PHOTOGRAPHY AS GAZE, PAINTING AS CARESS

by

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

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, University of Sydney. This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or other purposes. I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Aimee Fitzgerald

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Summary

Photography and painting have been posited as antagonistic mediums since the former’s inception in the 19th century, and despite generations of artists working across the mediums and disavowing the divide, it still looms large in our cultural imagination. This paper discusses the history of photography and painting as critical adversaries and practical allies, from both a historical and conceptual perspective, with a final segue to the history of gendered looking in art, and the rarity of a ‘female gaze’.

My master’s work comprises a series of paintings that are in conversation with photographs I have taken of my partner sleeping. Using intimate portraits in a combination of painting and photography I attempt to draw out dissonant attitudes to authenticity, artistic value and the ‘reality content’ of images. The work interrogates our disparate reactions between photographs and paintings that recreate photographs, using the unique strengths of each to challenge and complicate our instinctive ‘reading’ of the image. They are diverse in style and presentation, while constant in subject. The examination/exhibition will take place in June at the SCA Galleries, and will consist of at least ten paintings on various media (including but not limited to paper, glass, aluminium, and wood).
Introduction

Painting and photography are the dominant modes of representation and visual knowledge in contemporary Western culture, and yet they are typically posited historically and conceptually in opposition. Since its invention in the 19th century, photography has dominated institutional archives, family history and mass media, whereas painting has, somewhat in response to this new challenger, become our primary reference for the distant past, high culture, and our conceptions of what a ‘pure’ form of art looks like. In various contexts in the art world, the mediums have shifted in relation to one another as allies and adversaries — in contemporary critical art theory they exist primarily as adversaries, constituting fundamentally different types of knowledge that are considered antithetical, whereas in the practical world of actual art-making there are very few painters working today who fully eschew the occasional photographic reference, and few photographers who could say they have no compositional or aesthetic influence from painting. My work engages with this problem: How to incorporate the photograph into the painting; how to incorporate painting into the photograph.

My practice up until this point has been entirely photographic, and this new work is, to some extent, an extreme emotional response to the limit of the photograph’s capacity for expressive representation.

When photography was invented in various forms in the nineteenth century there was an ebullient response from the public, and a despairing one from the art world. Everyday people could suddenly get what they had wanted from art (primarily, archival traces of their lives: photography quickly became known as the “art of the Person: of identity, of civil status”1), for a fraction of the price of a painted or engraved portrait, and the purpose of fine art (which had, up until that point, been both the primary form of practical illustration and of cultural production) was called into question. As Walter Benjamin recounted it almost a century later,

“The nineteenth-century dispute as to the artistic value of painting versus photography today seems devious and confused. This does not diminish its importance, however; if anything, it underlines it. The dispute was in fact the symptom of a historical transformation the universal impact of which was not realized by either of the rivals. When the age of mechanical

reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever.”

This frisson between photography and painting as a historical artefact is of interest to my work because I like to deconstruct problems etymologically, excavating the ways in which conflicts are, as Roland Barthes would phrase it, “antigenetic,” or informed by their place in history. It is worthwhile to realise, before any discussion of the teleological conflicts of painting and photography, that some of the acrimony in nineteenth century sources is informed by the loss of work for engravers and miniature painters that occurred at that time, which is itself a microcosm of the hugely disorientating social and artistic shift that photography represented for a previously comfortable art world. Having mapped the area of conflict historically, my paper will consequently discuss painting and photography as conceptually oppositional mediums, with different capacities for representation and visual knowledge.

While each medium has a very different visual ‘default’ or ‘style’, the difference between painting and photography is not primarily, or even significantly, aesthetic. The rift between mediums is borne of their mode of production and how it defines their perceived capacity for ‘authentic’ images. In photography, the image is produced through literal mechanical transcription of a scene via a machine, and the photographer’s hand shows itself primarily through skilful manipulation (or conscious non-manipulation) of the scene or the mechanical process, more of a “guiding of perception.”

In a society heavily biased towards the supremacy of objective experience, photography is easily embraced as the objective art *par exemplar*; as Hubertus von Amelunxen has argued, belief in the authenticity of the photographic image is not innate but historical: “an exemplary case of what, essentially, the industrial revolution was about: the reduction of complex, time-consuming, skilled labour to the operation of a machine.” Despite this presumption of analogue authenticity in the photograph, as Barthes has exhaustively catalogued, photography is “a message without a code”: “A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions.”

Photography is limited in both its capacity for explicit connotation and expressive

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5 Ibid. 28.


representation, and, as Barthes has discussed, even commentary heavily implied by the photographer exists at the level of denotation, as a “floating chain of signifieds,” rather than a definitive statement.

Painting, by comparison, is “a structure that is already connoted, fashioned with a coded signification in view.” Painting shows only what the painter has placed there, “the operation of the drawing (the coding) immediately [necessitating] a certain division between the significant and the insignificant.” Thus, the way in which we ‘read’ a painting is different to a photograph, even with similar or even identical subject matter. In representations of people this is particularly significant for its effect on our capacity for identification with the subject, which can be alternately heightened or alienated by the perceived reality content of the photograph. When it comes to depictions of beauty or objectification of a subject, both mediums can serve similar purposes, with painting acting more as the idealiser and photography as, for lack of a better word, the titillater; when taken to its natural, irresistible extremes, photography in both mass media and fine art generally requires some refining aesthetic consideration to be distinguished from pornography. However, in both mediums the history of looking and the subject-object relationship of the spectator and the figure of the gaze is extremely gendered, and this will be the final topic of my paper.

There is very little history of women depicting men in art, and representation is particularly sparse in any kind of style that could be said to invert the ‘male gaze’ of Classical art. As Sally Mann has pointed out, “I can think of numberless male artists, from Bonnard to Weston to Stieglitz, who have photographed their lovers and spouses, but I have trouble finding parallel examples among my sister photographers.” For reasons both historical and personal, women have generally preferred to depict women’s bodies in their art, while the relatively more obscure artwork that objectifies men has predominately been the domain of homoerotic art. I argue that one of the primary influences of this gender disparity are the many theories of the art object as inherently ‘female’, underwritten with the presumption that they must be brought into the world by a Pygmalion-like male artist. This effect spans both painting and photography, reclining languidly over the history of Western art since at least the High Renaissance.

If art is feminine, extolling ‘feminine’ qualities like passivity, receptiveness to the gaze, and physical beauty, then the most preeminent subject for art must be the ‘Sleeping Venus’ who

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9 Ibid. 19.
10 Ibid. 43.
has haunted art in the West since antiquity, particularly in the Academic tradition from which most of our cultural perceptions of painting, and ultimately art itself, trace their lineage. This sleeping, nude figure invites the gaze without the capacity to return it; she is the ultimate fantasy of the spectator, simultaneously unable to consent to the watcher’s voyeurism while seemingly inviting the gaze by her very existence in a painting.

It is of interest then that a variation on this sleeping fantasy has been the gender-swapped subject of a handful of women photographers who can be said to have inverted the gaze, notably Sam Taylor-Johnson and Sally Mann. I discuss their works in relation to gendered looking and objectification, ultimately towards a discussion of my own work, which utilises both painting and photography in the service of interrogating a sleeping male subject.

The paper will conclude with a discussion of the artwork in question: its methodology, genus, and place in my own personal practice. I have taken my time in this degree to expand my practice significantly past the mediums and subjects that once served, invisibly to me, as its restraints, and the work made is the summation of my struggle against categorically defined historical, conceptual, gendered, and ultimately, personal constraints.
A History of Public Antagonism and Private Collusion

Photography was invented by artists, for the application of artists. Well before the invention of the daguerreotype process, its co-inventor Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre had a considerable reputation as a painter, architect, stage designer and inventor of illusionist effects, and it was his work with a camera obscura in his panoramic paintings that led to his collaboration on the invention with Joseph Nicéphore Niépce.\(^\text{12}\) William Henry Fox Talbot, the contemporaneous discoverer of the calotype photographic process, was an amateur artist who used the camera lucida and the camera obscura as aids to his landscape drawings, the extent of his invention merely being a way to ‘fix’ these projections onto paper without the need for drawing. The title for his first publication, \textit{The Pencil of Nature}, expressed his hopes for the medium; photography was to be a form of documentation which was akin to existing mediums for art.\(^\text{13}\)

Optical devices and experiments of this nature had been common amongst artists professional and amateur since at least the fifteenth century,\(^\text{14}\) and numerous treatises across countries and centuries are known to describe various lenticular and mechanical ‘machines for drawing.’\(^\text{15}\) Science and art were closely aligned on this topic, and one such sixteenth century treatise insisted “Painters should make the same use of the camera obscura which Naturalists and Astronomers make of the microscope and telescope; for all these instruments equally contribute to make known, and represent nature.”\(^\text{16}\) It was popularly assumed that the goal of art was the reproduction of nature, and consequently all of these methods and devices were designed to reproduce it with maximum precision, under the conviction that only a machine could serve as the final arbiter of visual truth. In the words of virtual reality aficionados Frank Biocca, Taeyong Kim, and Mark Levy, they were engaged in the “2000 year search for the ultimate display,”\(^\text{17}\) or what Norman Bryson termed the “essential copy”\(^\text{18}\); the fulfillment of a

\(^{15}\) Many books were published describing these devices, including notably Johannes Kepler in his \textit{Dioptrice} (1611), Charles-Antoine Jombert in his \textit{Lives of Flemish, German, and Dutch painters} (1753-4), and Count Francesco Algarotti in his \textit{Essay on Painting} (1764).
concept of imitation and reproduction espoused at least as far back as Plato’s fourth century BCE dialogue *The Republic,* in which the value of an image is determined by proximity and similarity to the original or ‘real.’ The value of an image is determined by proximity and similarity to the original or ‘real.’ Painting’s claim to reproductive supremacy was facilitated by machines for centuries, and then, in a matter of decades, eclipsed by them.

Aaron Scharf has said, “The initial enthusiasm for photography was largely an indication of the extent to which it confirmed the previous visual commitments of artists. Had the general character of painting... been significantly different, artists could not have given to photography the same enthusiastic reception.” This initial enthusiasm cannot be understated – it was estimated that in 1849, just ten years after its invention, 100,000 daguerreotype portraits were taken in Paris alone, and in 1862, over 105 million photographs were produced in Great Britain. The faculty of photography to reproduce the minutest objects in view while maintaining uniform tonal delicacy had seldom been approached in painting or drawing, and it elicited both high praise and profound despair from artists who felt themselves incapable of matching the virtuosity of the picture-making machine. The pamphlet that accompanied the release of Daguerre and Niepce’s invention in 1839 even asked the question, “Will the artist not be driven to starvation when a machine usurps his functions?” (It proceeded to nervously reassure artists of “profitable returns” from what they should think of as merely a mechanical sketchbook).

Nevertheless Daguerre genuinely believed that his discovery would “give a new impulse to the

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1. Théodore Maurisset, detail from *La Daguerreotypomanie,* published in *La Caricature,* Paris, France, Dec 1839. Lithograph, 26 x 35.7 cm

arts," and reporter John Robison also agreed that the Fine Arts would gain, “for the eyes accustomed to the accuracy of daguerreotype pictures, will no longer be satisfied with bad drawing however splendidly it may be coloured.” But the general sentiment of artists at the time can perhaps be better gauged from a prescient lithograph by Theodore Maurisset published in *La Caricature* in December of that same year, entitled *La Daguerreotypomanie* (Figure 1). It depicts a multitude of aspiring photographers in a frantic rush to embrace the new discovery, while in the background desperate engravers have committed suicide en masse. (Or even earlier, written in *The New Yorker* a mere three months after first news of the discovery, in an article cheerfully titled ‘New Discovery in the Fine Arts’: “Steel engravers, copper engravers, and etchers, drink up your aquafortis and die!”).

Within a decade, Francis Frith reported that the daguerreotype and the calotype had “almost entirely superseded the craft of the miniature painter,” and by 1863 painter-photographer Henri Le Secq stated “photography has harmed painting considerably, and has killed portraiture especially.” On being shown his first Daguerreotype near the end of his life, J. M. W. Turner is said to have declared, “This is the end of Art, I am glad I have had my day.”

While in the optimistic days of 1845 prominent art critic John Ruskin had written “Amongst all the mechanical poison that this terrible nineteenth century has poured upon men, it has given us at any rate one antidote – the Daguerreotype!” by 1875 he was lecturing at Oxford that “[Photographs] are merely spoiled nature,” “founded on the notion that you may substitute mechanism for skill.” In his 1859 Salon review, the prominent poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire accused the new process of “ruining what might have remained of the divine in the French genius,” and asserted that photographers were merely “failed artists.” In France in 1862, in response to a judge’s ruling that photography deserved copyright protections heretofore offered only to the arts, a petition signed by artists from the Académie des Beaux-Arts was presented before the court to assert:

“In recent proceedings, the court was obliged to deal with the question of whether photography should be counted as

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23 Ibid.
28 Ibid. 102.
a fine art, and its products given the same protection as the works of artists;

Whereas photography consists of a series of completely manual operations which no doubt require some skill in the manipulations involved, but never resulting in works which could in any circumstance ever be compared with those works which are the fruits of intelligence and the study of art - on these grounds, the undersigned artists protest against any comparison which might be made between photography and art.”

In private, however, many (if not most) leading artists of the day were fervently studying photographs. Because of the intense stigma attached to artists who were known to rely on photography, its use was generally concealed and denied, but it can be clearly seen in the homogeneity of style that emerged in Academic painting in the 1840s, so much so that in his review of the Salon of 1861 Theophile Gautier was moved to facetiously suggest that the Salon jury should have awarded the top prize to the entire process of photography, the “collaborator…which has not been named.” In 1859 Ernest Chesneau asserted “one knows that the majority of painters today use photography,” and attributed it with “the general toning down of the colour range during the last few years.” By 1877 Gaston Tissandier’s A History and Handbook of Photography insisted that “It is certain that no painter at this day, whatever may be his talent, will attempt to paint a portrait without having good photographic likenesses of his sitter,” and in the 1890s the painter Walter Sickert stated categorically that for a painter to demand more than one sitting, when photographs could be put to use, was “sheer sadism.” Scharf has found evidence of photographic originals for paintings from artists of the period as diverse as Ingres, Manet, Turner, Millais, Delacroix, Courbet, Monet, Degas and Seurat (several of whom signed the 1862 petition condemning photography as an art form).

Photography had quickly colonised and conditioned painting, under the auspices of fulfilling the representational onus of art since the Renaissance. As Scharf put it, “Once the public

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36 “Portrait Photography: From the Victorians to the Present Day”.
37 Scharf, Art and Photography.
had tasted the truth of the camera image it demanded the same of art.”  

In his 1851 pamphlet lionising the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin insisted that art should aspire to be a perfect imitation of nature, “down to the smallest detail,” “rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing,” and Walter Thornbury attributed this gospel, and much of the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, to the effect of photography.  

Contemporaneously, France was experiencing a movement towards extreme realism in painting in which the democratising influence of photography was unmistakable. As Benjamin H.D. Buchloh has noted, “In the pre-Revolutionary (feudal and bourgeois) period, both painting and literature set themselves the aim of differentiating individual people and events from their general context and concentrating attention on them,” but photography could not help but depict “those who used to be regarded by the pre-revolutionary consciousness as background.”  

Championed by Courbet, Millet and Corot, the new movement violently rejected the Romanticism that had previously dominated French Academic painting, in favour of intensely detailed scenes of domestic labour, farm work and other depictions of the ‘common man.’ Despite these attempts to reconcile traditional Academic painting with the new photographic consciousness, Scharf has described this relationship “between naturalistic art and photography” as “untenable.” Indeed, at the very end of the 19th century this homogeneity would, perhaps by sheer necessity, explode into the panoply of styles that made up Modernism. However, despite its various work-arounds, Modernism did not dissipate the tension inherent in this relation, and I will here discuss one aspect of its persistence, in the work of artist Gerhard Richter. If photography was invented by artists, for the application of artists, Richter is one of the artists it has served best.

Gerhard Richter is a German painter of the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, working in abstract and photorealist paintings, as well as photographic works and stained glass installations. Of interest to my project are his photorealist paintings, which began in the 1960s with the recreation of found photographs and family snapshots. Richter’s paintings eschew the reluctance of many artists before him to note their photographic references, engaging instead with photography and its various practices as a system of ideological domination, and more precisely as one of the instruments with which collective anomie, amnesia and repression are socially inscribed.

38 Ibid. 79.
40 Scharf, Art and Photography. 115-6.
42 Scharf, Art and Photography. 179.
Though he was born almost a century after the invention of the daguerreotype, Richter’s work engages with the 19th century dilemma of whether and how paintings can be conceived at all after confrontation with the apparatus of photographic mass culture, an untenable situation that his work confirms has yet to find resolution. His photo-paintings began in the 1960s exclusively in black and white, painstakingly recreating ‘low’ subjects such as newspaper clippings, encyclopedia images, found photographs, and family snapshots. As a German born before the eruption of World War II, passing his childhood in wartime and then adulthood in a society insistent on amnesia to that wartime period, these works have enormous resonance simply in their insistence on the factuality of the past. The paintings look like photographs; the thought doesn’t even occur that they could be simulations of false photographs, and their painstaking reproduction serves as a statement to the artist’s insistence on showing them, on acknowledging them. Tyler Green has called them a “quiet confrontation,” speaking particularly of Richter’s painting of his uncle in army regalia, Uncle Rudi (Figure 2), that it “doesn’t moralise,” or “self-pity, accuse or suggest to Germans how they might consider their own... roles in the Nazi machine. The picture simply [presents] incontrovertible evidence of something that many Germans couldn’t deny.”44 This is accomplished not through the photograph itself, but through a copy, with its status as a copy serving as the artist’s remonstration.

Richter’s photorealistic work initially seems to secede the ‘untenable’ conflict to photography; his paintings look like photographs, they take their effect from looking like photographs. They are not a pastiche-infused attempt to reconcile painterly aesthetics or history with photography, they are in complete subservience to the photographic image, and particularly the modern photograph — photojournalism, family snapshots, and passport photos. Jean-Francois Chevrier has suggested that Richter chose these photographic foundations as “an instrument of... ‘anti-sensibility’”: a way to break from the conventions of painting and embrace the particular ambiguity of photography, the “dubious agent simultaneously enacting and destroying mnemonic experience.”

Yet, their ontological and sensual power, their “inexplicable pleasure,” comes from painting. Chevrier suggests it is from “the liberation implied by the possibility of turning a vulgar photograph into a real painting.” The ‘vulgar’ image, studded as it is with unintentional loci of information, haphazard composition, and utterly democratic production, is recreated in a medium that is its opposite and antagonist, and which nevertheless perversely preserves and draws attention to these vulgarities. In the words of Chevrier, “in Richter’s work... the spectator is asked to see not merely the individual image which he has before him but the genre to which it belongs as well as social character of this mode of reproduction. He is summoned to consider how images function.”

By the 1980s, Richter’s painting was increasingly de-politicised while still engaging with the difficulty of mnemonic representation in the age of photography. Shifting to colour and a style of even more extreme photorealism, these works focused more on the pictorial than existential aspects of the photographic image, moving “from the semantic to the semiotic, from the realised function of the sign to the autonomy of the sign,” in a manifestation of “the semiotic turn of

4. Gerhard Richter, Betty, 1988. Oil on canvas, 102 cm x 72 cm.

46 Ibid. 115.
47 Ibid. 113.
events in modernism that can be defined as the retreat from the object of the representation to the very possibility of representation.”  

As Baudrillard asked, “what can art mean now in a world that is hyperrealist from the outset, a world that is cool, transparent, image-conscious? What can porn mean in a world that is pornographed from the outset?”  

The particularity of images has been thoroughly demolished in contemporary culture, in large part due to intense saturation by photographic images. Painting has responded in a myriad of ways, with a number of artists, such as Richter, responding by co-opting the photographic image and recreating it, which is a transformation because painting and photography are analogically and mnemographically irreconcilable. This is the question I grapple with in the next chapter, Owning the Moment: Photographic and Painterly Mnemography.

5. Gerhard Richter, Two Candles, 1982. Oil on canvas, 150 cm x 100 cm.

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48 Ibid. 63.
Owning the Moment: Photographic and Painterly Mnemography

Representational painting, and to a lesser extent, drawing, was once not only the primary medium of fine art, but the primary reference point for representations of reality. There were always painted images of the fantastical too, of course, but the production and therefore possession of reality was where the art market circulated. As John Berger put it, “Oil painting, before it was anything else, was a celebration of private property,” and “if one studies the culture of the European oil painting as a whole... its model is not so much a framed window open on to the world as a safe let into the wall, a safe in which the visible has been deposited.” Oil painting was elevated among art forms because it produced the finest modeling of texture and colour; it produced the most tactile three-dimensional objects heretofore created in two dimensions. And yet, in the nineteenth century painting lost its representational crown to photography almost immediately, no less to a form of photography that did not create tactile surfaces; that had no capacity for the reproduction of colour or subtle tone, or even naturalistic images — a daguerreotype could not capture a human being in anything less than full sunlight and held up by a stick. Photography won the right to reality through a capacity painting could never tap into: the analogue reproduction of light values, what one unknown writer in the New Yorker referred to in 1839 as “the real black art,” the “true magic”\(^{51}\); what Barthes called the “image revealed, ‘extracted,’ ‘mounted,’ ‘expressed’ (like the juice of a lemon) by the action of light.”\(^{52}\) The things that people most often wanted from their images — their own faces reflected; the bodies of their loved ones present, always; evidence of the things that they owned — could be produced by photography not only accurately, but in such a way that they were manifestly attested to as real. Painting responded to the demand ‘What is real?’ via the creation of real-seeming images; photography instead took the real object and created an image that could only come from reality, even if it did not particularly resemble that reality. Gregory Currie has referred to this difference as “natural dependence” and “intentional dependence”: in a photo the photograph and the object are necessarily linked by space and time, whereas the painting and the object are only conditionally linked by the artist’s consciousness.\(^{53}\) Hence, “Seeing photographs and ordinary seeing, by virtue of their ‘mechanical’ nature, give us

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\(^{51}\) “New Discovery in the Fine Arts.” 71.


perceptual contact with things; seeing paintings does not.”

In this chapter, I will discuss the differences between painting and photography in regard to each medium’s capacity for mnemographic transcription — the ways in which each satisfy and confound the desire to depict, and consequently comprehend and existentially possess the object of the image.

Photography and Its Limits

Photography provides a very literal form of pictorial reproduction. Operated in standard fashion, a camera will record what is placed in front of it, without embellishment, in a perspective and scale roughly commensurate with human vision, to the extent that, as Roland Barthes asserted, “A specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent.”

Barthes, in his extensive writing on photography, considered this deictic limitation to be the primary attribute of the photograph, easily dominating the aesthetic, political or conceptual aspects of any individual photo. He argued that the photograph will always refer back to “the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph,” and that, in his personal experience, the greatest fascination of any photograph was its capacity to capture details beyond the intention of the photographer; an element he referred to as the punctum. The punctum is a subjectively poignant ‘residue of reality,’ manifested in a banal object that captures the viewer’s attention, that “pricks” the viewer: it is a specific element that “does not necessarily attest to the photographer’s art; it says only that the photographer was there, or else, still more simply, that he could not not photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object.” This capacity for unintentionality is the primary way in which photography broke from painting, or really from any of the representational arts that came before it. While “the first man who saw the first photograph... must have thought it was a painting: same framing, same perspective,” the photographic image, when uncovered as such, generates a charge profoundly different from any non-analogical art object. Faces are examined with greater judgement, because we know that the artist’s capacity to flatter them was limited. Objects are suddenly interrogated, because we know (or think we know) they are real. As Charles Bowden attested, photographs “incite belief...
I may like paintings but I seldom believe them. I always believe photographs.\textsuperscript{59}

Photographs stir our imaginations with what feels like evidence. This is why pornography, for example, is more popular in a photographic medium than any other, despite the necessary fictions and frequent image and body manipulation that have attended pornographic forays into the analogical medium. Even an extremely altered photograph reflexively convinces more than the most faithful hand-drawn image: we know that the body before us is indexical on at least some base level, and even the most faithful-seeming photograph leaves out just enough teleological information for it to service our fantasies. This is one of the more alienating aspects of photography: that the image is often more compelling when given less context, that context often, in fact, undermines the perceived reality-content of any photograph.

I have been a photographer (or at least, I have continuously taken photos) since my twelfth birthday, but I have always rebelled against the presumption of "absolute contingency"\textsuperscript{60} in the photograph. What wears the skin of pure fact often disturbs me in its capacity to bear false witness: I have an enormous photographic archive, but photographs from when I was sad can look happy, photographs from when I was happy may have a melancholy cast; I have few pictures of some of my closest friends, and thousands of some photogenic acquaintances. After my death, they will not provide what I would consider an accurate record of my life.


\textsuperscript{59} Charles Bowden, "The Other Life of Photographs," \textit{Aperture} 167, no. Summer (2002). 27.

\textsuperscript{60} Barthes, \textit{Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography}. 4.
illustrates my discomfort in particularly jarring fashion, manifested in the family album of Mrs Hilda Thompson (Figure 6). The Thompson family album contains nothing more than a series of standard, 1960s family photographs — black and white snapshots of children playing in the garden; visiting a photo booth at the pier; tussling with the family dog — before Williams points out that “In the spring of 1988, June and Hilda Thompson shot and killed their father Tommy, a man who had violently abused them throughout their lives.”

These everyday snapshots feature a man the tabloid *Weekly World News* dubbed “the world’s most evil father,” and the smiling children in them had endured burns, beatings, and violent sexual abuse, to the end point of ultimate violence themselves. But there is no evidence of the inner lives of these subjects in the photographic record, and this is through the collusion of every person associated with these photographs, the entire “institutional frameworks within which they [were] produced and consumed.”

The children *wanted* to be seen in a certain way, and both (abused) mother and (abuser) father also wanted to see them that way; the camera they operated was designed to take these photographs, and not others (“personal histories run parallel to the history and evolution of Kodak”), and the developers and viewers of the album would expect to see the ‘family album’, a particular artefact that, as Marianne Hirsch has noted, typically “perpetuates family myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history.”

In that same book, German curator Alexander Honory showed a collection of found photographs bought

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64 Amelunxen et al., *Photography after Photography: Memory and Representation in the Digital Age*. 138.
from a flea market in Cologne in 1989, which further emphasise this point (Figure 7). The dozens of families in these photos are almost indistinguishable from each other, actors in a strictly-directed play, the specifics of their lives unknown and unknowable from this record — Honory has commented that Germans often insist the figures must be Polish, while Polish audiences are certain they are Germans.\(^6^6\)

As artist Christian Boltanski, who has thoroughly plumbed these unsettling depths, has said, “Everyone is unique, yet everyone disappears so quickly.”\(^6^7\) Boltanski’s work on the subject primarily uses found photographs placed in installations that create intense emotional spaces (“What I want to do,” the artist has said, “is make people cry”\(^6^8\)). The spaces usually act as places for mourning (routinely, of the Holocaust, but just as often, merely of the fatal passage of time), while also illustrating the limits of our capacity for mourning: the works power themselves through the photographic undeniability of the people depicted therein, while they destroy any possibility for individuality with their crushing scale and sameness. Rebecca Caine has described it as “the photograph as both evoker and destroyer of memory.”\(^6^9\) This emotional space and the photographs therein are routinely baseless in fact: the children depicted in Monument: Les Enfants de Dijon are not necessarily dead; Murdered and Victims gives no clue as to which is which; and all ten pictures in 10 Portrait Photographs of Christian Boltanski (Figure 8) are


\(^6^6\) Williams et al., Who’s Looking at the Family? 27.
actually of other people. The photographs do not have to be factual to elicit the appropriate emotional response, which somehow, circuitously, abstracts their emotional responses into something potentially more authentic: mourning not for a solitary Anne Frank, but for an endless, faceless, indescribable number of victims.

Photographs are often taken, as Sontag said, to “help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure”\(^\text{70}\); they assert that this moment is real, this party is fun, my children are happy, and so on. Meanwhile, after the fact, they “turn people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.”\(^\text{71}\) Photographs are things, and they can be used by Tommy Thompson to show off his ‘happy’ children in an album, and just as easily exhibited by Honory or Boltanski to elicit whichever emotional responses the artists choose. While photography wears the skin of recognisable life, details intact and seemingly artless, each individual photograph is opaque, its very artlessness obscuring the scaffolding which created it and the purpose it ultimately serves. “A photograph is a secret about a secret,”\(^\text{72}\) Diane Arbus said, and as a photographer most active when the Thompson siblings suffered most brutally, she would know.

Barthes, who had long championed the capacity of even everyday photographs to affect the viewer, came upon this opaque terror in subdued fashion when discussing photographs of his mother after her death. Amongst dozens, he could find only one photograph that truly reminded him of her, dubbed the Winter Garden photograph, but he feared to reproduce it in his writing. In a quiet, apologetic voice, between parentheses, he admitted,

“(I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the ‘ordinary’; it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity... in it, for you, [there is] no wound.)”\(^\text{73}\)

No matter how perfectly pictorial, how artificially constructed or manipulated, “it is in the nature of a photograph that it can never entirely transcend its subject, as a painting can.”\(^\text{74}\) It is hard to imagine Barthes desperately pawing through paintings of his mother, thrown into existential crisis by their lack of resemblance to the woman he knew. The problems are twofold: as Barthes himself pointed out, “the painted, drawn, or miniaturized portrait [was], until the spread of Photography, a limited possession, intended moreover to advertise a social and

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\(^{71}\) Ibid. 14.


\(^{73}\) Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. 73.

\(^{74}\) Sontag, On Photography. 95.
financial status,” and furthermore, had his mother been the subject of even hundreds of paintings, any deficiency of resemblance would fall upon the mimetic capabilities of the artist, not reality itself. It was probably with this in mind that the Bauhaus theoreticians denied aesthetic categorisation and classified photography as a branch of design, like architecture, “creative but impersonal.”

It bears briefly mentioning that the reality-content of photographs has also been challenged in recent decades by the development of digital photographic manipulation and simulation. (Though, of course, “Any familiarity with photographic history shows that manipulation is integral to photography.”) The digitally manipulated or simulated photograph inhabits an eerie middle ground between indexical and graphic artworks: feeding on the perceived reality-power of photography, while indulging in the fantastical capacities of the man-made image. Timothy Druckrey has argued that digital works would be more accurately referred to as “post-photographic,” “as they no longer refer to a particular characteristic of photography, which was that it verify something in the world.” At present, I am more interested in the satisfaction of our desire for reality in images, and what it might take to satisfy that yearning when the indexical image does not seem flexible or transparent enough to convey our individual realities. Digital art, with its endlessly reproducible products and aura of the machine-made, does not satisfy my intentions at present, and is consequently left out of this discussion.

My thesis work began spontaneously, the first steps taken without consciousness that they were steps. I was in a new relationship, enduring a bout of extreme happiness that disturbed me in its potential to end. My capacity for happiness and, equally distressingly, for the memory of happiness, has always been limited.

While I have never been a documentary photographer, or a strong believer in the representational qualities of photography, I still, habitually, turned to photography in the hope of preserving something. I bought a cheap instant camera, and had bundles of film shipped to me at a steep discount from Hong Kong; the photographs taken were necessarily of the moment, each a unique object that could not be reproduced, and the number of them was curtailed (each

76 Sontag, On Photography. 89.
77 Amelunxen et al., Photography after Photography: Memory and Representation in the Digital Age. 37.
shot costing roughly a dollar), and therefore precious (see Figure 9 for an example). It was something, but not quite enough: not personal enough, not illustrative enough — I already dreaded Jay Prosser’s threat that one day my photographs would be nothing more than “the dream of fire that comes after the burning”\textsuperscript{79}; a scar that merely marks where the injury occurred.

Following instinct, I tried drawing from my photos, ultimately releasing a zine entitled \textit{I AM IN LOVE} in 2014 (seen in Figure 10 and expanded in Appendix 1A). The drawings were, with a slight irony, more mechanically reproducible than their singular photographic referents (a photocopy of my ink drawings is almost indistinguishable from their originals), but also more clearly charged with the hand-made, and the loved. Their wobbly lines and graphic abstractions defined them as human, and somehow, both more and less real than a photograph.

Concurrently, I tried embellishing the photographs themselves with stickers and collage, in what became the series \textit{There Where You Are Not} (seen in Figure 11 and expanded in Appendix 1B). These kitsch objects were satisfying, much like I imagine Victorian mourning photographs encased in gold and embroidered with the hair of the dead were satisfying; they were physical, and for me, sentimental. But I could sense the limits of their sentiment, and the people in them did not quite feel like us. I played with them for a time, experimenting with risograph printing, and combinations of drawing and photographic channel-splitting (see Figure 12 and Appendix 1C), but they were ultimately discarded — another side project.

The sentimental underpinnings of the project, which were its fuel, repeatedly stymied the final products as artworks. I struggled to reproduce the genuine feeling they elicited in me, occasionally even falling into an embarrassed camp sensibility, as though apologising for their lack of ironic detachment. There seemed to be a certain amount of pressure, in my desire for them to be maximally expressive, to make them sexually explicit, as a way of making them more powerful and unambiguous. But they weren’t really about sex: what I wanted was to touch them, and leave traces of my touch, ectoplasm of my feelings (“To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it,” 80). Finally, bold in the midst of a crisis, I tried, as Sontag states, as linked clauses, “the painterly surface, the personal touch” 81: that medium endowed with all the mystical power of centuries of art history.

**Painting and the Painter’s Hand**

Francis Bacon once said that painting “is a method of opening up areas of feeling rather than merely an illustration of an object. The object is necessary to provide the problem, [and] the discipline in the search for the problem’s solution.” 82 Bacon was very familiar with the painting-as-problem, it was the paradigm his work followed for most of his life—painting the same subjects, over and over again, eternally in search of a ‘solution’. His ‘problems’ included Velázquez’s *Portrait of Pope Innocent*

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11. **Top:** Untitled, from the series There Where You Are Not, 2015. Collage with instant photographs, stickers and inkjet prints, 10 x 15cm.
12. **Bottom:** Untitled, 2015. Two-colour risograph print, 297 x 420 mm.
X, the Odessa Steps scene in Eisenstein’s *The Battleship Potemkin*, and George Dyer, whom he loved, sometimes. Bacon preferred to approach his problems through photographic intermediaries, where the subject could remain fossilised but unreachable; a problem themselves in analogy to the problem they were representing (see Figure 13). Bacon believed that if he could “trap the object at a given moment” in a painting, “the technique and the object [will] become inseparable”83; in this way, through the right technical approach, one could symbolically possess the desired object; that Renaissance desire of the sumptuously rendered visual catalogue tailored to more abstruse subjects.

While photography has the power to fascinate through perceived objectivity and the specificity of its images — Barthes once insisted, “no painted portrait... could compel me to believe its referent had really existed”84 — painting confers power upon its subjects by the singularity of the painted object itself, “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”85 Even in the painstaking reproduction of a photographed image, “when the painter reproduces... elements, their presence stems from deliberation alone which is so total as to affect the very space in which they are set... [conferring] upon them both

83 Ibid.
85 Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
a meaning and an exemplary value.” Benjamin referred to this quality as the “aura” or “cult value” of a work of art.\textsuperscript{86} The painter John Currin, who routinely paints from pornographic photographs, once said, “Pornography is so associated with photography... One motive of mine is to see if I could make this clearly debased and unbeautiful thing become beautiful in a painting.”\textsuperscript{88} The transubstantiation of the painting cannot help but confer value on its subjects; in its most refined form, we call this ‘beauty.’

While the photograph is created using technologically advanced equipment, the images actually produced are usually bare of all signs of their production, most significantly, from the lens that was their vantage point. As Benjamin has pointed out, photography “offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment.”\textsuperscript{89} The painting, by contrast, is necessarily physical and its means of production somewhat knowable from the physical existence of the artwork. Even in the smoothest possible Academic style, one can determine the many aesthetic decisions absolutely made by the artist, and when it comes to the centuries-later investigation, their layered process can be deciphered by an x-ray; their material manufacture laid bare by chemical analysis. The physical evidence of the painter’s hand is inherently knowable in a painting.

After my first few experiments in paint, I was delighted to discover that other painters had suffered the same surface frustrations as I: with my face pressed against gallery walls, I observed endless tiny hairs and dust caught in their paint; skin cells; body hair; studio detritus: the physical remains of bodies and lives fossilized in our works. (Congruously, I have always been pleased to see the inclusion ‘cigarette butts’ in the list of media for a Jackson Pollock or a Brett Whiteley; the inevitable detritus of a painter with cigarette in one hand and brush in the other).

I was surprised to find these imperfections in paintings because I had never noticed them before. I have tended to think of paintings as flat surfaces, like their reproductions in art books; I have been the sort of easily-pleased philistine who sees little substantive difference between a Pollock drip-painting and the perfect, flat and gestureless reproduction of one that Rockwell executed for The Saturday Evening Post (Figure 14). My sense for the painterly gesture and the ridged surface have, in the course of this body of work, changed significantly, but nevertheless I have always felt the energy of a painting as something easily distinguishable from the photographic index, applicable to both the Pollock and the Rockwell. Bacon has said that

\textsuperscript{86} Rochlitz et al., \textit{Photography and Painting in the Work of Gerhard Richter: Four Essays on Atlas}.
\textsuperscript{87} Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 105.
\textsuperscript{89} Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
"Art lies in the continual struggle to come near to the sensory side of objects," and I believe that this pertains to the smooth paintings of realists who gently lick at their canvases over months and years as much as the violent, comparatively brief spasms of more expressionistic painters. Both forms of painting, in fact, appeal to the idea of tactility: the Pollock literally; the Rockwell through the traditional means of illusion in oil painting, in which “every square inch of the surface of [the] painting, whilst remaining purely visual, appeals to, importunes, the sense of touch... [so that] what the eye perceives is already translated, within the painting itself, into the language of tactile sensation.”

This tendency of paintings to appeal to tactile sensation has probably been most challenged by the Photorealist movement, which has its obvious bearings on my work, as a painter interpreting photographs.

Photorealism, as a movement, has its roots in the 1960s, but has maintained a strong presence in painting up to the current time. While painting from photographs has been around since 1839, Photorealism became notable for emphasising the photographic nature of its source material. In contrast to an artist like Rockwell, who maintained an illustrative, almost caricature-ish style while nevertheless working with photographic references, the Photorealists attempted...

90 Bacon, "Francis Bacon."
91 Berger, Ways of Seeing. 90.
to replicate the photograph in such a way that it retained a sense of mechanical detachment.

This was accomplished in many ways: Richter, for example, used black and white tonal ranges
that ‘read’ as photographs of a certain era, whereas Charles Bell specialised in specular surfaces
that retained a sense of photographic lighting and specificity, and Marilyn Minter actively sought
a razor-thin depth of field that typified photographic optics. Most Photorealists worked with
either projected images or a grid system to transfer the photograph to the painting surface, and
it was actually a condition of Louis K. Meisel’s five-point definition of Photorealism in 1973 that
“The Photo-Realist uses a mechanical or semimechanical means to transfer the information to
the canvas.”92 As a movement, Photorealism petered out in the 1980s, while leaving an indelible
stylistic mark on painting as a whole. While very few artists working today would actively
describe themselves as photorealists (lowercase as suits a style, no longer a Movement),
photorealistic painting has been utilised for various effects by artists as diverse as Glenn Brown,
Jenny Saville and Jeff Koons.

This mechanisation of the painted photograph found its apotheosis in the work of Chuck
Close, who no longer identifies as a Photorealist, but whose work is still a close collaboration
with photographic seeing. Close initially worked in large-scale photorealist portraits that closely
resembled passport photographs or mug-shots, usually featuring either himself or close friends
and family members. In the early 1980s his style began to depart from strict photographic
reproduction by accentuating its gridded process, dividing miniature individual sections into
more expressive segments that still constituted an aesthetically photographic whole, an
extremely mechanical process nevertheless accomplished with human hands (quite literally in
several paintings carefully executed by inked fingerprints). Close’s work in the 1970s came right
up against the far periphery of painting’s capacity for non-expressionism, with the New York
Times even suggesting that this early work constituted a “movement to erase the boundary
between painting and photography.”93 If this was his aim, however, it ultimately failed, for even
the most faithful Close painting is still, always, a painting. Upon first viewing in the National
Gallery, the large-scale airbrushed painting Bob (Figure 16) is often briefly mistaken for a
massively blown-up photograph, with a consequent, quiet dismissal. But viewers are quickly
informed, one way or another, that what they are seeing is synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
and henceforth its immense fascination is its inhuman perfection: the capacity for human hands
and human eyes to so perfectly render the alien visual complexity of what is, nevertheless, a
very simple photograph. But no person ever saw another like this: the pores enormous, every

92 Louis K. Meisel, Helene Zucker Seeman, and Gregory Battcock, Photorealism (New York: Abrams,
25-6.
hair defined, reflective surfaces betraying a specular flashbulb. They would not be interesting as photographic prints; their power comes from category confusion and the sense of wondrous transubstantiation that follows. While he eventually moved away from literal transcription, Close’s later work still trades on the residue of category confusion, with the clear visual signifiers of a photographic image that has since been mutated, transformed, its particles seemingly wiggling and dissolving in something like an acid bath (Figure 17).

The fascination of photorealist work is ultimately that the painting cannot be suppressed, regardless of the virtuosity of the painter. This serves as a refutation of that ‘death’ that haunted painting in Modernism in the twentieth century (“A history needs to be written,” Elkins has said, “of the times painting has been said to be at an end... it would include, for example, Vitebsk in 1920, Yale in 1960, CalArts in 1995...”\(^\text{94}\)); thoroughly illustrating that the capacity of the painting for intricate reproduction cannot erode the “aura,” or “cult value” that Benjamin identified as the casualty of works of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. (Though, ironically, their reproduction in this document does: they have no aura here, in miniature, digitised form; objects

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pried from their shells.)\textsuperscript{95}

Unlike the Photorealists, or even Pollock or Rockwell, I embarked on painting as something of a last resort, after a long history of photographic practice. For the first time, my photographs simply \textit{weren’t enough}. My particular dilemma, of the beloved body not carrying its aura into the photographic object, has been contemplated by photographers before, and particularly notable is the unconventional photographic and mixed-media work on the subject produced by Rik Garret and Lucinda Eva-May.

Garret and Eva-May have both explored alternative means of representing the maddening intensity of love and sex when butting against the limited range of the photographic instrument. In his series \textit{Symbiosis} (Figure 18), Garret, in a precursor to my own interests, applied paint to his photographs to merge the bodies of figures engaged in sex until they formed amorphous, straining blobs. In \textit{Unity in Light} (Figure 19), Eva-May created photograms from sex on photographic paper. Garret’s works are miniatures, 8 x 11cm photographs dabbed with paint, while Eva-May’s are necessarily life-sized, but their works are startlingly similar, expressing what Garret describes as “a physical union made tangible through desire.”\textsuperscript{96}

Both works take advantage of the charge of the real in photography, particularly the titillation of documented sex acts, while also abstracting them to serve a more expressive

\textsuperscript{95} Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”
purpose, and both series are simultaneously depictions of sex that are completely explicit and somewhat chaste; you know what they are doing, but any form of ‘seeing’ occurs in your own head.

Through obscuring their subjects, these works abstract them into the idea of ‘sex’ or ‘love’. One could never identify a specific subject in them, nor make anything but generalisations about the relationship of the figures in the photograph — to each other, or to the photographer. My own interest in reconciling the photographic analogue with the depiction of love leant more towards the obsessive, specific quality of ‘the look of love’; that feeling Berger described, wherein “When in love, the sight of the beloved has a completeness which no words and no embrace can match.”

This was the feeling I struggled to convey in straight, or even embellished photography; it was dependent on the specificity of a particular body, and the intensity of my relationship to that body. The object of my affections could not be conveyed by an artful blob, or a glowing ball of mystical light; it was very specifically 5’10”, a brunette with one white hair in his beard, blue-eyed, twenty-nine (at the beginning), and amongst all these other things, a man.

In my next chapter, I discuss gendered concepts of art, as epitomised by the sleeping female nude, and the anomalous quality of the few female artists who have engaged in depictions of men in this mode.


97 Berger, Ways of Seeing. 8.
The Sleeping Subject; or a Solution to the Difficulty of Looking at Men

Women who watch men are rare in the history of Western art. While galleries are haunted by “18th-century sleeping shepherdesses watched by amorous swains,”98 their blouses mysteriously open, the occasional sleeping Endymion seldom shares the company of a watching Selene. As for the gaze of the painter, women were rarely permitted to work as artists at all before the 20th century, and even amongst the women allowed into the androcentric pantheon of Artists, a common ‘female gaze’ that could be said to parallel the male one is simply not a phenomenon. This is not for lack of women looking — Susan Bordo assures us, “Women — both straight and gay — have always gazed covertly, of course, squeezing our illicit little titillations out of representations designed for — or pretending to — other purposes than to turn us on.”99

Women certainly look at men, and yet the already sparse history of women as artists is dominated by women depicting women. (Particularly notable is the frequency of self-portraits, which a commentator on the 16th century painter Sofonisba Anguissola characterised as “two marvels”: “one the work itself, the other its [beautiful] painter.”100) Photographer Sally Mann has spoken of:

“The thinly populated group of women who have looked unflinchingly at men, and who frequently have been punished for doing so... I can think of numberless male artists, from Bonnard to Weston to Stieglitz, who have photographed their lovers and spouses, but I have trouble finding parallel examples among my sister photographers. The act of looking appraisingly at a man, studying his body and asking to photograph him, is a brazen venture for a woman; for a male photographer, these acts are commonplace, even expected.”101

This erasure has been dictated in part by historical restrictions on women’s right to look (Anguissola, for example, was limited throughout her career by her prohibition from anatomy classes102), but also by deeply embodied ideas of what constitutes ‘art.’

101 Mann, “Sally Mann’s Exposure”.
102 Garrard, “Here’s Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist.”
In this chapter I will discuss the genesis of those ideas, and their embodiment in the history of Western art as the ubiquitous ‘Sleeping Venus,’ to ultimately illustrate their effect on the intersection of women as artists and men as subjects for art, finally touching on several contemporary female photographers who have skirted the taboo of looking.

As Berger has pointed out, “In the average European oil painting of the nude the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man. Everything is addressed to him. Everything must appear to be the result of his being there, it is for him that the figures have assumed their nudity. But he, by definition, is a stranger with his clothes still on.” But of course, this power dynamic applies to more than just the nude in European art history. Apart from the rare exception of a powerful female patron, most art has historically been made for men’s eyes, and it is difficult to definitively state when, or even if, this has ended — aren’t most art museums still run by men? Aren’t most of the artists represented by commercial galleries still men? Aren’t more paintings in galleries still of women rather than by them? In an art world in which women are already marginalised, it’s not surprising that they would work within the established conventions of ‘fine art’. It calls to mind Foucault’s description of power relations as “a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised.”

Resisting this richly rewarded orthodoxy and viewing men as objects requires a radical restructuring of the gender dynamics inherent in watching for an artist. Critical art theory in the past century has repeatedly proposed that art itself is inherently female, a position espoused by Berger, Bryson, and W. J. T. Mitchell, who for his part insisted “As for the gender of pictures, it’s clear that the ‘default’ position of images is feminine.” The ‘feminine’ here is an attribute applied to women, which exists independent of actual women. Bryson has argued that art

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103 Berger, Ways of Seeing. 54.
105 Amongst artists represented by galleries in New York and Los Angeles, just 30 percent are women, according to the collective formed by Micol Hebron, “Gallery Tally,” http://gallerytally.tumblr.com/.
107 “Less than 4% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 76% of the nudes are female.” Guerrilla Girls, Do Women Still Have to Be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?, 2012.
109 Berger, Ways of Seeing.
constructs “spectatorship... around an opposition between woman as image and man as the bearer of the look.” These theorists equate artwork with passivity, and assign ‘female’ as the gender of passivity, an association that Bordo reminds us goes at least as far back as ancient Greek antiquity, where “passivity, receptivity, penetrability were marks of inferior feminine being.”

This passivity is perhaps best manifested in the common subject of the ‘Sleeping Venus,’ an image that resonates throughout Western culture and calls to mind some of the greatest triumphs of Western art (the figure also occasionally characterised as the sleeping Diana, Danaé, Antiope, Angelica, or in some morbid incarnations, the dead Cleopatra) (Figure 20). If art itself is gendered female because it is passive and yet desirous of a gaze, then the portrait of a naked, sleeping (or dead) woman would seem to be the most thoroughly articulated, feminised work of art. Berger wrote that “a woman’s presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her.” The unconscious, anonymous (apart from the mythical moniker that serves as the artist’s alibi), naked woman defaults to complete vulnerability, and anything can be done to her. It is worth noting that the first significant instance of this subject, Giorgione’s Sleeping Venus of 1510, was contemporaneous with a mode of portraiture for men referred to as ‘the speaking likeness,’ in which a “psychologically engaging subject” would consciously meet and return the viewer’s gaze. Another reminder that: “the art of any period tends to serve the ideological interests of the ruling class.”

Fig. 20

113 Bordo, The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private. 11.
114 Berger, Ways of Seeing. 46.
116 Berger, Ways of Seeing. 86.
117 Left to right, top to bottom: Giorgione, Sleeping Venus, c. 1510. 108.5 cm × 175 cm. Paris Bordone, Sleeping Venus with Cupid, c. 1540. 95 × 143 cm; Annibale Carracci, Sleeping Venus, 1603. 190 x 328cm; Peter Paul Rubens, Angelica and the Hermit, 1626-1628. 66 x 43 cm; Antoine Watteau, Jupiter and Antiope, 1714–1719. 73 cm × 107.5 cm; François Boucher, The Sleep of Venus, 1754. 102.5 by 89.5 cm; Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Jupiter and Antiope, 1851. 32.5 × 43.5 cm; Jean-André Rixens, The Death of Cleopatra, 1874. 286 x 195 cm; Gustav Klimt, Danaë, 1907-1908. 77 cm x 83 cm.
These supine bodies provide an enhanced form of spectatorship, a way of looking not complicated by even the residue of the model looking back. Derrida once wrote that upon looking at a drawn or painted self-portrait the “spectator's performance, as it is essentially prescribed by the work, consists in striking the signatory blind,” by coming between the artist in the picture (which serves as a mirror) and the presumptive perspective of the artist who is painting; its “symmetry is interrupted.” Looking at the sleeping subject seems to have almost the opposite effect: the complete cessation of violence, a perfect passing on of perspective. In paintings where the sleeping figure is alone, one surveys the body almost as a landscape or a still life, a territory completely neutral to one’s interest (perhaps this is why so many of these figures have an awake companion, to preordain their objecthood as desirous).

Thus, for much of human history, as Bordo has noted, “Women have been deprived not so much of the sight of beautiful male bodies as the experience of having the male body offered to us, handed to us on a silver platter, the way female bodies... are handed to men.” It was perhaps with this in mind that photographer and video-artist Sam Taylor-Johnson (then Sam Taylor-Wood) created the video portrait David (Figure 21). While the Venuses of history generally suffer from “a remarkable indifference to who any one person really was” that was endemic to the Academic nude, Taylor-Johnson’s work is not only of a particular person, it is of an extremely recognisable individual. David is a 107-minute video of soccer player David Beckham, asleep in his hotel room after a training session. Beckham is well known as the star of

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many underwear pin-ups, which tend to feature what Bordo has called “face-off masculinity”; they prominently feature his semi-nude body, but “stare coldly at the viewer, defying the observer to view them in any way other than how they have chosen to present themselves: as powerful, armored, emotionally impenetrable.”

While “‘Face-off ads,’... are pretty traditional — one might even say primal — in their conception of masculinity,” Taylor-Johnson’s portrait of Beckham is unconventional in its simulated intimacy, even the title giving the impression of a first-name basis. It provides a strong counter-case for the usually mens-only privilege of “cultural permission to be a voyeur,” buttressed by the fetishistic focusing device of a celebrity for its subject, and the unconditional perspective that is implied by any form of photographic looking.

David comprises a static shot close to Beckham’s face and bare upper chest, lit by a warm bedside lamp. The film is silent, and Beckham graciously sleeps the duration directly facing the camera, gently shifting position but never threatening to leave the frame. The piece is in part an homage to Warhol’s anti-film Sleep, in which a man is filmed sleeping in roughly real time for over 5 hours. Both works gain power from their endurance, their length attesting to their veracity — a subject may close their eyes and pose for a photograph, but they are less likely to feign sleep for hours of filming — and creating a kind of meditative space in which there is a constant flux of moments, but no actual change in state. However, while Warhol’s piece was largely an experiment in the limits of cinema verite and what constitutes a ‘film,’ apparently expected to be sat through in its entirety (consequently, its first major screening at the Los Angeles Cinema Theatre featured mass walkouts and a minor riot), Taylor-Johnson’s work functions more as a wall-hanging, a part of the genre of “artist videos” Christian Boltanski


122 Ibid. 10.
123 Ibid. 1.
identified “which are more like painting, really, because they are a space product.” Exhibited on a screen roughly commensurate to life-sized, the work is simultaneously intimate and distancing, as one cannot escape the position of spectator when watching this private space from a public one. David is an impersonal portrait, as Taylor-Johnson’s relationship with Beckham was not intimate (in comparison to Warhol, who stayed up all night on amphetamines filming a sleeping lover for his own purposes, Taylor-Johnson was commissioned to create the work by the National Portrait Gallery), and whatever relationship they shared in the making of the work was necessarily somewhat transactional. Taylor-Johnson’s work is, in this sense, thoroughly physically objectifying its subject; it’s hard to imagine what the work could be about apart from an appreciation of physical beauty, made easier by its subject being placed in a vulnerable position — Venus reborn as David, and her desirability relocated above the neck (multiple promises there embodied: beauty, but also money, fame, etc.).

In similar category, but stark contrast, one finds Sally Mann’s exhaustively personal portraits of her husband. In the iconography of unconventional desire, Sally Mann has always been a controversial figure. Her portraits of her children were accused of being sensual to a degree once dubbed “disturbing” in a headline by New York Times Magazine, and the writer Mary Gordon referred to them as “unambiguously sexualised,” comparing the stance of one child to a “hooker.” Despite these critics’ claims, the charge in Mann’s photographs is usually not one of sexuality, but of physicality and sensuality; her photography often carries the air of looking carefully and coldly at a world that is itself wildly, uncontrollably sensual. In more recent years, her work has also touched on photographing the decaying dead, and Mann’s most recent work has seemingly found a balance between these subjects: Proud Flesh is a series of loving, sensual portraits of her husband, Larry, taken over six years, as his body is transformed by disease.

Mann has said of the series, “Maintaining the dignity of my subjects has grown to be, over the years, an imperative in my work, both in the taking of the pictures and in their presentation. As my father weakened with brain cancer, I tried to photograph him... But I put

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away my camera when I began to see that photographing his loss of dignity would cause him pain.”  

In Larry, however, she found a subject who could bear “that many of the pictures would come at the expense of his vanity”:

“Almost the first thing I did after I met Larry Mann in 1969 was to photograph him, and I haven’t stopped since. At our age, past the prime of life, we are given to sinew and sag, and Larry bears, with his trademark stoicism, the further affliction of a late-onset muscular dystrophy. In recent years, when many of his major muscles have withered, he has allowed me to take pictures of his body that make me squirm with embarrassment for him... It is a testament to Larry’s tremendous dignity and strength that he allowed me to take [these] pictures.”

Mann’s photographs fulfil the promise of intimacy that is present but superficial in many depictions of seemingly vulnerable figures; the sleeping Venuses, dead Cleopatras and napping soccer players. Larry is usually pictured at rest because of the long exposure times necessitated by Mann’s esoteric nineteenth-century wet plate collodion process, and because of his own, newfound physical frailty. The collodion process leaves scratches, chemical trails, and actual fingerprints of the artist strewn across the vulnerable body they are attempting not only to

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131 Mann, "Sally Mann's Exposure".  
132 Ibid.
document, but to engage with. They are works saturated with love, and its companion, fear (of depletion, of loss, of mortality).

While I cannot hope to be quite so ambitious in my own work, nor fulfil the promise of intimacy built over decades, this is the category of love in which I would like to file my work. Neither exempt from desire, nor wholly composed of it; about life, and about the dream of life; a work that can overcome Barthes’ insistence that “the art of living has no history.”

Having wandered across historical, conceptual and political contexts, I will now discuss in earnest the work made in their midst.

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The Making of Work, Which Serves as a Conclusion

The work I have made in the course of my Masters is an enormous departure in my personal practice. In two years I have learned how to paint, which is a process both physical and cognitive, and I have engaged with photography as a medium existing in a historical and conceptual context. This has been in service of my own personal crisis of practice. The first chapter of this paper served as a historical grounding for the relationship between photography and painting, which helped me contextualise the work I had made; the second engaged with the conceptual antipathies of photographic and painting practices, which was innate to a work that sought to combine the mediums; and the third examined politically the gendered notions of these practices that my work, inadvertently, served to disrupt. I choose to end it by drawing tight the thread that connects them, in a discussion of the work itself.

The work I have made is a series of paintings which interact with photographed portraits of my partner sleeping. These portraits are not representative of sexual desire as much as they are of its aftermath: intimacy; they attest to physical closeness, and the duration of that closeness; and are an attempt to illustrate something of love, as it is manifested in the body of the loved one. They are diverse in scale and medium, liable to be interpreted (quite accurately) as though each attempt at a satisfactory depiction failed and a new approach was taken.

The photographs that serve as the ground for the paintings were primarily taken in the early haze of intense infatuation, whereas their painted analogons first began in a time of relationship unrest, and were to some extent a hysterical attempt to perform a Dorian Gray-esque feat of transubstantiation; painting, as Claude Levi-Strauss identified the works of the High Renaissance, not only as “an instrument of knowledge but... also [as] an instrument of possession.”\(^{134}\) The process of making work exceeded the brief rupture that brought on its initial crisis, and thus necessarily became more engaged with the difficulties of reconciling mediums that have antagonistic historical and conceptual foundations, and with producing subject matter that is somewhat at odds with the traditionally gendered relationship of the artwork and the spectator.

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\(^{134}\) Claude Lévi-Strauss and Georges Charbonnier, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss* (University of Virginia, 1969).
The paintings began a year into my relationship with Michael, which had felt solid and unshakable. There was a sudden, minor tremor, and all in a night we were crumbling and unstable, and I had no apparent capacity to repair or even diagnose what had happened. I tried writing on it at the time, and since, and failed in every approach; it seems to have been a crisis beyond art. (I don’t know if this means it was too cataclysmic, or too pedestrian). I could not make work about the problem, as hard as I tried, but at the same time, I was too absorbed in it to make work about anything else.

Hyperbolic, but nevertheless, I was engaged in mourning; moreover, the particular period of suffering Barthes once referred to as “Exile from the Image-Repertoire.” Barthes wrote: “Amorous passion is a delirium, but such delirium is not alien; everyone speaks of it, it is henceforth tamed. What is enigmatic is the loss of delirium... As long as this strange mourning lasts, I will... have to undergo two contrary miseries: to suffer the fact that the other is present... and to suffer from the fact that the other is dead.” Barthes mourned this loss as a death, the permanent extinction of a temporally-located iteration of a person who only really existed in relation to one’s self — much like he despaired over the deaths of people who live on, hauntingly, in their photographs. (Of which I had, of Michael, already amassed thousands).

Barthes wrote of one kind of mourning; in an essay on Barthes’ more literal death a decade later, Derrida wrote of another:

“This moment of mourning [is] when the breaking of the mirror is the most necessary and also the most difficult. The most difficult because everything we say or do or cry, however outstretched toward the other we may be, remains within us. A part of us is wounded and it is with ourselves that we are conversing in the work of mourning.”

Derrida believed that the frantic thrashings of a compulsory eulogy, “the desperate effort of an unhappy speech to move beyond the specularity that it itself constitutes,” is a place where work can begin, as “impossible, indecent and unjustifiable” as it may seem at the time. Eventually, working with the tragedies that begin to litter one’s life becomes the only way that anything can get done.

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138 The Work of Mourning. 6.
While this might seem histrionic in retrospect, it was very real and intense at the time. Cut off from my ‘image repertoire’ while haunted by literal images, I made the only work I could— I compulsively painted effigies of my loss, shrines, creating pictures, as Kafka said, “to drive them out of [my mind].” In this time I progressed from rough, impressionistic daubs to what would be my most detailed realist paintings: individual freckles, pores, the beard painted hair by hair (seen in Figure 24, Figure 25, Figure 26, and Appendix 2). Vonnegut once wrote, “The artist says, ‘I can do very little about the chaos around me, but at least I can reduce to perfect order this square of canvas, this piece of paper, this chunk of stone.’” Initially I painted directly on photographic prints; there was something satisfying about hiding them, burying them, and remaking them as my own. After a while, it became satisfying enough to simply paint the photograph, transferred painstakingly to its new surface, where I was its owner, parent, confidant. I met his face anew, becoming a studied expert on the slight asymmetry of his eyebrows, the variation of colour in the hairs on his face. Paradoxically, my longing was soothed.

Completely independent of this desperate practice (Freud might reasonably have categorised it in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ as “clinging to the lost object by means of a hallucinatory psychosis of desire,”) our relationship did not end. It is hard to know what the work would have become if it did — is there an ethical dilemma in such a work? Sally Mann has

139 Quoted by Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. 53.
spoken passionately of her subjects as “those people who are unafraid to show themselves to the camera [and who] disarm me with the purity and innocence of their openness”\textsuperscript{142} — but my works would have taken advantage of an openness that had since become closed to me. They would have become, for lack of a better word, creepy, like Victorian memorial photos of the dead, from which they were but a step removed.

Our reported death turned out to be merely a period of ill-health: we recovered with my work not yet finished, and it was with my subject’s consent that I continued painting, a hard kernel of mortal fear now ensconced in the continuation of our lives; such as they were, relieved to still be plural.

Because the work proceeded somewhat compulsively, I came to grapple with its implications as a medium \textit{ex tempore}, when trying to process what I had already begun to make.

Artwork that combines painting and photography has existed since the dawn of photographic technologies, but only in recent decades while comfortably identifying as such. The use of lens-based ‘aids to vision,’ such as the camera obscura, existed from at least the fifteenth century, and after the invention of photography the general tone of Academic painting was clearly, undeniably photographic.\textsuperscript{143} A good number of early modernist painters, despite decrying the photographic image as antithetical to the noeme of their painterly work (such as the Impressionists), used photographic references (the list of prominent Impressionists who regularly used photo references in their work includes at least Monet, Degas, Bonnard, Caillebotte and Seurat\textsuperscript{144}), and the work of various Post-Impressionists, Futurists, Cubists and

\textsuperscript{142} Mann, "Sally Mann's Exposure".
\textsuperscript{143} Hockney and Falco, "Optical Insights into Renaissance Art."
\textsuperscript{144} Scharf, \textit{Art and Photography}. 
other movements of the 20th century were clearly inspired by photographic seeing.\textsuperscript{145} Art, as Baudrillard has said, is prone to a “general process of insider-trading... in the management of aesthetic values”\textsuperscript{146}; any lines were never going to remain drawn for long. The Surrealists in particular were comfortable with mixing and matching mediums, embracing photographic manipulation and collage even in relatively traditional painterly works, and the Photorealists, whose work Baudrillard described as the logical end-point of Surrealism,\textsuperscript{147} eventually made the distinction between a photograph and its hand-drawn reproduction aesthetically indistinguishable. The combination of photographic and painterly processes is novel, but not completely new — my work can also be compared to any number of contemporary artists working with paint on photographs, from Rodney Pople to Arnulf Rainer to Sophie Derrick.

Despite this extensive precedent, I still find the idea of the painting and photograph as collaborators and antagonists compelling, backed up as it is by a century of discursive writing and a certain intuitive response from audiences. The painting that calls to mind a photograph (and vice versa), tends to awe people. It taps into a vein of feeling which might be seen as a continuation of ancient Aristotelian poetics, in which the “the real [is] attainable only within the ideal, not within the empirical”\textsuperscript{148} — the real reality hiding behind a shadow-reality, which is more easily recognised in self-consciously artificial iterations. Viewers instinctively respond to artwork that lays this bare. We are moved by things that do “not simply imitate nature but are actively involved in constructing the realities they represent.”\textsuperscript{149} Painting elevated my subjects, it heightened them; every brushstroke necessarily conveying importance, because it was placed there by a consciousness. Of course, to produce paintings, first I had to learn how to paint.

The process of learning to paint was arduous. I did not have a particularly natural capacity for painting (if anyone does), and every step was slow and research-intensive. I tried painting on canvas, paper, plywood, aluminium, Perspex, and on both sides of glass; in oils, acrylics, ink, watercolour and enamel paint (this technical exploration is detailed in Appendix 3). Of many, many works, only a few reached a state of refinement I call ‘completion’.

Researching the techniques of various painters attested primarily to the endless multiplicity of processes; while I had initially thought I would experiment until I finally found the ‘correct’ process, at which point my work could finally begin, as I danced from style to style the

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Baudrillard, \textit{Screened Out}. 185.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Edgar Landgraf, ”Mimesis Und Simulation (Review),” \textit{MLN} 115, no. 3, April (German Issue) (2000). 555.
\textsuperscript{149} Landgraf, ”Mimesis Und Simulation (Review).” 555.
endless mutability seemed more of a testament to painting’s real animus. Painting is a medium with extraordinarily loose constraints, one which has pursued revolution over centuries to erode all rules imposed upon it, and which has been declared dead continuously while soldiering on. As James Elkins commented, “Painting’s imminent and repeated death should be regarded not as a problem, a possibility, or a truth, but as an intermittent accompaniment of painting in the age of modernism.”150 This endless death, variously described as a loss of political urgency, isolation from popular culture, categorical disorientation, etc., is not a drawback of painting, it is a feature — painting is now “unpressured: there is no right answer, and if there were, for a short while, a right answer, it would be without consequences for the future.”151 I created a great number of paintings, none of which could fully sate my desire for divine manifestation of their subject, but each of which attested to that desire in its own way. At their most ritualistic, my paintings slavishly recorded each centimetre of their photographic

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151 Ibid. 38.
eidolons; at their most removed, they became barely visible spectres of an image, floating white on white on glass (see Figure 28). I retreated and advanced, obsessively, closer and further from each image, unable to ‘solve’ any of them.

I also initially painted many variations of my subject, both awake and asleep, but ultimately found the sleeping portraits to be the most effective. With the faint hint of death behind their closed eyes, denied by their multiplicity (different settings, lighting, the slight growth and trimming of hair; all the banal evidence of time’s passage which also “distinguishes between voyeur and lover”\textsuperscript{152}), they allow one to look intimately at their subject, as a subject. When looking at these paintings, even the larger than life scale ones, the spectator is placed in a position of power over their figure. While the gendered dynamics of this unanswered gaze are well established in art history and in the phenomenological theories of spectatorship, this work cannot help but serve as a gentle rebuff, looking closely, with some desire, at a vulnerable man. If, as Berger insists, “A man’s presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies.... [which] is always exterior to the man,”\textsuperscript{153} these depictions are thoroughly emasculated. As portraits they are specific in subject, but embody no civil status, they are empty of props that could suppose social position. (Their figure is, in fact, usually naked, but the works themselves provide no satisfaction for that fact). They embody a beauty that is coded feminine, while being undeniably masculine.

This is, again, a matter of context, more than intention. The work itself proceeded extemporaneously, a form of research guided by hands and heart, and it is coming to myself afterwards, teasing out the knowledge that existed subconsciously behind my hands (I had long read my Barthes, my Derrida, my Baudrillard) and adding to that knowledge that I define its specificity and situate it within a field.

This work was a culmination of two years of struggle with the limits of representation, made earnest by my intimate connection to the subject of my struggles. I had a need to create this work, and took my Masters as a time to heuristically expand my field of influences, and the unrealised horizons that hemmed in my practice. Among the large number of works I made in this time I am choosing to show only a selection for examination. I have made diverse work with a common thread, and I hope that collecting a smaller number of disparate works together will make their thread more apparent, so that they are mutually reinforcing but compelling on their own terms. The production of this work has been thrilling (new lands to explore), and exhausting

\textsuperscript{152} Berger, Ways of Seeing. 61.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid. 45.
(new lands, endless ones), and frightening (what if I’m no good at painting? What is a good painting?).

My reserves of early infatuation are almost tapped out, thoroughly memorialised and manifested outside of my body, and already I can see this body of work becoming a part of my past, in the section of timeline that can be referred to as our past. Already Michael looks a little older than he did in those photographs, which I don’t feel the need to take as often as I once did; and I can denounce the unsteady hand of the early paintings as no longer mine. They will haunt us, in whatever future we find; the photographs as one kind of memory, their variously counterfeited twins another.

I no longer know whether to identify myself as a photographer or a painter, or where exactly to classify this work, or what works I will make next and where I could classify them, and this work ends with questions unanswered, to be resolved in the next —
APPENDICES

1. **Works that were created contemporaneously with my Master’s work, but were ultimately distinct from it:**
   A. *I Am In Love*, May 2014
   B. *There Where You Are Not*, June 2015
   C. *Risograph poster prints*, Oct 2015

2. **Early works, experiments that did not make it into final work:**
   A. Detail of *First Painting*, 2014
   B. *Untitled painting*, 2014
   C. *Untitled painting*, 2015
   D. *Untitled painting*, 2015

3. **Illustration of technical processes:**
   A. Oil on inkjet print
   B. Oil on plywood
   C. Oil on aluminium
   D. Oil on C-type print
   E. Oil on glass
   F. Examples of the matting process for glass
   G. Painting on the back of glass
   H. Painting on the back of glass, white on white and black on black
1. Works that were created contemporaneously with my Master’s work, but were ultimately distinct from it
B. *There Where You Are Not*, June 2015. Instax photographs, stickers, c-type photographs, inkjet prints on tracing paper, 24 pieces, 15 x 10 cm.
2. Early works, experiments
   A. Detail of First Painting, 2014. Oil on inkjet print, 50 x 50 cm.
   This first work was undertaken on a large photographic inkjet print. The print was sprayed with a clear coat sealant, and the section to be painted on was prepared with a thin layer of white gesso. Despite these safeguards, the paper still had trouble with warping, and oil from the paint sank through and stained the photograph. It was not archivally stable.
B. *Untitled painting*, 2014. Oil on inkjet print, 210 x 297 mm. Similar in process, this piece was an experiment in covering the entirety of the photograph.

C. *Untitled painting*, 2015. Oil and inkjet print on plywood, 75 x 75cm. This piece was a more accomplished attempt at painting on paper prints. It was a partial success, the paper did not warp or stain (the paper was allowed to flake off its wooden backing, for effect).
D. **Untitled painting**, 2015. Oil and inkjet print on plywood, 75 x 75cm.
This piece was another use of oil on paper, also successful. These pieces, while technically successful, were excised from the final series for lacking a sleeping subject.
3. Documentation of technical processes

A. Oil on inkjet print
This piece was an attempt at large scale painting on paper prints. The photograph was printed grid-style on multiple pieces of A4 paper which were allowed to cure for a week, then glued to a wooden backing. The paper was sealed with a spray sealant, and the section to be painted prepared with five or six thin layers of gesso. The photograph was drawn back on the gessoed surface with the assistance of a digital projector. The painting was completed in layers of transparent glaze (using dye-based oil paints, such as Burnt Sienna, Cadmium Yellow Light and Alizarin Crimson) and opaque scumbling (using mineral-based oil paints, such as lead whites).
B. Oil on plywood
This piece was my first movement away from painting directly on photographic paper, and the first finished piece included in my Master’s work. The plywood was sealed, sanded, varnished, and primed with gesso on the section to be painted. The photograph was drawn on with the assistance of a digital projector, and painted in the same glazing and scumbling style as the previous.
C. Oil on aluminium
Another attempt at painting directly on a photograph, this piece used a photographic print on aluminium to get around some of the difficulties experienced with paper prints. The surface was masked with tape, lightly sanded for grip, and covered in three layers of gesso at alternating angles. The painting surface was excellent, but the photographic print quality was poor and not cost-effective. Having already worked in a detailed realist style, for this piece I began to experiment with something looser, more colourful and impressionistic.
D. Oil on C-type print.
These works were more like small-scale studies. The photograph was printed twice, and one version was cut and taped on top of the other to provide a mask. The surface was prepared with gesso, then painted. Although it gave me a chance to experiment stylistically, these pieces were something of a failure, as the masks had a tendency to leak.
E. Oil on glass.
Continuing from the small-scale studies, these pieces used clip-on glass frames containing photographs. Using the photograph as a guide, the glass was masked with tape, then gessoed and sanded (three layers, alternating angles). The tape was removed, and the photograph was transferred on to the prepared section using a digital projector, and painted in a traditional realist fashion using layers of glazing and scumbling (the bottom image shows a further stage of progress, not a finished painting).
F. Examples of the matting process for glass

For the glass pieces, I printed a photograph and clipped it under the glass, then carefully masked it using electrical tape. After preparing the surface with gesso, I ran a scalpel along the edge to cleanly break the paint, and removed the tape. Finally, I cleaned and neatened the primed edges using the scalpel, and sanded down the gessoed surface. They were then ready to be painted.
G. Painting on the back of glass

After working on glass surfaces, I grew interested in the potential for painting on the back of glass (a common technique in Mexican folk art). This operation required acrylic paint, as oil would not dry on glass, and a painting process almost the reverse of my oil paintings. Fine details needed to be painted first, then larger areas, each layer obscuring the one underneath. The opacity of the paint also required multiple layers to achieve a single colour. These pieces are displayed in shadow box frames, with their photographic originals sandwiched at a slight, mirroring distance behind.
H. Painting on the back of glass, white on white and black on black
Painting again on the back surface of the glass, these pieces use transparency to achieve their weightless, almost invisible effect. Painted in minimal lines from photographs under glass which were then removed, they retain only the faintest hint of their photographic antecedents, like ghosts. The white pieces are to be shown against white gallery walls, on which they become almost invisible. The black pieces achieve the same effect with a black backing.


Gautier, Théophile "Abécédaire Du Salon De 1861 ". (1861).


Catalogue of (Currently Completed) Work Presented for Examination

List of Images

1. Size comparison. All works, adjusted for relative size.
2. *Untitled (or, Photorealism).* Oil on wood, 75 x 75 cm.
3. *Untitled (or, licked with a single hair).* Oil on glass, with c-type print, 15 x 10 cm.
4. *Untitled (or, asleep in profile).* Oil on glass, with c-type print, 15 x 10 cm.
5. *Untitled (or, as sensitive to gold and orange as to blue).* Oil on glass with inkjet print, 28.8 x 23 cm.
6. *Untitled (or, a green base coat).* Oil on aluminium, 30 x 45.6 cm.
7. *Untitled (invisible art i).* Enamel paint on glass in wooden frame, 25.3 x 20 cm
8. *Untitled (invisible art ii).* Acrylic on glass and paper in wooden frame, 25.3 x 20 cm
9. *Untitled (invisible art iii).* Enamel paint on glass in wooden frame, 25.3 x 20 cm
10. Works still in progress, oil on glass, acrylic on glass. These works may or may not reach a stage of completion before examination.
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6. *Untitled (or, a green base coat).* Oil on aluminium, 45.6 x 30 cm.
7. *Untitled (invisible art i).* Enamel paint on glass in wooden frame, 25.3 x 20 cm.
8. *Untitled (invisible art ii)*. Acrylic paint on glass and paper in wooden frame, 25.3 x 20 cm.
9. *Untitled (invisible art iii).* Enamel paint on glass in wooden frame, 25.3 x 20 cm.
10. Works still in progress, oil on glass. These works may or may not reach a stage of completion before examination.
Work in progress, acrylic on glass.