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Incomplete Objects and Object Sketches

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

Sydney College of the Arts, Sculpture Performance and Installation

University of Sydney

2011
Incomplete Objects
and
Object Sketches

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Master of Fine Arts

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the outset of this thesis I would like to first dedicate it to my parents, Alan (who has since passed away) and Maeve Platt, without whom, this thesis would have undoubtedly been impossible. Thanks to their support throughout not just this paper, but also all that has come prior, I have had the fortune of feeling able to choose the direction of not just this thesis, but also a general trajectory in life, and I would like to express the gratitude that for this, I feel I owe to my parents.

There are a few people to whom I will be forever indebted, and forever grateful for their assistance on, but not limited to this project. I would like first to thank my partner, the wonderful Shauna Scicluna for acting as sounding-board, occasional editor, clarifier and punctuator; and for applying her unlimited skill in the position of layout and image-arranger. For guidance through sometimes confounding topics or discourse; for suggestions that led me along paths both useful and fascinating; for hounding me and managing to tolerate my slowness and inefficiency – with patience and support, no less – with great respect, I thank my supervisor through this project, Dr Adam Geczy. For technical advice in the workshop, and similar tolerance of my slow aspect, I thank Tony. The same can be said of my thanks to Colin Winter within the Sculpture studio at SCA. A thankyou to any and all of my friends who have given guidance and help throughout the period, with particular thanks to Jeremy Berton and Jessica Lajard for housing me and making me feel at home in France. And last but not least, a thankyou to my siblings – Jeremy and Courtney.
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ABSTRACT

The research and the work that motivates it, herein discussed in this thesis, hinge upon the need to communicate with the viewer, a sense of desire that remains suspended. Throughout both thesis and practice a defining concept is incompleteness. This suggestion is made manifest in the practical element of my work, through the use of the iconography of the frame and construction images, that suggest what could yet be built upon, or added to the work, that is present in the gallery. The implications of this iconography are diverse and accordingly are explored through a series of art-historical discussions. The physical appearance, or the signature aesthetic of my practice, is explored through the pressing immediacy that ruled and defined the sketch aesthetic of Impressionism. The concept of a desire continually entertained is given exemplary treatment in the seminal Large Glass of Marcel Duchamp. As such this is used as a major study with which to compare the motivating factors of my practice. Engaging with the text Kant After Duchamp, by Thierry de Duve facilitates an exploration of two belief systems that arose and defined and impacted art discourse through the middle and latter half of the last century. This study does not seek to align my work either but rather finds the conviction to follow neither and instead identifies my practice with work that does not take a heavy authorial hand looking for a determined outcome. As such, what is made apparent through this investigation is an enduring interest in that which cannot be attained.
INTRODUCTION

One of the central, and gnawing preoccupations of my MFA project has been the idea of desire. It is a word as loaded as ‘real’, especially when it comes to philosophy, psychoanalysis and art. While both practical and theoretical components of this project embrace certain philosophical tenets, it must be said at the very outset that the idea of desire, as it is mobilised within my work, was arrived at in an entirely intuitive way. Indeed the term ‘desire’ is used almost to suggest the act of desiring, in order to evoke that which it is lacking; thus becoming the very embodiment of the entertained other, and incompleteness itself. My preoccupation in this project has not so much to do with becoming as such, so much as an associated but still different state of ‘getting there’. This is a state that is not melancholy nor is it necessarily abstruse, for it is still contained within ‘resolved’ aesthetic closure. My sculptural objects and associated works (diagrams and the like) therefore share a strong affinity with the idea of drawing and the painterly sketch, and with some works of Marcel Duchamp (1887 – 1968). Works such as the seminal The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass), 1915-23, have the qualities of incompleteness in their materiality and in the quizzicality they seem to elicit. This is ultimately the aim of the artwork in this project: to instill puzzlement within the viewer, but a puzzlement that does not lead to dissatisfaction. In this regard, my work is a kind of Moebius strip but without the paradox being literally demonstrated within the object. Rather it is sublimated, yet ever-present. Within this thesis, through examinations of the work Francis Alÿs and Bas Jan Ader, this theme is further explored. In their manner of engaging with incompleteness and the unknown, these artists supply the ambit of affinity for the studio MFA component.

My practice until the MFA project was dominated by interrogating the relationship between immateriality and materiality; to be precise, between video and objects. The ambitious, yet paradoxical work, Nostalgia for the Never Known (Honours, 2008) (fig. 1) combined a meticulously made boat, and a sequence of video-monitors and slide-projections that traced activity, above and below water, of myself swimming to an indeterminate point, with the boat affixed to my torso by rope. While looking good, the boat was far too delicate to be purposeful; the absurdity of the act was compounded with the fact that I was not swimming anywhere in particular. However, the beauty of the images and of the boat itself foiled the ridiculousness of the act. The effort put into swimming, and indeed the fabrication of the boat, gave the project a strong rhetorical sense of purpose that went well beyond that of arbitrary intent. In this
regard absurdity was transcended through material beauty, which subsequently conveyed some other level of intent.

This had, admittedly, a certain romantic edge. Romanticism, it will be remembered, was always looking toward the horizon of the artist’s finitude, of death, and made a great deal of transitional states, especially dusk and dawn, which were held as embodiments of ambiguity and uncertainty. It was an uncertainty that was fundamentally theological, since it existed as a displacement of the Christian God into the artist’s own subjecthood and into the phenomena of nature. While similar theological concerns may be latent within my work, they remain latent; what is of greater interest is the undermining of Classical certainty. Nostalgia for the Never Known was a work that pursued a two-pronged approach to searching for things unapparent or intangible. The project ostensibly set out to try and find the space between a camera’s lens and the representation that it creates. While the work was motivated by the idea of what goes missing in the process of representation, it acted more as a suggestion of the idea of something that cannot be known. Similarly the physical act that is portrayed in the image, as mentioned, suggests an absurdity that goes beyond reason. This implies it was pre-acknowledged as an act that would yield no answers, but symbolise a yearning and longing to know the unknown and unknowable.

In the practical application of the work, the making of the boat became a symbolic pursuit in itself; a kind of one man’s Ark, that may somehow project me toward some kind of answer, or aid some kind of escape, the idea of which is summarised quite perfectly in John Barth’s (b. 1930) novel, The Floating Opera (1956):

To build a boat—that seemed to me a deed almost holy in its utter desirability. Then to pro-vision it, and some early morning to slip quietly from my mooring, to run down the river, sparkling in the sun, out into the broad reaches of the Bay, and down to the endless oceans. Never have I regarded my boy-hood as anything but pleasant, and the intensity of this longing to escape must be accounted for by the attractiveness of the thing itself, not by any unattractiveness of my surroundings. In short, I was running to, not running from, or so I believe.¹

During the building of the boat, it became more and more apparent that merely the idea of the boat, and what, as Barth describes, this symbolises – a “running to” some

imagined other, was the important factor. As such there was something in the aesthetics of the boat that were enough to stir this idea. In the middle of doing the performance with the boat, where I had swum myself surprisingly far out to sea, I climbed in the boat and found that it could not be used. I had made what was more the aesthetic idea of a boat than a boat itself; I had not installed a keel and the rowlocks – where the oars sit – were not usable, though they looked great.

It was this conception of the manufacturing of the imagined, or the building of an aesthetic ideal – how we imagine something to be – that brought me to explore this idea through the MFA project. What had come to fascinate me was the imaginative process and how we may come to invest ourselves in envisaging a state that cannot be achieved. An idea, as it exists incomplete, need not give way to proper reason or reality. It was this understanding of the idea of desiring being better than the actual that led me to investigate Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, 1915-1923, as it describes through a kind of codification, a state of speculation which needn’t suffer the consequence of gravity. Similarly I was drawn to the impressionistic sketch aesthetic; something that disagrees with Duchamp’s cerebral positioning on art’s purpose, but as a description of an aesthetic symbolism of the first ‘conception’ of an idea, helps to explain the physical form that my work takes.

The physical component of the MFA project is a group of objects that though interrelated and grouped under the title *Invested Objects*, 2009 (Fig. 2), also operate as discrete works. The largest component of the group is the aptly titled *Large Object*, 2009 (Fig. 3), which is a framework object of 2.2m x 1.8m x 2.4m. The framework is constructed of thin plywood that is bolted together. This work gives a finished aesthetic to a framework structure, something seemingly incompatible, as a frame is normally the point of commencement for an object. It is this incomplete figurative form that links the aesthetic of the sketch to my work. The visual manifestation of *Large Object* is a stylised version of a frame, which when hung as it is – just floating above the ground – further exaggerates the absurdity, and incomplete nature, of the work. It is this symbolic incompleteness that comes to suggest an idea held in suspense. Accompanying the frame are four pictures that are called *One Against Another and In Colour I & II*, 2009, (Fig. 4). These four pictures are diagrams, or transcribed versions, of the *Large Object*; they are done in the fashion of construction or design plans. They were made after the frame, and as such document something extant, rather than being its draft form. Two versions are pencil on grid paper and the other two are made out of coloured panels. One of each version (panels and pencil-drawn) transcribe the work as
it exists and the other two draft an imagined version of what the frame may have become. The difference between the transcribed and the draft versions, highlight the gap between the actual and the envisaged.

Chapter one, Sketching Things, describes the key visual and theoretical elements that make up what is known as the ‘sketch aesthetic’. This brief chapter acts as a preface in which I locate and define an aesthetic fixity through which to view elements of my work, particularly *Large Object*. Albert Boime’s (1933 – 2008) writing contains a comprehensive analysis of how the sketch aesthetic came to prominence with the Impressionists. Accordingly, Boime’s writing is used in this chapter to provide a clear historical background to the sketch and its evolution; first in its operation as a study and later as an aesthetic unto itself. It is an aesthetic once controversial and still striking for the suggestions of ‘incompleteness’ and immediacy that it conveys. A relationship in my work to elements of impressionistic style and incompleteness is discussed, however in this case, it is an impressionistic recording of the artist’s imagining, rather than the striking visuals found *en plein air*.

In the second chapter I discuss the ways in which desire and longing are described and function within my practice and how these ideas are suggested to the viewer. My artwork sketches and charts the state of desiring, almost as if transcribing fragments of imagination, and in doing so, seeks to express and initiate the speculative process of imagining. Marcel Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, 1915-1923, *(fig.5)* offers the pre-eminent example of a practice that portrays desire as operating on a mechanic level, so as to signify a state of speculation. As such this chapter works through the elements of Duchamp’s *Large Glass* and explores the devices in play that signify a kind of reverence for the imagined state. In parallel with this analysis I discuss the devices in my work that suggest a similar wish to signify the speculative realm. The particular affinity of subject and method found within the *Large Glass* and within my work, leads this analysis/comparison to make up the core component of this thesis.

Through the first section I do my best to decode the machine that no one can ever truly understand – that is Duchamp’s machine of desire; which rather than trying to understand desire, uses it as a kind of abstract symbolism to suggest the state that desire brings about. Throughout this section I explore the work in relation to its creator and what marriage, the bride, bachelorhood and the idea of ‘eroticism’ come to mean as symbols in the work. Under the subheading ‘As a Machine’, I discuss the way in which Duchamp decoded the process of desire by describing it as a process in a diagrammatic form. In doing so he gives the blueprint for an exactly designed but
dysfunctional machine. I compare this to my work *Large Object*, which uses an exaggerated aesthetic to suggest an idea suspended, but one from which the viewer can continue the imagining. Under a second subheading I discuss the Fourth Dimension as Jerrold Seigel (b. 1936) sees it relating to Duchamp’s work. It is, whilst valid as a mathematical theory, really a symbolic clue or physical form which Duchamp uses to suggest the cerebral plane - a realm of imagination. It is a poetic appropriation – a borrowing from a realm more precise than imagination – that my work shares through its use of construction iconography in the form of scale plans and frames. Further I discuss Duchamp’s musings on the state of the window gazer. This describes the urge of wanting an object purely in its desired form – an understanding of desire that informs my work.

In the penultimate section I discuss the importance of the symbolism of chess, which was famously played a large part in Duchamp’s life, especially after he professed to have ceased making art. The continuous entertainment of options, and the player’s constant search for an ideal outcome in chess, represent so thoroughly Duchamp’s concerns present in the *Large Glass* and similarly occupy my work. The chapter closes on a note dealing with *Etant Donnés*, 1946 – 1966 Duchamp’s final work. It presents a scene that seemingly implies concerns counter to those aforementioned. This work cannot be ignored, existing as it does in Duchamp’s oeuvre, as the final act. I shall argue that it only serves to reinforce the importance of what was explored in Duchamp’s work hitherto.

The Final chapter involves an investigation of a division that in art *after Duchamp* and how this division can be reconciled. This is approached using Thierry de Duve’s (b.1944) important book *Kant After Duchamp*. The purpose of investigating the post-Duchampian world, is to understand the distinctions framing other artists’ work, which operates under similar material and conceptual constraints as my own. The chapter explores the way in which de Duve positions Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) and Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945) within an art-historical context as analogous to Immanuel Kant’s (1724 – 1804) thesis and antithesis regarding the antinomy of taste. In his rereading of Kant, de Duve ultimately finds the two opposing positions reconcilable. I then frame my practice, in relation to other artists through an understanding that neither the material nor the conceptual, need be disregarded, nor dogmatically followed. In doing so, through the latter half of this chapter, I situate my practice amongst the work of Bas Jan Ader (1942 – 1975) and Francis Alÿs (b. 1959). Both artists instil beauty within a conceptual framework. I argue that this comes about through following the
material and the conceptual, simultaneously to their respective ends; in doing so they both bring attention to the unquantifiable – a realm that my work engages through investigating the imagined or speculative state.

Approaching the discussion of the aesthetic to which my work belongs, it became clear that previous discussions that bound architecture (which my work somewhat resembles), with deconstructive philosophy, could be of interest. In particular the concept and term of deconstructivism – a term reserved for architecture – as distinct from deconstruction and deconstructionism, was considered for its bearing on the incomplete, as signalled through the physical. It was a term most alive in the 1980s and ‘90s, used to characterise a new kind of architecture – now associated with the likes of Bernard Tschumi (b. 1944), Peter Eisenmann (b. 1932), Daniel Libeskind (b. 1946) and Frank O Gehry (b. 1929) – that repudiated the symmetry of modernist architecture and appealed to a different moral and synthetic order. This oriented itself around the philosophy of Derrida and his rereading of Heidegger, in particular with respect to the disclosure of non-Being through the realm of Being in *Dasein*.

An aesthetic link between deconstructivism and my practice could exist in the motifs of incompleteness that arise in deconstructivism’s built form. An example, though referred to variously as being modernist, postmodern and high-tech in style and approach – owing to its excess and use of colour – is Renzo Piano (b. 1937) and Richard Rogers’ (b. 1933) Centre Georges Pompidou (completed 1977). The building bears characteristics of a deconstructivist approach, in which the architects inverted the traditional concealing nature of building, rendering cladding unnecessary and exposing what would otherwise be its ‘inners’ – plumbing, air conditioning and a host of other pipes. It however became apparent that the idea driving deconstructivism was the real and pressing need to ‘resolve’ the representation of incompleteness, inasmuch as a building must still offer shelter and stability. Of course the difference with art is that shelter rarely comes into question. Further, incompleteness in my work had come to centre more around an unresolved desire (as desire must be if it is to continue to be entertained), and thus my investigation became focussed upon the suspension of incompleteness rather than any attempt to resolve it.

As noted previously, the term ‘desire’ is indeed a loaded one. It’s associations, with not just the psychoanalytic frame and how that has impacted art, but also with the history of Western philosophy (not to exclude the Eastern) run a long and important course. It was apparent however, from the outset of my interest in the term ‘desire’, that my work did not call on a recounting of the canon of Western philosophy, and that
anyhow, the length of this thesis would exclude any such activity to be conducted meaningfully. It is likely, however that in the future, my research activities, or at the very least my reading, may well include the Classics. It is apparent for example that Aristotle’s *De Anima* could be of use to my research: in *De Anima* Aristotle posits that animals are given motion by their desires, and that we follow a similar path, but that our desire operates in concert with intellect. It was also apparent however, that for this thesis a more relevant point of discussion is Duchamp’s large glass, which exists as an exemplary form of symbolising a speculative state — as I feel the term ‘desire’ relates to my work.

The combined course that my research and practice have taken, through this MFA, has led me to consider more deeply, the role and purpose of art. I am aware that this statement may sound broad and overly general. However through examining a seemingly disparate set of periods and the manner in which the artist – viewer relationship was typified throughout each, has brought art’s societal role to my attention as a topic of potential future research. What becomes apparent is that defining outright rules with which to govern a practice is not my lot, nor do I believe that it is a sustainable pursuit, as is evidenced in de Duve’s modern interpretation of Kant. Rather, it is in the suspension of ideas and exposing of the otherwise unnamed in which my interest lies. The research that has arisen through this MFA project has given me ample leads for a diverse and inquisitive practice that may continue to seek or speculate upon the communication of ideas in art.
The objective relationship between the sketch and the finished painting emerged in the Renaissance but became a topic of contention only in the nineteenth century. In the Renaissance, drawings and sketches were seen as the logistical means to resolving a finished work, while in the nineteenth century they were increasingly viewed as having their own substantive value. Even though artists ranging from Franz Hals (1580 – 1666) to Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732 – 1806) used techniques that were highly painterly, it was only with Édouard Manet (1832 – 1883) and the Impressionists that discussion about the sketch became heated, and a cause for real anxiety. For Manet introduced a style, that to the academic eye, was far closer to a sketch. Further liberties were taken by Claude Monet (1840 – 1926) and his generation who painted directly onto the canvas, thus eschewing drawing – drawing and painting were effectively one. Immediacy was key: Impressionism made the theories that existed between sketch and finished painting, once held so dear to the academy and reaching its apogee in masters such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780 – 1867), all but redundant. And with photography and the instant blueprint, they were made redundant all the more. This short chapter will discuss the sketch first in relation to the French Academy, in particular using Albert Boime’s important study, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, and then relate this to aspects of the MFA project.

Traditionally the role of the sketch in the structured mode of painting, as taught by the academy, was to capture the fleeting nature of a scene. Its purpose was to give guidance to the formation of a complete and finished painting later in the studio. Near to the mid-nineteenth century with the approaching wave of impressionism, the sketch came into its own as a finished form within painting, seeking to exemplify immediacy. The traditional role of the sketch defines its aesthetic, in which “Artistic content is based then on the immediacy of contact and the rapidity and dexterity of its material embodiment.”

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1 Sketch *n 1* a quick rough drawing. *2* a brief descriptive piece of writing. *3* a short funny piece of acting forming part of a show. *4* any brief outline. *vb 5* to make a quick rough drawing (of). *6* sketch out to make a brief description of: *they sketched out plans for the invasion.* [Greek skhedios]²


presence, in the finished painting. The ability to work effet into a finished painting (effect or impression in English), which is defined in this situation as a sense of immediacy, reliant upon light and its transitory nature, had become increasingly important around the onset of impressionism.

The “removal of this conventional interference with perception”\(^4\) that was the bridging of immediacy, from sketch to laboured oil in the studio, agreed with new conceptions of originality in painting. The aspect of a ‘personal originality’, which was not an idea fostered by the academy hitherto, was an integral part of the ideas behind a decree proposing reform in 1863.\(^5\) As such, what was now advocated in the capturing of effet, was an impression specifically associated with the première penseé (literally ‘first thought’ but closer to ‘immediate impression’ here) as belonging exclusively to an individual artist – in effect making it a personal and unadulterated impression. Thus, what was becoming increasingly important to the success of a painting was its ability to convey to the viewer, the striking first conception of a scene, as perceived by the artist. Eugène Delacroix (1798 – 1863) held the conviction that “… four strokes of the brush or the pencil are enough to sum up for the mind the whole impression of a pictorial composition.”\(^6\) For Delacroix, there was clearly great merit in immediacy; and moreover, in the role of ‘invention’ or ‘originality’ within the artist struck by that first impression of a scene. As Boime observes, “To Delacroix, clearly, the sketch of an original impression, if it came of itself, embodied the effect.”\(^7\) Delacroix’s conviction, it seems, was the bellwether that would precipitate the coming advent of Impressionism (figs. 5 & 6).\(^8\) The logical step forward in attempting to convey this immediacy, or the absolute manner in which to describe the première penseé, was to forgo the pencil in favour of applying paint directly to the canvas. And as such, when it came about, with impressionism the aesthetics of the sketch came to constitute the aesthetics of the finished work – immediacy, transitory light, and the painter’s initial impression of a scene. Those guided by the desire to capture the most fleeting and delicate effect of a scene, at the very moment it struck, had abandoned the studio for the lure of the light that existed en plein air. In doing so they were no longer separating the act of sketching and the act of painting, they were sketching in paint, to capture the effet, finalising it as

\(^{4}\) Ibid
\(^{5}\) Ibid, 181. Boime discusses this decree as the concluding subchapter of “The Sketch Aesthetic”.
\(^{8}\) By way of comparison, so as to make the idea of the genesis across generations of the aesthetic of the sketch within the oil painting visible, paintings by Delacroix and Monet have been provided.
they witnessed it. The result was a less laboured and more immediate form of painting, done in the time that would have previously afforded only a sketch. What is of interest to my work is the manner in which the brief idea now became the finished work, something that caused discord in the Academy: “The Academicians were still calling this a sketch, while the Impressionists called it a respectable work of art.”9 The significance of this disagreement is that it sets a precedent for an aesthetic of incompleteness. The visual relationship between the viewer and the artist became one in which the accuracy with which a scene was portrayed was no longer an overriding necessity. It was now most important that the viewer saw the artist’s conception of the scene.

In my work, most notably Large Object, 2009, (fig. 3) the initial impression and the final form coexist. Its shape is largely conjured from imagination, differing from the Impressionist mode but shares the idea of ‘invention’. Accordingly, what is presented, is a simple rendition of an idea – it is not a perfect finished object, but rather a finished form of incomplete. What unifies the aesthetic of my work, with the sketch aesthetic, is the attempt to communicate immediacy and the first conception of an image to the viewer. In my work I present the physical underpinnings of the idea of an object, which I associate with longing and desire. Catching and showing only the fleeting qualities of an imagining, or a sentiment, creates a starting point for image-formation within the viewer.

This work does not share the immediacy of the sketch in its production – it is in fact quite laboriously produced. Moreover, the subject lives in my mind’s eye rather than outdoors – a substantial difference. It is, however, this unfinished aesthetic, being at once the conception and the final form, that is of importance to my work. In both the Impressionist mode, and in my work, we see the conception of the idea given greater communicative presence through its incomplete form. In Large Object, the framework we see looks to be the underpinnings of some form of vessel. This framework is not built in a fashion that could ever support a complete object. Rather it is the impression of, and signification to, what its actualised form could offer the viewer, and where, in their mind, they speculate it could take them. This fleeting form of an object seeks then to communicate the imagining of desire.

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This chapter deals with themes and ideas that pervade my work and that are pre-eminently found in Marcel Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-1923, (fig. 7). Accordingly, this chapter gives a thorough analysis of *The Large Glass* and to some extent, aspects of Marcel Duchamp’s personality, in order to elicit those ideas that are pertinent to my own work. The key ideas within the *Large Glass* that relate to my greater body of work are: desire and longing; a suspended, speculative state, which Duchamp liked to call a ‘delay’; and how a suggestion of that state can be communicated through an artwork, and instilled within the viewer. ‘Desire’ is a loaded term due to its overwhelming Lacanian connotations. In Jacques Marie Émile Lacan’s (1901 – 1981) formulation, desire desires its own desiring. While this thesis and my own work, by no means repudiates such ideas, it does not so much call upon psychoanalysis. Rather in my work it is important to focus instead on the way in which desire operates to aid image formation in the mind of viewer and artist. Further, when talking about Duchamp’s work, the word ‘desire’ is used repeatedly by Duchamp himself and authors of analyses of his work. Often its purpose is to suggest a suspended state, akin to the idea of unconsummated eroticism, and thus I continue the use of the term ‘desire’ to most accurately describe source texts. In this sense, desire or longing, comes to represent a realm of speculative possibility that does not have to give weight to the physical restraints of reality.

Marcel Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23 is a work comprising of two adjoined glass panels. The panels stand supported by a freestanding frame, at an impressive height of just over 2.7 metres and a width of 1.75 metres. In assessing the *Large Glass* it is useful to look at a key to the *Large Glass* (several exist) as a reference to get a grasp on all the elements of Duchamp’s machine (fig. 8). Duchamp never issued a clear key to the Large Glass, but various versions have been divined, or translated, from his notes, by several Duchampian enthusiasts. These include Richard Hamilton (1922 – 2011), who created an abstract box-like flow-chart interpretation, and Jean Suquet (1928 – 2007) who accurately reproduced the elements in the *Large Glass*, but also included elements that Duchamp’s notes suggest he intended to include, but never executed. The key that assists this description is an elaboration or reinterpretation of the latter. On the upper panel, there is what is called ‘The Bride’ or the *Pendu Femmelle* (hung, or suspended, female in the English), who is suspended by a ring from the top of the glass, or what is
effectively the ceiling within her domain. The Bride is a jumble of unrelated pieces – a ‘Mortice joint’, a ‘Stem’, a ‘Wasp’ – but as a whole she is reminiscent of nothing particular, except perhaps an odd diagram of a stick insect – though it must be noted that her figure and its movement bears some resemblance to that of the nude in Duchamp’s earlier sensation-causing *Nude Descending A Staircase, No. 2*, 1912.

Adjacent to The Bride, and somewhat connected, is a cloud with three window-like clear spaces inside it. This is known as the ‘Milky Way’ and may or may not be emanating from what would be the Bride’s head. To the lower right of the ‘Milky Way’ are ‘Nine Shots’, small marks made by Duchamp shooting paint-dipped matchsticks from a toy pistol. The line that separates the two panels of glass is referred to in the key as the ‘Horizon/Bride’s garment’. At its centre is the ‘Vanishing point of perspective’. This dividing line ensures that The Bride and Her Bachelors are kept quite separate in their pursuit of each other. The Bachelors live in the lower panel, and are comprised of a similarly odd assortment and mish-mash of character-components. Floating above a ‘Chariot or Sleigh’ that houses a ‘Water-mill wheel’, is a selection of catalogue cut-out uniforms, known as the ‘Nine Malic Moulds/Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries’. These describe archetypal jobs that range from ‘Priest’ to ‘Servant/Flunky’, that Duchamp is thought to have taken from mail order catalogues. At the centre of the lower panel, and supporting a pair of ‘Scissors’, is an object that Duchamp called a ‘Chocolate Grinder’, supported by a ‘Louis XV Chassis’. Passing above and behind it are a series of seven cones referred to as ‘Sieves’ or ‘Parasols’ that follow each other like a series of arrows. Floating beneath the scissors’ open blades, are the ‘Three Oculist Witnesses’ (diagrams from an optometrist’s chart) and a circle, that Duchamp called a ‘Magnifying Glass’. Finally, running through this assorted assembly of seemingly unrelated pieces, we can follow the otherwise invisible path of the ‘Illuminating Gas’ (perhaps a kind of erotic energy emanating from the operations of the bachelors) through the domain of the Bachelors and up toward an interaction or clash with the ‘Bride’s instructions’. The overall picture is one of a machine-like design, broken into individual components.

In separating the Bride and her many Bachelors, Duchamp compartmentalises their relations and prevents their interaction. The line that falls between the two sections demarcates ‘the wanted’ and ‘the wanting’ and defines them as the same –

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10 Jerrold E. Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: desire, liberation and the self in modern culture* (California: University of California Press, 1995), 92. Seigel notes that several writers in analysing the Large Glass have suggested that this may be the case.
wanted and wanted, wanting and wanting – but makes them inaccessible to the other. Neither of the two opposing elements – 1 The Bride, 2 The Bachelors – is able to access and consummate/reconcile their opposition. The title suggests as much – *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. At first it is uncertain if the undressing is suggested or actually occurs, but as we come to understand the underlying themes behind this work, we start to see that it is a mental affair, which acts as a motif for speculation and suspended desire. Why is there no single groom preparing for wedlock? Why is she all dressed up and why are there so many bachelors? She is a bride, yet there is no chosen groom. This indicates that to exist in a state in which she is continually desired, requires a perpetual division, ensuring that she is never ‘taken’. She is bound by her role of being desired, however, that desire remains unfulfilled.

Defined by the term of the *Bride*, she is always on the cusp of being taken, and the bachelors, we imagine, should simply desire her, but all is not so simple. Colloquially, the term *Bachelor* is often employed to portray the most eligible state of male-hood. However, etymologically the term refers to something almost a little cuckolded, or even suggestive of desire that cannot reach its object. In zoological terms for example, the bachelor is a male bird or mammal without a mate, especially one prevented from breeding by a more dominant male. Historically, the term *bachelor* fares little better, in that it indicates a young knight serving under another knight’s banner. This meaning is thought to have its origins in the French *bas chevalier* – quite literally *low knight*. Whether this latter definition of the low knight holds any ground with the work is too difficult to be sure, as the title is originally French, though the work was made in America – that is, in English speaking surrounds. The French word for bachelor – *célibataire* – holds no association with low knights, but we can expect that Duchamp, with his penchant for word play would not be offended by the *bas chevalier* – *bachelor* link. With the colloquial usage of *bachelor*, the title suggests the bride has been, or is in the process of, being undressed by the force of male desire. But the *bachelor’s* etymology would suggest a series of incomplete efforts, incapable of effecting the consummation and finality of desire, remaining as a kind of *suspended* desire, one that refuses to possess its object.

Bachelorhood was a state that Duchamp was known to identify with, and as one of his biographers, Calvin Tomkins (b.1925) notes, that Duchamp “at twenty-three, had already taken on the wariness of a dedicated bachelor.”\(^{11}\) This is further evidenced by the sentiment expressed in Duchamp’s drawing *Dimanches (Sundays)* 1909, in which a

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\(^{11}\) Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp, A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 41
well-heeled, yet terminally-bored looking couple push a pram. Duchamp’s stance on marriage was well known and a matter about which he did not equivocate. In an interview Pierre Cabanne (1921 – 2007) suggests that at twenty-five Duchamp was known as “the bachelor” and held an antifeminist attitude; to which Duchamp retorted “No, antimarriage, but not antifeminist.” 12 He accepted Cabanne’s term of “anticonjugal”, with “Yes, anti all that.” 13 And explains that it was a choice that was decided as something of a “budgetary question” “To be a man of art, or to marry, have children, a country house…” 14 Duchamp’s early take on marriage indicates to us that he may have perceived and calculated marriage as the stifling of desire through unity. Somewhat ironically, Duchamp actually married twice. Both marriages were, however, well outside of his youth. His first marriage was in 1927 at age forty, to Lydie Sarazin-Levassor (1903 – 1988), and lasted less than a year. He was later (at sixty this time), and more successfully, married to Alexina (Teeny) Duchamp (previously Matisse) (1906 – 1995), until his death at eighty-one. It seems that in his younger years he was more interested in the symbolism of marriage. While marriage doesn’t necessarily end desire, contracts and services – legal and religious, signal its perpetual and binding nature. In acknowledging a perpetual agreement, the bride is no longer suspended, but has descended and found a determined and singular outcome. She is then, no longer in a position to imagine the possibilities that lie ahead of her, now that she has left the speculative plane. For Duchamp the state of the bride, not yet confirmed as the wife, operates as an indicator of imagined possibilities. The bride, awaiting consummation, thus becomes a signal of the erotic not yet confirmed, but anticipated. Duchamp commented in the interview with Pierre Cabanne: “I believe in eroticism a lot,” talking of it as something “widespread”, global and “a thing that everyone understands.” 15 He saw the language of eroticism almost as a movement unto itself in art – that “It could be another ‘ism’ so to speak.” 16 The state of eroticism – speculative and just short of unison or the consummation of desire, signals desire as the ultimate (though it is more literally the penultimate) state of being. Eroticism and sex, while clearly related, have different symbolic suggestion. Sex is the closing act or the completion of a desire. Eroticism is the entertainment of a desire, one that need not be made material, or be

13 Ibid
14 Idem
16 Ibid
acted upon. For Duchamp the language of eroticism – suspension and desire – indicate continued imagining. The parallel between The Large Glass and my work is the symbolism of perpetuating incompleteness. Where Duchamp holds his machine just short of conjugal activity, I suggest incompleteness through the motif of an unclad frame.

In the case of the Large Glass, it is the Bride’s role, as an unattainable woman, sitting perpetually on the verge of marriage that acts as the motif of the incomplete. Typically, a ‘bride’ is only to be known as such by her dress and by her appearance at a wedding. Stripped bare, thus without her dress, nothing marks her specifically as a bride. Without the dress or the wedding day, she is nothing but (perhaps – or, theoretically at least) the virgin. Of course, as the Bride in question is not figurative, we cannot be sure as to whether she is clad or not, but more importantly her name alone suggests she possesses a sexual status that is about to change. We expect the bride to be taken sexually, and made ‘complete’ through the first act of eternal matrimony, but the bride in this case is the Pendu Femelle – the suspended female. As such, she is being Stripped Bare by a group of males, desiring her but incapable of taking her to the altar to finalise the act. The assemblage is thus reduced to its two base elements: the object and the desire for it. But the scene is held in perpetual suspended animation, emphasising the desire or eroticism. While the defining terms in the glass are sexual, the portrayal of desire need not be viewed merely as a sex act that never comes about. The glass operates as a describing template for the process of desire, desire as a machine, and this process being perhaps a sustaining element of life, or at least the imaginative aspect of life. The suspension of receiving thus constitutes the act of desiring.

AS A MACHINE

The Large Glass resembles a grandiose machine, as well as a diagram with each component arranged as a part of the mechanical function of the machine. To attempt a thorough analysis of the machine function, devised through the interplay of characters in the Large Glass, would be both beneficial and fruitless. To establish a clear, coherent understanding of each of the parts of the machine is impossible. This is part of Duchamp’s intention: according to Jerrold Seigel, despite Duchamp releasing a series of notes as a key to accompany the Large Glass “their goal of letting people know what the
work was about (was) undermined”. This is because Duchamp published only fragments of the notes he made regarding the *Large Glass*, and episodically, at that. The notes, on the various forms of paper, on which they had originally been written, further hampered clear understanding owing to “their sometimes impenetrable mix of lyrical effusion and playful nonsense, serious metaphysical speculation and pseudo-science, yearning for transcendent experience and unshaken disillusionment.”

That Duchamp did everything but issue a defining thesis to accompany the project suggests that he may have been offering his note-form ideas in the same fashion that the *Large Glass* does. That is, he was showing the speculative ruminations, in planning for a work whose central theme is exactly that speculative process. While Duchamp’s notes help to understand elements of the *Large Glass*, they also serve the overall purpose of deepening the mystery. However, certain elements of the work offer ideas in their metaphorical suggestion, and the metaphor of a greater ‘desiring machine’ can be derived from the *Large Glass*. Duchamp’s machine is represented in an allegorical form – the bride hovers over her harem of hard working, erotically charged little bachelors who adore her from below. They are arranged, to suggest a map, or almost diagrammatic form of the act of desiring. In attempting to signify something quite similar in my work – desire or desiring – I similarly use diagrammatic imagery, but its form is a stylised aesthetic, rather than machine symbolism or allegorical suggestion. By stylised, I intend to mean that it is an aesthetic that is somewhat exaggerated, or idealised, or even a little bit caricatured. The frame-like work *Large Object*, 2009, (fig. 3) symbolises the imagining of an object in a fashion that could only be the way one imagines a frame, not in the manner that an actual frame exists. Thus, in this work the motif of a frame that exists as an extract of the imagination, serves to describe the speculative state itself. The depiction of an idealised state through a stylised aesthetic in *Large Object* comes to serve a purpose similar to that of Duchamp’s allegorical machine symbolised in *The Bride Stripped Bare*. The exaggerated lines that are suggestive of a boat in a transitory state of construction, give cues to the viewer to imagine their conception of how this boat may take final form.

Jerrold Seigel’s book *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp, Desire, Liberation and the Self in Modern Culture*, gives a very useful analysis of the *Large Glass* in the chapter ‘Desire, Delay and the Fourth Dimension’. What is most apparent in Seigel’s account is the at once achingly precise, yet equally whimsical and non-

18 Ibid
dogmatic approach Duchamp took in creating this work. Seigel comments that “proportions of the bachelor section were worked out with painstaking precision, and yet the objects only pretend to work in a mechanical way;”19 The multiplicity of concepts is such, that Duchamp later mused on “how much pleasure looking at the glass still gave him”; referring to it as “un amas d’idées,” a heap, mass, or “hoard of ideas, gathered up and preserved against despoliation.”20 This comment in itself seems a good summary of the overwhelming concepts that seem to exist behind the large glass. It also gives us an idea of what to expect, as it suggests that none of the ideas are given in their finality, nor are they rigid and unyielding.

What Seigel manages to distil in his analysis of the various notes and comments left by Duchamp, is that a multitude of concepts are used to express a few major concerns. Mostly, these concerns lie with an animated or suspended state, such as the animation of mental play, rather than the conclusion that can be drawn from it. This suspension is suggested through desiring, as desire exists in this case, to represent a delay in receiving. Using Duchamp’s notes regarding the bride, Seigel finds evidence to suggest that the bride exists in the grip of her own desire; with Duchamp “calling her ‘this virgin who has reached the goal of her desire’ and ‘this virgin who has attained her desire’ – a desire already fulfilled within her virgin state of bridehood.”21 This suggests that though a large group of suitors await her, she does not make plans with any of them, but keeps them all at a distance, desiring her. She is satiated in her own state of suspension, as an imagined object or goal, and by desire itself.

Beneath her on the lower panel, the self-satisfying chocolate grinder is involved in what Duchamp called an “adage of spontaneity: the bachelor grinds his chocolate himself.”22 Arranging the bachelors to grind away at making their own sweet, rich, satisfying paste, suggests Duchamp was hinting at that other condition of bachelorhood – masturbation. All these elements point to desire being the goal, or “The ‘Triumph’ … of desire (being) intensified by the exhausting hope of a fulfillment that remains out of reach.”23 Thus it is clear that there will be no reconciliation of the bride and her

19 Ibid, 89
20 Ibid, 97, in this section the French that Seigel is quoting comes from an interview with Michel Sanouillet, in Les Nouvelles Litteraires, December 16, 1954, 5.
21 Ibid, 94, here Seigel refers to Duchamp’s Writings, 39, 42, and 44.
22 Ibid, 92
23 Ibid, 96, Here Seigel is referring to Duchamp’s Writings, in which Duchamp refers to (as Seigel puts it) “the brides desire remains unsatisfiable within the conditions of the picture; one note refers to her blossoming as ‘the image of a motor car climbing a slope in a low gear. The car wants more and more to reach the top, and while slowly accelerating, as if exhausted by hope, the motor of the car turns over faster and faster, until it roars triumphantly.’” Note that the car does not reach the peak, but rather a ‘triumph’ in its effort of wanting to.
bachelors. While this self-desiring state suggests we could take a Lacanian path, for the sake of space within this paper and for its relevance to my work, we shall not. Rather we are better served to consider the state of mental play that Duchamp is both inducing and transcribing. To express this state, Duchamp looks to concepts or devices that can suggest or represent a similar intangible state of suspension.

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

Further to the codifying of desire through the motif of the bride and her bachelors, is Duchamp’s interest in the fourth dimension. Duchamp had become very interested in the idea of a further dimension; though it is what it represents, somewhat metaphorically, that we must examine. First we should remember that, although when we read his notes it appears as if this theory is being worked through by a mathematician or a physicist, Duchamp is neither. His approach to understanding this theory, a kind of playing-it-out, is performed with the semi-serious appearance of the rigour of a logician. This method is harmonious with the general theme of the Large Glass, in giving a serious investment of time and energy to portraying mental play. However, Duchamp as per usual follows no dogma, and rather, takes only the elements that suit his purpose. Thus when representing or attempting to represent the fourth dimension, it appears Duchamp is more interested in the abstract suggestion of what a fourth dimension offers, not necessarily how he could most rigorously represent it. In discussing the relevance of the fourth dimension, Tomkins notes that if Duchamp was “fascinated by the fourth dimension, it was for his own reasons, which were more poetic than mathematical.”24 Borrowing poetic elements, rather than adhering to, and carrying out a strict structure, relates to my work. I use an incomplete frame that appears to represent that of a boat, not because I wish to adhere to the strict and exacting traditions of boat construction, but because I wish to take the poetic suggestions that arise with the construction of such a vessel. A boat implies a voyage, a sailing away, and as such, the raw form of the frame and the construction methods and materials create an iconography that implies both longing and escape. In its unbuilt fashion, a boat’s iconography suggests escape that is imagined or speculated upon. I lean upon the poetic suggestion inherent within the iconographic shape of a boat to spark the imagination in the viewer. For Duchamp it is the poetic idea of an otherwise unseen projection, existing on a fourth-dimensional plane, that provides him with an iconography.

24 Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp, A Biography (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 60
In the Large Glass, the section of the bachelors is illustrated with a sense of three-dimensional space, whereas the bride and the objects of her panel are represented in flat, two-dimensional form. Jerrold Seigel proposes that this gives to some degree a sense that “we are in two positions at once”, seeing the glass from in front and above as if the “two halves of the picture were joined by an invisible hinge.” Using a hinge was an idea that Duchamp had worked on and may have been intended to help represent, or maybe suggest, the fourth dimension, but one that Seigel speculates may have been prevented from application by the cracking of the glass. Its purpose would have been to enable further, the experience of viewing the work from two places simultaneously, which goes some way to defining Duchamp’s interpretation of the fourth dimension. Exactly what the fourth dimension is or is not, in the mathematical sense in which it was first proposed, is not of the greatest importance in this paper; rather it is the abstract understanding and application of it by Duchamp that is of relevance to this discussion. Though it is also worth noting at this point that, especially during the ‘heroic phase’ of cubism (1909–1912), rhetoric of the fourth dimension was used liberally. It was introduced to the popular imagination in France by Henri Poincaré (1854–1912), espoused in art circles and Pablo Picasso’s (1881–1875) studio by a an actuary and amateur mathematician named Maurice Princet (1875–1973), and was even written and lectured about by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918). Accordingly, this is something about which Duchamp and his brothers would have been acutely aware, and may also have been influential in Duchamp’s own dramatic rethinking of cubism in his Nude Descending a Staircase (Nos. 1&2), 1911 and 1912, respectively. Siegel describes “Duchamp’s fourth dimension” as a “kind of utopia of aesthetic existence, where imagination never has to give way to the conditions and limits of real life.” It is this aspect of Duchamp’s interpretation of the fourth dimension that ties its purpose to the whole of the work.

The fourth dimension becomes the aesthetic plane on which the imagined is free to roam unadulterated by constraints of reality or completeness. It is the plane of imagining, a suspended sphere in which ideas are entertained, and where incommensurables are joined. Eliciting such a sense in the viewer is facilitated through

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26 Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp, A Biography (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 59. In his biography on Duchamp, Tomkins gives an account of the presence of the idea of the fourth dimension in early 20th century Paris. He writes of the fourth dimension’s ability to suggest an explanation for the changes sweeping the modernising world, and of its popularity only giving way to “the great wave of interest in Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity.” p 58.
27 Ibid, 105
creating the capacity to view an idea from all angles. This suggests the perception of a broader view of a concept, without giving weight, and therefore finality to one angle of that concept. Rather it is seen as a continuum, dynamic and perpetually multifaceted. Seigel sees it as standing for “a conceptual and possibly a visual equivalent for the experience of living perpetually in the realm of aroused desire that Walter Benjamin (1892 – 1940) described as ‘spared rather than denied fulfilment.’”

Thus we see Duchamp’s interest in the fourth dimension, existed little for the sake of the pursuit of the mathematical. Rather, Duchamp used the fourth dimension as a device, to help suggest the imagined zone in which desire exists.

Beyond the metaphor of desire, Seigel’s understanding of Duchamp’s Fourth Dimension has bearing on the condition of art, which need not always give in “to the conditions and limits of real life”. The condition of art allows it a separation from the actual world; something that can be considered on another plane, like Duchamp’s concept of desire. Art, though, does have its constraints and ‘realities’ in that there are conventions that govern the manner and way in which it is judged and classified. Duchamp however, wanted this work in particular to avoid all limitations, including those of art’s well-established pictorial conventions. In abandoning the pictorial conventions of the time and mapping an allegory of desiring in the fourth dimension, Duchamp “had wanted it to be sui generis, ‘something that absolutely didn’t need … to be compared with other works of the time,’” and thus he pushed away from all manner of convention, as he saw it, through doing what was not strictly painting. The concept of the fourth dimension operates as Duchamp hoped his Large Glass would - in a field outside of comparison. The fourth dimension does not register with what would be a generally recognised understanding of space. In the case of the Large Glass, the fourth dimension’s operation offers a parallel of how Duchamp hoped his work would function; as something so different that it operates outside of the realm to which it is supposed to belong, which for the Large Glass is the realm of art.

Whether or not Duchamp intended so, the inherent physical properties of glass operate as a device in suggesting the concept of the fourth dimension. The contrasting qualities of physical opacity and optical transparency together, allow multiple viewing points when illustrated upon in the manner used in the Large Glass. The transparency of the glass creates both a fixed and floating position upon which the characters are

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28 ibid.
literally suspended within their environment. In turn we perceive the suspended nature of relations between the Bride and her many Bachelors, their frozen and almost preserved portrayal suggestive of a perpetuating delay.

It is interesting to consider the associations of glass with window gazing, an activity Duchamp himself reflected upon in 1912. In his musings, he suggests that in the act of gazing/considering/longing before a shopfront we are transported to another plane; once the choice is made, and we attain what we have longed for, we descend back down to earth. In attempting to find satiation however, we find disillusionment. The disillusionment is almost a form of punishment, which Duchamp described as a kind of extreme regret. The regret owes to the realisation that we now possess a single, unsatisfying object, and the state of speculation has been shattered by this choice. Such musing suggests that Duchamp conceives the optimal state of the mind to be one of eternal play. In having to settle upon a final choice, the mind is forced to descend from the state of play and acknowledge a bodily and physical relationship to the world. It seems that the punishment in store for the speculative mind that decides upon a singular outcome, lies in being thrown back to earth, and forced to acknowledge a physical reality. Like the bride and her bachelors, the window-gazer exists in what Duchamp called a ‘delay’, and the figures of the Large Glass serve to describe the animation of the mind of the desirer. A similar sentiment is expressed within my own work through the device of a suggested object, rather than the object itself. In my work Large Object, 2009, the large frame-like structure suggests a boat. This suggestion is a depiction of the idea of a boat, in its embryonic and imagined state. Communicated to the viewer are the underpinnings of a boat, or its frame like state, though in a pristine form. This unsullied form is like a freeze frame of the imagined, from which the viewer can continue the imagining. It occupies a space similar to Duchamp’s delay or state of suspension in which the thing imagined has not yet been possessed and thus remains in a state of play.

There is a sly irony that affects the viewer of the Large Glass: anyone who looks upon this work, becomes instantly a ‘window-gazer’, but in doing so is only transported to the plane of rumination and imagining through seeing a description of speculation. There is no object to be attained on the other side of the glass, and so there is no chance of completing the act of possession, and having to come back down to earth disillusioned. Duchamp is thus able to use something more like a trick than a reference

to hint at the idea of the expanded and animated cerebral plane, by keeping the viewer without an object, and thus suspended. Similarly with my work I hope to keep the viewer in the realm of the imagined and suspended. The incomplete form of the frame in a gallery environment signals that it will always remain as a suggestion of an object, thus relieving the viewer of a definite object.

Duchamp’s obsession with the cerebral is also made manifest in his devotion to chess. Discussing his obsession with chess, Duchamp makes clear that as much as winning is part of playing a game, the essential and more rewarding aspect of chess is the continual engagement of the mind. To the Stettheimer sisters from Buenos Aires, Duchamp wrote, “I play [chess] day and night and nothing interests me more than to find the right move.”

Throughout the game the potential for new outcomes continually arises, so the possibilities never rest or become final. In the work *One Against Another and in Colour I & II*, (fig. 4) through depicting two states of the *Large Object* I was attempting to suggest a futility inherent within both imagining and possessing. The pair of diagrams, one in pencil and one colour, that are angular in appearance, are a plan form of the *Large Object* as it hangs. The curved pair are plans of its potential finality. The coloured form of each of the pictures is suggestive of play, in a mental form and through its almost building-block construction it leans toward childlike playful assembly. The sense and purpose of play is very much a physical form of the speculative state of imagining and desiring. In application it is a process of trying something, arriving at a result, demolishing it and starting over again. This experimental actuation of the imagination is the element of chess Duchamp so relished.

Chess produces little, other than speculation: no waste materials, nothing of material value, no final form. It is, as an activity, always in play. It is for these qualities that I included in the series *One Against Another*, an offhand, and somewhat whimsical reference to chess. The letters and numbers that run along each axis of the grid paper diagrams are the letters and numbers that operate to define the squares of a chessboard, for the notation of a game. The letters and numbers give coordinates for the entirety of the surface, thus suggesting that the entire area of the pictures exist within the realm of chess-like speculation.

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A NOTE ON ETANTS DONNÉS

Etants Donnés: 1. la chute d’eau/2. le gaz d’éclairage (fig. 9) or in its English form, Given 1. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas is Duchamp’s one work that symbolises and deals with death and finality. Completed 20 years after Duchamp professed to have quit making art, many perceived Etant Donnés to present concerns that were the polar opposite of those found in his greater oeuvre. To some the opposition it held with the past works was too much to bear: “Duchamp’s friend Robert Lebel (1901 – 1986) found it repellent. Others saw it as evidence of a frightful decline.”32 However, at the core, these concerns are one and the same. In this work, Duchamp highlights the qualities of ephemeral and expanded cerebral process, by showing quite the opposite. Through direct and life-like representation and a fixed viewing position (exactly the opposite qualities of the Large Glass) Duchamp is able to create something heavy, deathly and complete. The instructions and notes for the bequeathing and installation of Etant Donnés in the Philadelphia Museum arrange for it to be positioned near to the Large Glass.

Thus within the same room, Etant Donnés and the Large Glass work to strengthen the position of the other, through presenting two contrasting states of being. The first is that of the animated and suspended – or the state of delay, found in the large glass. The latter, perceived by many (including Tomkins33 and Seigel) as the earthly and heavy state of disillusionment that accompanies the window gazer’s return to earth, located aesthetically and symbolically within Etant Donnés. According to Seigel, Etant Donnés represents just what Duchamp “thought art should not be; it is the world of the Large Glass destroyed by being finished off, the ending he refused to provide all through his life”.34 In the Large Glass, the viewer considers the work from a multiplicity of angles, and contemplates the ephemeral musing and eroticism that pervades the work. In viewing Etant Donnés the viewer must peep in from a fixed point, through two small holes, the only available openings in a solid wooden door. This places the viewer firmly in the position of voyeur, looking in on a scene in which they see a spread-legged female torso. The graphic finality of the figurative forms in Etant Donnés leave little to the imagination, and little to the suspended realm of continuing speculation.

32 Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp, A Biography (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 455
33 Ibid, 465
This chapter explores historical divisions between the role of taste and its relation to art that touts an adherence to formalist methodologies and an art that is classified as conceptual. In doing so it works through the explanation of the division, as provided by Thierry de Duve’s book *Kant After Duchamp*. As the title suggests, this study of a division in art following in the wake of Duchamp’s destabilisation of ‘what art is’, examines the division through the lens of Kant. In doing so, de Duve casts Kant’s understanding of taste and judgement across a post-Duchamp world. His focus is upon what defines the split in these two art-mantras. Through Kant’s reasoning of the presence of the role of ‘concepts’ within the act of the judgement of taste, de Duve finds the division that brings the post-Duchamp dichotomy; or antinomy, as it is more readily referred to in this discussion. He then continues, through a Kantian frame, to find that the apparently irreconcilable arguments of conceptual art (as personified by Joseph Kosuth) and the material-formalist mantra (defined by Clement Greenberg) are united in their difference. That is that they both suffer from an irresolvable flaw upon the matters with which they find disagreement with the other. Thus they are, by de Duve’s understanding, reconcilable.

This understanding of the compatibility of the conceptual with a material beauty is what is of interest to my work. A strange side-note, is that both camps sought to expunge personal sentiment from art, (which is not what is focussed upon in de Duve’s argument) which despite all his ‘indifference’ and ‘chance’ was never something that Duchamp clinically or seriously sought to rid art of. My work, full of yearning, longing and speculating, as discussed earlier in this paper, uses both the conceptual and the material to express an unquantifiable sentiment. As such, I use the latter half of this chapter to position my own work amongst work that shares such traits in its production and sentiment. In doing so, I refer to the work of Bas Jan Ader and Francis Alÿs who have both used a conceptual framework, with the motif of searching, in an effort to express a romantic *unknowing*.

Thierry de Duve’s book and particularly the chapter of its namesake, *Kant After Duchamp*, works through the dichotomy between the camps of Formalism and Concept, that arose in the wake of Duchamp redefining the conventions of art. In de Duve’s argument, the two protagonists that represent art *after Duchamp* are Clement Greenberg and Joseph Kosuth. The two examples given are rather extreme in portraying, or discussing, their take on art. While Greenberg steers toward a formalist method of
evaluating art, Kosuth is wont to deny art of any potential (or latent) beauty and instead suggests that art is defined only in concept. Greenberg came to concede to Duchamp’s role in altering art history, though he was not fond of the change that Duchamp brought. In the case of Kosuth, it took others to point out that his line of argument is less than watertight, philosophically speaking.\textsuperscript{35} Duchamp and Kant are bookends that frame the dogmas of Greenberg and Kosuth. The main thrust of the argument revolves around what effect Duchamp and Kant have had on art thinking and practice. Greenberg and Kosuth serve a purpose as a pair of (roughly) contemporaries that animate the two distinct antinomies that exist in the post-Duchamp (and rather North American) milieu. These two viewpoints give modern, post-Duchamp, subjects through which to view Kant’s assessment of the judgement of taste. The challenge of judging is one of a division as to how it may occur:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Thesis.} The judgement of taste is not based upon concepts; for, if it were, it would be open to dispute (decision by means of proofs).
  \item \textbf{Antithesis.} The judgment of taste is based upon concepts; for otherwise, despite diversity of judgment, there could be no room even for contention in the matter (a claim to the necessary agreement of others with this judgment).\textsuperscript{36}
\end{itemize}

For de Duve the contentious issue is the relevance of the aesthetic in the judgement of not what is beautiful or not beautiful; but in the judgement of what is art or is not art. His hypothesis reads that: “‘this is art,’ though not necessarily any longer a judgement of taste, remains an aesthetic judgement, even though no particular meaning is attached to the word ‘aesthetic’ until the rereading is completed.”\textsuperscript{37} He further suggests that in the rereading of Kant we replace the word ‘beautiful’ with the word ‘art’, so that the thesis becomes:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Thesis.} The sentence ‘this is art’ is not based upon concepts.
  \item \textbf{Antithesis.} The sentence ‘this is art’ is based upon concepts.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{35} Thierry de Duve, \textit{Kant after Duchamp} (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996), 307. In \textit{Kant After Duchamp}, de Duve points out that Kosuth’s writing “is in any case full of loopholes” with “its inverted Hegelianism” and “borrowed Wittgensteinianism” and refers to Richard Selafani’s article “What Kind of Nonsense is This?” \textit{Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism} 33 (1975): 455-458.


\textsuperscript{37} Thierry de Duve, \textit{Kant after Duchamp} (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996), 304.
And further:

Thesis. Art is not a concept.
Antithesis. Art is a concept.

Here, de Duve has reduced art into two simple, seemingly oppositional statements that typify elements of arguments around art at the time. Art concerned strictly with the formal and aesthetic, such as the material-based practices of formalist abstraction, expressed in styles ranging from Abstract Expressionism through to Post-Painterly Abstraction, advocated by Greenberg, and seen in the works of Jackson Pollock (1912 – 1956) and some the work of Frank Stella (b. 1936) (figs.12 &13). And the conceptual camps that deny the aesthetic, claiming that art matters only as a concept – Fluxus, happenings, and most overtly, Kosuth (fig. 14).

that the judgement of taste is not based upon determinate concepts, and in the antithesis that the judgement of taste is based upon a concept, but an indeterminate one (viz. of the supersensible substrate of phenomena). Between these two there is no contradiction.\(^{38}\)

Modern parallels can easily be drawn between Kant’s antithesis (Kosuth) and his thesis (in Greenberg) – it becomes a matter of concept versus divined judgement. De Duve finds Kant coming to the conclusion that, in the thesis, judgement is “not based upon determinate concepts” and that in the antithesis the concepts are “indeterminate”, meaning the antinomies are united in sharing the same flaw. De Duve implies that likewise in the then contemporary arts, what divides the two camps is exactly what unites them. Or: the two dogmas contradict themselves on their opposing principles and thus remove their opposition to each other. What it boils down to is that though Duchamp advocated a move away from the ‘retinal’ toward the ‘cerebral’, to create absolute divisions in art is not likely feasible, as the two parts will share weaknesses that render them to be not in contradiction of the other. It is likely that Duchamp was aware of this problem even as he was moving away from the ‘retinal’ toward the ‘cerebral’ the two of which constitute his own internal ‘thesis’ and ‘antithesis’.

\(^{38}\) Ibid, 309. Here, de Duve quotes Kant and the footnote cites “Bernard, p. 186”, as there is no bibliography, we must assume that he is referring to *Kant’s Critique of Judgement*, translated with introduction and notes by J.H. Bernard, 2\(^{nd}\) ed. revised, London, Macmillan, 1914.
SO THEN, WHAT DOES COME AFTER?

Du Duve pursues this argument as an historian and theorist emerging from the modern/conceptual period into a postmodern era. My interest in this argument lies in the suggestion that concept and beauty are not irreconcilable. Through de Duve’s reading of Kant, we see beauty (thus possibly poetry) and concept can exist harmoniously, and even in a complimentary fashion. It seems that this was not entirely apparent to Greenberg; and it seems that it was, and has become – if that were possible – even less apparent, to Kosuth, who becomes enraged, if people, who believe his work to contain an inherent beauty, venture make this apparent to him.\textsuperscript{39} Duchamp (to whose choosing of a urinal we owe this discussion) however, in seeking to associate the role of art with the cerebral rather than the retinal, did not seek dogmatically to exclude human urges and desires from art. On the contrary, while he may have steered away from an art that was exclusively visual/retinal, such as that of Gustave Courbet (1819 – 1877),\textsuperscript{40} he instituted desire – an unquantifiable thing – as the concept driving and explaining his major work, \textit{The Large Glass}.

Similarly, my work deals with concepts through abstract representation, without denying the unknown or intuited aspects of art. There is a harmony and even a relationship between the realm of the explicable and conceptual and the indefinite or intangible. My past work used a conceptual framework and method to \textit{seek} and attempt to understand the intangible or deeply personal yearnings. In \textit{Nostalgia For the Never Known}, 2008, I used a series of camera-based technologies in order to interrogate the unknown space of the televisual. This interrogation used the footage of me swimming out into the ocean towing the boat. This work, while operating through conceptual ideas about the nature of representation (with reference to the ideas of Hollis Frampton), sought to find something that it knew was unreachable, and thus signalled that unknown thing’s existence. The absurd act of searching out an unattainable past, future or present, by swimming out into the ocean, attached to and dragging a boat, implied that some things can only be searched for and never located. It was tinged with an element

\textsuperscript{39} During a talk at the Louvre, 2010, Joseph Kosuth snapped, and retaliated almost abusively at woman who suggested very poshly that there is a “poetic beauty” in conceptual art like his, and perhaps conceptual art (and his specifically) talks abstractly to the emotions in the way that poetry once did for the broader public; a function that poetry no longer serves, simply through failing to be read by the masses. Conversely, Duchamp almost admits at various times to his ideas being of flawed conviction and to contradicting himself because he can’t believe in belief.

\textsuperscript{40} Calvin Tomkins, \textit{Duchamp, A Biography} (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 58. Duchamp’s main gripe was with Courbet, whom he suggested caused, or made popular the purely visual, and the role of the painter to paint that which he sees. Thus the phrase that caused him bother “bête comme un peintre” can be seen as a direct reference to the purely retinal act that painting had come to be.
of romanticism and explored through a conceptual understanding and examination of the materials. The ‘romantic’ element became apparent through the beauty and absurdity that became the content of the work: the documented images of a man swimming with a boat attached to himself, and the fragile delicate nature of the boat itself.

This method of working has an affinity with other artists whose work searches for, or explores the unknown using a conceptual framework. Attempting to understand a complex problem invariably unearths elements of the unknown. It was the unknown that became the object that classically drove the search of the Romanticists, as something that can only be intuited, yet it became a ‘thing’ enough that they should try to represent it. Likewise, conceptual art seeks to give a (albeit abstract) representation of a concept or an idea and often proposes to be strictly that – emotionally detached. As we have seen (Kosuth), it sometimes claims to be a purely intellectual search, devoid of any beauty. Yet the beauty often becomes apparent in attempting to represent and explain that which cannot be simply figuratively depicted – hence the existence of poetry.

I situate my work amongst artists whose practice merges concept and beauty, often illustrated by physically searching for meaning. The work of Bas Jan Ader’s (1942 -1975) oeuvre typifies this concept. In his work, Ader developed to an extreme (and unfortunately fatal) point, an exaggeration of the idea of the Romantic. In his most well-known and final work, *In Search of the Miraculous*, (pt 1) 1973, (pts 2 and 3) 1975 – unfinished, Ader took the persona of a true romantic hero through all the steps of a rigorous conceptual examination. (fig. 11) In the first part of the triptych, he wandered the streets of LA for the duration of a night, looking for his lost love. Photographs documenting this lonesome journey were exhibited with the words of a lonely-heart pop song, at once almost parodying both the romantic and the conceptual. In the final part of the triptych he attempted to sail across the Atlantic, alone, in a tiny thirteen-foot boat, and in doing so, fulfilled the ultimate romantic possibility by actually disappearing at sea. He worked at once on mystifying, and seeking to explain or understand, the idea of romantic yearning, through conceptual methods. In doing so he searched for the romantic through a rigorous conceptual lens.

The work of Francis Alÿs adheres to a conceptual structure of arbitrary measurement. He uses task-based performative methods, usually performing within a city environment. Through this approach his work engages the outside world, though his path through it is pre-determined. Alÿs’ work is concerned primarily with
examining the occurrences that arise as a result of the transition between places. This transitory period is representative of the unquantifiable changes that occur in communication, in which meaning is lost, or morphs into something else, positioning his work as an investigation of the inexorable instability of meaning. Meaning becomes something unclassifiable, and he pursues it quite literally. The documentation of his performances shows him traversing various landscapes, urban or otherwise. In each he institutes an arbitrary action with which to trace his passage: running a drumstick along a fence (*Railings*, 2004); pushing a large block of ice around Mexico City until it melts (*Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*, 1997, [fig. 10]); trailing green paint (*The Leak*, 2004); or having his jumper unravel, part of it still left in his place of origin (*Fairy Tales*, 1995). Formal conceptual art parameters, used as a means to an end allow him to create a character who seems to be a purposeful flâneur – a contradiction in terms – searching an in-between space. The pointless journeying puts the focus of his travels on that in-between space. These actions give a sense of beauty to the unknown present and future that he is tracing, as he pursues each task whilst looking to the horizon in the romantic sense.

This aspect draws us fleetingly back to Duchamp and the *Large Glass*. Central to the subject of that work was the attempt to represent fourth-dimensionality, that was to some extent, a theory founded as an effort to explain the mysterious or inconceivable. What occurs in the work of all three of these artists is an attempt to understand the unclassifiable, through the implementation of arbitrary constructs. Where Duchamp used the fourth dimension, and Bader the Romantic Hero, Alýs uses a given set of aims and records what occurs in between. Similarly, the three artists share an understanding of their respective projects being unlikely to solve the greater mystery. Rather it becomes about pointing to the importance of the somewhat mythical imaginings or spaces that entertain change, imagining and chance. My practice employs a similar structural approach in attempting to locate an unquantifiable sentiment. My past work (specifically *Nostalgia for the Never Known*) used a structural framing to investigate the televisual, in the pursuit of an unknown space. My present (specifically *Large Object*) work relies less on arbitrary rules, but still focuses on the unknowable and unattainable, managing only to suggest such a space exists.

While Bader and Alýs both employed their own form of whimsical rigour, perhaps the suggestion to explore a matter seriously and systematically, but without unyielding conviction, was also provided pre-eminently by Duchamp. In leaving directions for the reassembling of *Etants Données*, Duchamp made precise notes but
“he left room for a degree of *ad libitum*… It was a characteristic mingling of seemingly opposed tendencies: precision and indifference. Let’s be serious, in other words, but not too serious.”\textsuperscript{41}

CONCLUSION

The approach of both the written and practice based components of this MFA project express an appreciation of, and an attempt to, communicate a state of speculation and imagining that does not have to take into account the binding factors of reality. I have suggested at times, particularly when working through Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, that this is an important aspect of the condition of art, and perhaps to some degree one of art’s few responsibilities. I do not, for a moment, mean to suggest that this is the only or overriding place of art in society, but that it can play a role that offers the viewer a simultaneous encounter of cerebral relief and engagement.

I arrived by way of an aesthetic preface for my constructions, near to the start of Impressionism, and the turning point of the role of figurative painting, owing to the desire for immediacy that heralded a sketch aesthetic in the late 19th century. This desire for immediacy in the field of art is no doubt present in an era that hangs on to the term ‘Contemporary’. My work however, in its relation to the immediacy so desired by Monet et al., finds its greatest link in the way in which a new sketch aesthetic formed its relationship with the viewer. It is the completeness and incompleteness extant upon a single canvas that arose from working without mediation, which ties my work so strongly to the changes of this period.

Discussing Marcel Duchamp’s seminal work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, wove the preoccupations of this thesis through another pivotal period in the history of art. It took this course not so much for the sake of studying the redefining of art that the practice of Duchamp brought about, but for the subject matter with which he dealt, and the method he employed to express it. Of interest to my project was Duchamp’s use of an erotic state to portray desire, or his conversion of the ‘ism’ in eroticism, to become an art-like ‘ism’ that could work to arouse suspense, through codification and mechanising desire. It is exactly this suggestion of the incomplete and hence its suggestion of delay, suspension and the speculative state that identifies my interests in art, with those of Duchamp. Further, the mechanising of wanting, or imagining what can’t really be, begged for comparison with the speculating upon, and imagining of what could exist, that is so present in my work.

Whilst in the first two chapters, we see elements of art with which I strongly identify, the first half of the final chapter *Kant After Duchamp*, deals with proponents of oppositional camps with whom I’d rather not be involved. For all the division that exists between Kosuth and Greenberg, Thierry de Duve finds, through a reading of
Kant, that their manifestos appear to be surprisingly well aligned. This finding suggests that adhering to a dogma of any sort does not fare well. Thankfully the latter half of the final chapter reunites my work with two artists (though it cannot help but take some recourse with Duchamp) with whom I find an affinity in their almost parodic approach to the serious, the arbitrary, and the search for something unclassifiable. What becomes manifest through this final chapter, and the paper more generally, is that a search for something will often highlight incompleteness, which is not something that need be dealt with ruefully. With the understanding that we won’t quite find the object that we search for, but instead make apparent the importance of the unknowable, I shall end in suggesting: let’s not be too dogmatic.
Bibliography


Figure 1a.
Kevin Platt, *Nostalgia for the Never Known*, 2008
Hoop Pine, Kauri Pine, Digital Video on DVD, Slides and Projector, Television, Plywood boxes

Figure 1b.
Kevin Platt, *Nostalgia for the Never Known*, 2008
Detail- Digital Video
Figure 1c.
Kevin Platt, *Nostalgia for the Never Known*, 2008
Detail- Slides
Figure 2.
Kevin Platt, *Invested Objects*, 2009 (Installation comprised of love components- see figs 3 and 4)
Plywood, nuts and bolts, pine, coloured paper, pencil on grid paper

Figure 3.
Kevin Platt, *Large Object*, 2009
Plywood, nuts and Bolts
Figure 4a.
Kevin Platt, *One Against Another, One Against Another In Colour, One Against Another II, One Against Another In Colour II*, 2009. Plywood, pine, coloured paper, pencil on grid paper

Figure 4b. Detail view, clockwise from top left
Kevin Platt, *One Against Another In Colour, One Against Another, One Against Another II In Colour, One Against Another II*, 2009. Plywood, pine, coloured paper, pencil on grid paper
Figure 5.
Claud Monet, *Sunset over the Seine at Lavacourt*, 1880
*oil on canvas*
150 x 101cm
Eugène Delacroix, *Chopin and George Sand* - sketch to the painting *Chopin and Sand*, now cut and separated (Chopin in Louvre, Sand in Ordrupgaard-Museum).
Sketch is in the Louvre, 1838

Eugène Delacroix, *Portrait of Frédéric Chopin*, 1838
*oil on canvas*
46 x 38cm

Eugène Delacroix, *Portrait of George Sand*, 1838
*oil on canvas*
46 x 38cm
Figure 7.
Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23
Oil paint, varnish, lead foil, lead wire and dust on two large glass plates (cracked), each mounted between two glass panels in a steel and wood frame 272.5 x 175.8cm.
Figure 8.
Key to *The Large Glass*, After Jean Suquet, *Miror de la Mariée* (Flammarion)
Figure 9a.
Marcel Duchamp, *Etants Donnés: 1. la chute d’eau/2. le gaz d’éclairage*, (English title: *Given I. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas*) wooden door, bricks, velvet, twigs, mannequin, glass, linoleum, an assortment of lights, landscape composed of hand-painted and photographed elements and an electric motor housed in a cookie tin which rotates a perforated disc.
Figure 9b - view through the peep holes.

Marcel Duchamp, *Etants Donnés: 1. la chute d'eau/2. le gaz d'éclairage*, (English title: *Given I. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas*) wooden door, bricks, velvet, twigs, mannequin, glass, linoleum, an assortment of lights, landscape composed of hand-painted and photographed elements and an electric motor housed in a cookie tin which rotates a perforated disc.
Figure 10.
Francis Alys, *Paradox of Praxis I or Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*, 1997
video documentation of performance
Figure 11a.
Bas Jan Ader, *In Search of the Miraculous (One Night in Los Angeles)*, 1973
*series of 18 black and white photographs*

Figure 11b.
Bas Jan Ader, *In Search of the Miraculous* (Art & Project bulletin no. 89 July 1975), in association with Claire Copely Gallery (detail)
Figure 12
Frank Stella, *Hampton Roads, New Madrid, Delaware Crossing, Sabine Pass, Palmito Ranch and Island No. 10*, 1962
Alkyd (Benjamin Moore flat wall paint) on raw canvas
each 30.6 x 30.6cm

Figure 13
Frank Stella, *Hyena Stomp*, 1962
Oil on canvas
195.6 x 195.6cm
Figure 14
Joseph Kosuth, *Four Colours Four Words*, 1966
*Neon and transformer installation*
Figure 15
Kevin Platt, Masters Exhibition Overview, 2011
installation view
Figure 16
Kevin Platt, *Objet D’Art*, 2011
timber, watercolour paint, copper wire
48 x 48 x 4cm

Figure 17
Kevin Platt, *Study in Bronze*, 2011
bronze, felt, cork, timber
148 x 30cm
Image Sources

Figure 1 - 4
supplied by artist

Figure 5

Figure 6a., Figure 6b. and Figure 6c.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait_of_Frédéric_Chopin_and_George_Sand

Figure 7
http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/54149.html?mulR=1898439173|90

Figure 8

Figure 9a. and Figure 9b.
http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/65633.html
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Figure 10
http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/finch/francis-alys-5-6-11_detail.asp?picnum=1

Figure 11a. and Figure 11b.

Figure 12

Figure 13
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/stella-hyena-stomp-t00730

Figure 14
http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/joseph-kosuth/four-colors-four-words

Figure 15, 16 and 17
supplied by artist