\) with a positive inner feeling and emotional appeal of spiritual sensing (similar to the *supreme transcendence* of Mark Rothko).

I also observed the absorption, reflection and transmission of light. Some of the light waves were absorbed by the object, with their energies converting to heat. The light wave could be reflected or transmitted by the object.

*Threshold* is the theme of my research and exhibition and is defined as the entrance to any point of entering or beginning something. It marks the boundary between two worlds of old and new when the transformation happens to cause the renewal and rebirth to exist. I have explored using light as a material to attain my aim.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, both the contemporary iconoclastic and light artists’ influences and their methodology informed my own work. Integrating knowledge of spirituality, philosophy and phenomenology with experimentation in light contemplation, I arrived at a state similar to that described by many mystics – one in which both the phenomenology of material (its perception) and its physicality no longer conflict. I intend to show that the bridge between the two is *light* – ‘unnatural light’ or even ‘miraculous light’.

With light there is a ‘two way’ juncture, either ‘from God to the person/world’ or ‘from the person/world to God’. Irrespective, it matters little which way I start my journey as

\(^{258}\) Kuspit, “Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art”.
long as I am able to use light as a manifestation, a representation and a source of the ‘holy’ and sacred subsistent light/energy which emanates from all material (again to enable the viewer to experience the inner life).

Then this revelation from ‘light to life’ or ‘the mystery of Divine light’ motivates me to invite my viewers to cross the light-to-life bridge. Through my research and work, I feel compelled to express the mighty presence of this light. I want to explore, the ‘miraculous light’. Here, refer to the ‘Holy Fire’ in Jerusalem. Focusing on light and spirituality, the intent is to explore the transformative process of materials expressed immateriality via rebirth, the divine mind, the spiritual sense, and the transcendental. These are to conclude that it is possible for art to effect change and unite people by the humanist value of peace.

As the work developed I liked the effect of moving light in a circular fashion whilst changing the dynamics of the movement. This was my aim: to achieve inegmatic, mystic, relaxing, contemplative, meditative seductive transformation. Transformation, 2013. (fig.31). This is the middle section enlarged from Transformation, (fig 33) page 52.

Figure 31. Marcelle Mansour, Transformation, 2013. Painting. Enlarged from 44x33x14cm
After spending considerable time experimenting, and “experiencing the phenomena,”\textsuperscript{259} I explored “how revolutionary an experience”\textsuperscript{260} this is. As in changed coloured light can be seen in \textit{Circulating Shifting Light, 2013}. (fig. 32).

![Figure 32. Marcelle Mansour, \textit{Circulating Shifting Light, 2013.} Painting.](image)

At this stage I still did not know how to exhibit these experiments light effectively, until I thought of making box-like ‘units’. I decided to use the same timber in (fig. 27 and 28) to exhibit my three dimensional paintings using light.

This way the light is meant to be the material, and the painting and the timber unit is made similar to Donald Judd’s work of timber units in his \textit{Untitled, 1975}, to ‘contain the light’ inside the void.

Hence the work consists of a series of vertical three-dimensional rectangular units which are made in a modular ‘given’\textsuperscript{261} way from pine timber. These units are open and filled with artificial lights. The medium of the work in this case is the mixture of natural light (on the pine raw timber panels) and the colourful artificial shifting light that creates a movement and contemplative environment. The format is there is nothing in each unit except light contained in the space of the wooden panel, constructing a unique and an effective form: paintings are in shapes of changeable colourful light. (fig 33).

These identical wooden boxes measuring 44x33x14cm. are to be installed on a wall spaced at equal intervals. That is the same size and kind of timber I previously used (similar to holy icons). Therefore the wood is deliberately and carefully chosen which keeps the grain with a glowing natural colour.\textsuperscript{262} This determines the light falling into and around each box. Accordingly, the display room is expected to be dark, because

\textsuperscript{259} HYLTON, “How James Turrell Knocked the Art World Off Its Feet”.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{261} Donald Judd, \textit{Untitled, 1975}. John Kaldor Family Collection at the Art Gallery of NSW
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid.
these units are all open and filled with colourful light. As the light keeps moving and changing, it invites the viewer to look into each unit in particular, are in general, to experience the presence of immateriality of the phenomenal perception of the powerful light. *Transformation I*, 2013. (fig.33)

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 33. Marcelle Mansour, *Transformation I*, 2013. Light in timber. Painting. 44x33x14cm.

In terms of using spiritual symbolic materials, I became fascinated with the beauty and the feel, and the sensitivity of light-reflection. Light to me symbolises *Truth*. Symbolism is also pronounced in a way similar to the symbolism of Beuys, I am using light to signify the Christian faith that symbolises my spirituality that is based on my *Eastern Antiochian Orthodox* faith which heals humanity as in to heal a wound or the *nous* (intellect “*dianoia*”) with the ‘Church’ acting as a “hospital” curing the wounded through therapy.

Beuys, for example, associated materials and elements which influenced him and linked him to the past “and through repeated use they attained a personal symbolism [having] magical or therapeutic power both for Beuys and for the audience.” Examples include felt and gold leaf. Beuys also recognised that specific foods had roots in certain religions or traditions. For example bread, fish and honey carry symbolic

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265 Rekow, "Joseph Beuys, Materials."
meaning in the Christian faith. In this same vein, some materials seemed to me to have a power of therapy. For example the light appears from behind the Holy Bread, *Moonlife* (fig. 34). The moon itself has no light, but it projects the light that is generated by the sun, like a mirror reflecting light and changing shapes.

![Figure 34. Marcelle Mansour, Moonlife, 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.](image)

I also incorporated gauze in my work which is used for medical purposes to heal wounds. For me, gauze is a healing metaphor; to heal humanity's wounds. The word ‘Gauze’ originates from ‘Gaza’ (my birth place) the Palestinian city associated with the production of the material, or from ‘Gaze’ (Arabic ‘gazz’; ‘raw silk’). I also employed gold leaf, used for icons in the Orthodox Church as a symbol of the presence of God. In addition, to using other materials such as marbles, salt, holy water, frankincense, olive oil and earth sands which are brought from Jerusalem and have a significant meaning in the scriptures.

Orthodox worship is characterised by a ‘complete utilisation of the senses’ sighting (light), smell (incense), hearing, (sound), taste (salt) and touch (oil). We see the light of candles and icons, we hear the sounds of singing, and we smell the characteristic aroma of the incense. The whole of the person and body is involved in reverential worship to reinforce the sense of reverence: In my work *Five Senses*, (fig 35) 2013, these materials are used to symbolise the five senses.

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266 Ibid.
268 Monastery, “Orthodox Prayer”.

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Referring also to (fig. 36) *Healing the Wounds* 2013, the gauze appears to be wrapping the wound which takes the shape of a new baby being formed in the womb as a sign of transforming life where rebirth can be perceived in healing. I am reminded here of Viola’s (rebirth), Beuys’ (wound) and Turrell’s light (feeling with your eye).

There is also the reality of the ‘inner’ (about which Kandinsky spoke as the ‘inner necessity’ of ‘spiritual sensing’) which for me is the truth which manifests itself in light. Light is therefore the material in unveiling this truth by ‘feeling it’– perceiving it through other-worldly senses, or in Kantian ‘mind’s eye’, the ‘spiritual eye’ or (in
Orthodox faith where perception becomes reality. As Kandinsky said “I want people to see finally what lies behind my painting”

I want the observer, through spiritual light to ‘see’ that which is invisible from the realm of ‘space-time’, a ‘deliberate silence’ leading to purification of the observer and the artist, thereby bringing about a ‘transformation,’ as in Turrell’s words: “to look into, not to look at.” “The spiritual sensing functions like a spiral leading the wanderer-seeker to its centre.” “The spiral symbolises the recycling of life experiences in the context of an ever widening consciousness and growing capacity to benefit from life’s lessons.” (fig. 37) Spiritual Sensing, 2013.) and (fig. 38), Inner Depth, 2013.

Figure 37. Marcelle Mansour, Spiritual Sensing, 2013. Painting. Paper cut movement. 44x33x14cm.

270 Kuspit, “Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art”.
271 Maurice Tuchman, “Concerning the Spiritual in Contemporary Art,” 314.
273 Butterfield, The Art of Light and Space, 79.
275 Ibid., 211.
In a practical and ‘material’ sense, to which Kandinsky and Beuys refer, my art is created from the raw material physically constituting it, but these do not give it meaning in a ‘spiritual sensing way’. Light as my medium, the materials and the tools I work with; all help me convey the message of the spiritual meaning. It is the presence which is perceived through the changeable colours. I am reminded of Turrell’s *Bridget’s Bardo (Gansfeld Piece)* 2008, where viewers are immersed in a bath of changeable colourful pure light. Turrell described this as ‘feeling with your eyes’ and a spiritual experience. This to me is not a simple or superficial optical illusion of the eye fooling the mind, but rather it is the perception of truth and of universality with the mind’s eye. The viewer becomes an active participant in the work and in fact creates the reality which the work brings about; perhaps that would be the reality of peace based on their point of view in space-time, their background, idiosyncrasies, and thought.

My artwork of *The Mandilion*, 2013 (fig. 39) I am reminded of Bill Viola’s *Unspoken, Veil of St. Veronica, 2001*, (fig.14) which is said to carry the mark of Christ’s face. Viola’s work on the silver panel 14and (fig. 15) The *Holy Mandylion of Christ (Napkin Icon)*, bears a resemblance to the imprint of the face of Christ visible on the cloth veil (that portrait “miraculously left by Jesus on the veil that Veronica used to wipe his face” thus it becomes an overpowering meditation on worldly suffering and spiritual hope which shows the art’s healing function because such “icon expresses the indissoluble link between death and resurrection and exalts.” The ‘imprint icon’ tells the story “of Prince Abgar who was infected with leprosy, and he heard of Christ the Healer of every disease, and sent an artist, Ananias to Palestine with a letter to Christ and brought back a towel wiped by Christ on his face, which pictures the face.

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276 Wolfsburg, “The Wolfsburg Project?- James Turrell at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg ”.
277 Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, 235.
278 Ibid., 236.
Receiving the towel, Prince Abgar kissed it and he was healed. These images of the Christ’ face imprints of (fig. 15) and (fig.39), can be described as timeless and eternal because of their universal theme, for their artistic value remains in their meaning.

Figure 39. Marcelle Mansour, *The Mandylion*, 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.

*Windows to Heaven, 2013* (fig. 40, 41, 42, & 43), refer to Holy Icons which are customary in all Eastern Orthodox Churches, and are often called “windows to heaven,”

Figure 40. Marcelle Mansour, *Windows to Heaven I*, 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.

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The *Portrait, 2013* image (fig. 44) is a handmade tiny blank board, made of genuine 24ct gold leaf with no image at all (similar to my MSA work (fig. 24)). As it can be seen below, the light is reflected on the empty image and creates an interesting iconoclastic abstraction as a result of shifting colourful light. I will leave the significance to the viewers’ interpretation in how and what sense they perceive the image. I believe all of us - as in (Beuys ‘everybody is an artist) can make changes to ‘our image’ through light-perception. At this stage I perceive myself as transformed and hopefully so are the viewers.
As illustrated in my artwork The Heartbeat, 2013. (fig. 45), the awareness to the action of seeing is essential to the work. The work contributes to change and to ‘transformation’ in the sense discussed previously, with the viewer becoming aware of light, its energy, possibly its wave-nature, its movements and its continuous flow from dark to light, interlaced with light flashes. When the light flashes it reminds us of our existence, as we perceive. When the light is off it is a sign of our death or darkness. We are reminded of our mortal existence. We realise that we need the light to be spiritually transformed.

![Image of The Heartbeat](image)

Figure 45. Marcelle Mansour, *Heartbeat*, 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.

*World Centre* 2013, (fig.46), I concentrate on the ‘centre’. It is the centre of Light and Life. It is the centre of a visual field and the point of balance where all forces come to rest. The symbolism of the centre is about inward consciousness to unity and infinity, not being contained within the finite and eternally open, “the finding of the way is the starting point of another journey.”

Using metaphorical and analogical thinking is an important objective in exploring my own vision. My spiritual journey into a future Jerusalem is a metaphor in itself. Jerusalem is the centre of the world. The ‘new city of Jerusalem as a bride’ is a metaphor for peace. The ‘marriage of heaven and earth’, materiality and immortality are integrated. Light is seen turning. *World Centre*, 2013. (fig. 46),

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Alchemy is the art of liberating parts of the Cosmos from temporal existence and achieving perfection. It is similar to gold in metals and immortality in us. Material perfection was sought through the action of a preparation (Philosopher’s Stone for metals; Elixir of Life for humans), while spiritual ennoblement resulted from some form of inner enlightenment. The use of alchemy (fig. 47) in my paintings to reflect the light is a metaphor of transformation. The process of transformation is that ‘I change timber into gold’ (fig. 44) and (fig. 24). Timber is a symbol of human beings who are perishable and gold is the symbol of the immortal divine.

This image of the Sky and Horizon, 2013 (fig. 48), the use of perspective gives a sense of three-dimensional depth and theological meaning. The vanishing point is at the viewer’s sight and expanding as one “enters” the world of the scene that creates a sense
of opening up. It shows the perspectives of individuals from themselves and the world, where as Merleau-Ponty suggested the structure of perception is the central theme of consciousness and existential bodies of the world already there\footnote{Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception. 346.} since we do not grasp space directly through our senses but through our bodily situation. Space is the central perspective which regulates perceptions with its perspective having no other location than that “given by the body.”\footnote{Grosz, Volatile Bodies : Toward a Corporeal Feminism 90.} Our bodies are placed in the centre of a location that is cauterised by having a reversed perspective to perceive correctly with our sensory body. As an artist I like to situate myself in a spot in the world where I can have reserved perspective, situating myself in the spot of the triangle point to uncover the process of perception and to reveal the diverse changes of meaning across cultures. It is an experience of transformation for both the viewer and the artist. “The horizon....not extend .... unless they could be converted into points by transference of the gaze.”\footnote{Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception}

![Figure 48. Marcelle Mansour, Sky and Horizon, 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.](image-url)
Examples of, *Reversed Perspectives I & II, 2013*, (fig. 49 and 50) are shown below:

Figure 49. Marcelle Mansour, *Reversed Perspectives I* 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.

Figure 50. Marcelle Mansour, *Reversed Perspectives II* 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.
In the image of *Inverse Reflection of Perception*, (fig.51) explains Merleau-Ponty’s words: “This relation of reason to fact is like that of reflection to the unreflective or of thought to perception is this two-way relationship (thought-to-perception relationship) that phenomenology has called *the originator* \(^{286}\) where perception constitutes the world and *vice versa*.

![Fig. 51. Marcelle Mansour, *Inverse Reflection of Perception*, 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.](attachment:image.jpg)

These images of *The Threshold I & II*, (fig.52 and fig.53) illustrate the step to transformation, or the threshold between life and death, which could be explained by throwing out the old persona of ourselves and receiving the new of us, the old has gone and the new soul has come. I am reminded of Bill Viola’s work of the threshold between life and death. “Finally, to cross the threshold and centre, new reality is to gain knowledge belonging to a New World, a new to the initiate, through eternally present.”\(^{287}\)

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\(^{286}\) Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

\(^{287}\) Smithson, “The Spiral or Infinite Journey,” 232.
The journey of transformation goes through different stages to develop, striving to achieve the goal. “A mature personality is the indispensable foundation of a spiritual life that in time leads to transfiguration, illumination and liberation.”

Referring to the artwork of *Transfiguration, 2013, (fig.54)*

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288 Eversole, *Art and Spiritual Transformation, the Seven Stages of Death and Rebirth*, 6.
Figures 55. Marcelle Mansour, *Transfiguration II*, 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm each.

*Metamorphosis* artwork (fig.56) refers to the moment when a person is being transformed and transfigured, suggesting a complete reformation in the radiation of blue blinding light.

Figure 56. Marcelle Mansour, *Metamorphosis*, 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.
In the artist’s mind, transfiguration is a mind and body experience where the inner self is completely transformed with the *Duality and the Union of the* body and soul, (fig. 57 & 58)

Figure 57. Marcelle Mansour, *Duality*, 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.

Figure 58. Marcelle Mansour, *Union* 2013. Painting. 44x33x14cm.
I depict the image of *The Chair, 2013*, (fig.59) which is important in my work. There is no actual chair in the image except projected light forming a chair. The meaning is significant; it is an allegory which could be understood as either the Bible chair, or a Government Chair, or a University’s Chair, or any individual’s Chair. For the function of ‘The Chair’ is diverse and is the centre of light, knowledge and wisdom, where it prepares the new future as part of our renewal and transformation.

Figure 59. Marcelle Mansour, *The Chair, 2013*. Painting. 44x33x14cm.
“...Love your enemies” artwork (fig. 60) is King James Version (KJV) Bible’s verse, Matthew 5:44, inspired by the Scripture text, I have used the three main languages of the three main religions; English, Arabic and Hebrew. It is a sincere call to love all people.

Figure 60. Marcelle Mansour, “... Love Your Enemies, Matthew 5:44”, 2013. Painting x33x14cm.
The final artworks of *the Instrument for Peace I, II & II, 2013*, (fig.61, 62 & 63), I have used a crystal object, to show the luminosity of the artist’s ultimate goal where I am already transformed to music instrument which tonalities outreaching world-wide. “The body is my being-to-the-world and as such is the ‘instrument’ by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated.” Instrument for peace “....seek peace and pursue it” KJV Bible’s verse, psalm 34:14. When we transform we would actively pursue what is good, we become a people with a passion to “wage peace.” Therefore we are affected to change as (artists and viewers). In my transformation and renewal, I have become an instrument for peace to bring to the world comfort, healing and peace. When there is no way to peace, (a just) peace is the only way.

Having intensively experimented and created pieces of art, influenced by the power of light and the contemporary spiritual and light artists, I find it is inspiring when I perceive light waves reflecting off the smooth surfaces of ‘alchemical’ materials. This light is dynamically moving and shifting colours, being meditative, aiding perception and conveying the meaning of spirituality and socio-political transformation.

I have used light as a material and perception as a medium, to allow the viewer to experience the engagement with the light as a contemplative tool through our sensory bodies. The work’s implication of philosophical and theoretical meaning is based on Eastern Christian mysticism and light phenomenology. I have perceived this as a kind of *universal light* which inspires me and allows me to express my wishes and feelings of peace. This sense of *ex nihilo* might inspire others to re-create our realities in the world.

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289 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* 90.
Conclusion

“The plain lesson of these observations is that works of art do not represent “reality,” “the real world,” or “everyday life,” even if those terms are taken to carry a specific or meaningful reference. Rather, art creates realities and worlds.” People perceive and conceive in the light of narratives, pictures and images. That is why art is central to politics, just as it is central to social relationships and to beliefs about nature.’

Murray Edelman

Implicit in this research are a set of beliefs that may test how we think about art and the role of art in the contemporary world. This is my view, it is particular, in the sense that it has been shaped by the continuing crisis of the war in Palestine. In response to this situation within the context of art practice, I have spoken of the kind of art that may transform and which I believe can advance the human spirit.

I have drawn on the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and other theorists Madsen, Henry, Kant, and Grosz. I have also mentioned artists Kandinsky and Malevich in the introduction. I have affirmed the importance of non-intentionality in revealing the invisible truth via the inner eye, via mind and body.

My research has shown how spirituality as a concept is validated and relevant to contemporary art today. My work has used light as a material and perception as a medium, which has the potential to raise consciousness in the viewers’ mind. Hopefully they can be moved to contemplate the ‘presence’. The sense of transformation can be experienced in the shifting colours of light.

It has also investigated at length a number of the artworks of contemporary artists: Irwin, Turrell, Viola, and Beuys. It has also shown that I have produced a considerable number of artworks (on ‘trial and error’ basis) that have presented my approach as an artist, who aspires to effect socio-political change. An example of a trial and error is fig.36; the object didn’t work very well with light.

In Irwin’s mathematical calculation “two plus two equals five”, he teaches perception by focusing on the energy instead of the image appearance, to feel the sense of ‘presence’ rather than a sense of physicality. In his ‘trial and error’ process he focuses on the ‘how’ factor. An example is in his Dot Paintings, Untitled, 1965, (fig.1) and (fig.3). It is

important how we perceive life to change our reality. While creating my work – on trial and error- seeing the light reflection, I was observing and perceiving the invisible and searching the truth.

Turrell’s art is imbued with the ‘sublimity’ of the truth in changing colours of pure light which brings the viewers to a different realm of imagination. His work impinged the eye, body, and mind with the power of ‘spiritual awakening’. Informed by perceptual psychology. This has permitted me to view ‘myself seeing’ because the more I perceive the more I create for social change.

In reference to change, it is not only through art perception and changing colours, but to the renewal of birth through spirituality. Viola’s work is conclusive since it is imbued with transformation based on Christianity and of immersing in water. His work ‘wash away’ the old by breaking ‘the threshold of perception’ to bring the spiritual sense of rebirth. In my work I have explored the phenomena of sense perception as a path to self-knowledge by focusing on human experiences of rebirth recalling Viola’s works that have roots in both Eastern and Western art and spiritual traditions.

The role of art is empowering and can play an effective role in changing society or healing our wounds. Beuys took this notion seriously and communicated his brilliant idea that ‘everybody is an artist’. His influential philosophical-political work is exemplary in bringing together art, social responsibility and morality.

My view is related as I believe that art can advance the human vision. In my work I have spoken of the kind of art that may transform the world and nations which suffer from oppression, occupation and in Diaspora resulting from war. They have permanent wounds that can be ‘healed’ via the new humanity. This is the reason I intend to incorporate social change into my creative practice. Perhaps it helps extending from the ‘microcosm’ to ‘macrocosm’ and towards humanistic, civil and democratic co-existence, supporting a just peace for the Palestinian cause, in the words of Nancy “an experience that makes us be.”

This research paper and creative work have provided me with the opportunity to have a considerable artistic experience where “the viewers’ act becomes reflective” as an integral part of my work and has enriched my creative and thinking ability. I am looking forward to developing further within the exploration of my art practice in the future.

Bibliography


(‘empreuve de soi’) and phenomenological, intentionality : since it is precisely not a manifestation of something It remains invisible within the horizon of intentional consciousness because it was always there was immanent and self-evident.


"Bill Viola, Ocean without a Shore." NGV International.


desired, Pathos is plural of Patho meaning to awakening emotions in the audience so as to induce them to make the judgment.


———. "His Eminence Archbishop's Dr. Atallah Hanna's Message to Austrlian Immigrants During His Visit in Sydney." [In Arabic ]. El-Telegraph Arabic Newspaper, no. 5700 (September 11, 2013 2013).


Noesis and noema from the Greek verb noéō (νοέω), meaning to perceive, think, intend, whence the noun nous or mind. The intentional process of consciousness is called noesis, while its ideal content is called noema.


Marcelle Mansour
Catalogue of Works

Artwork (1.) Marcelle Mansour, 2013. Healing, Painting, 44x33x14cm.
Artwork (2.) Marcelle Mansour, 2013. Illumination, 44x33x14cm.
Artwork (3.) Marcelle Mansour, 2013. Transformation I, Painting, 44x33x14cm.
Artwork (4.) Marcelle Mansour, 2013. Threshold, Painting, 44x33x14cm.
Artwork (5.) Marcelle Mansour, 2013. Metamorphosis 44x33x14cm.
Artwork (6.) Marcelle Mansour, 2013. Liberation, 44x33x14cm.
Artwork (7.) Marcelle Mansour, 2013. Transfiguration, 44x33x14cm.
Artwork (8.) Marcelle Mansour, 2013. Inner Depth, Painting, 44x33x14cm.
Artwork (9.) Marcelle Mansour, 2013. Five Senses, Painting, 44x33x14cm.

Exam Exhibition
Nine artworks from Installation of artworks (paintings) Marcelle Mansour shown in SCA Postgraduate Exhibition, held 5th December to 11th December, 2013.
(1.) Healing          (2.) Illumination           (3.) Transformation

(4.) Threshold                             (5.) Metamorphosis                          (6.) Liberation

(7.) Transfiguration                           (8.) Inner Depth                          (9.) Five Senses
Marcelle Mansour _ Category 1 Healing, Painting, 2013

Marcelle Mansour _ Category 2, Painting, 2013

Marcelle Mansour _ Category 3, Painting, 2013