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# PERFORMING MEDIA

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Supervisor: Rory Bester

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it at any university for a degree.

_____ _____

Signature Date

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To my parents Claude and Giuli Osso I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to learn and grow in my own direction. You have both taught me to follow my heart and work hard, for that I am very grateful.

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# Abstract

Catherine Wood describes our society today as an entanglement between languages, time, space, intimacy, drama and diversity (Wood 2012: 10). Ian Chambers affirms that the notion of communicating or recounting with greater multi-dimensionality, enacting or displaying more than one perspective at the same time, seems to better facilitate the complexity involved in communication itself (Chambers 2000: 25). Interaction in today's context is therefore a complex experience that can position many modes of engagement in the same moment. The following dissertation explores the process of translating more than one visual language – here, painting and performance. It explores how the interdisciplinary nature of visual languages can interpret experience as multifaceted, lending greater perspective to concepts, issues and subject matter. Walter Benjamin suggests that this is only possible because languages "are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express" (Benjamin 1969: 72). Benjamin's text introduces the idea of translation between languages as a mode, a natural way of interaction. I will use his concept of translation to explain my interest in the conflation between painting and performance, and how this process reflects on a particular experience our current context.

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# Introduction

Virtually Real Exhibition

For many years my practice has included an engagement with various modes of working and interacting with a variety of visual languages in the making of an artwork, and understanding how this can transform one's own visual language and create a unique object or experience that is multi-dimensional and inclusive. I understand that the distinctions between an object, the experience of making an object, and experiencing the object are elusive and malleable categories that are open to experimentation.

*Virtually Real,* my final fourth year exhibition, formed part of my Fine Art undergraduate degree completed in 2010. I would like to begin this dissertation with a brief description and personal recollection of how the *Virtually Real* exhibition was produced, as the mode of working which I discovered during this period has become crucial to my artistic practice and influenced the decision to pursue a MAFA.



Figure 1 (a&b) Installation shot of *Virtually Real* exhibition (2010)

*Virtually Real* was produced after suffering an attempted hi-jacking. I began to paint 'my friends' from profile pictures that they had themselves uploaded onto Facebook. During this time, I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome, which restricted my movement and, because I feared any engagement with the outside world, the Internet became my primary mode of interaction. The Facebook portraits that I accessed became an intriguing subject matter for me, primarily because the basis of the type of relationship we engaged was something quite ephemeral; that is, I had no physical contact with them. The contact I experienced was voyeuristic at best as I spent much of

my time prowling through their public profiles and interacting with them through online chats. The portraits I produced (as a result of manipulating the computer-generated photographs) can be described as ethereal and dream-like because all of my experiences with my virtual friends were intangible, in terms of physicality, and mediated through the two-dimensional interface of the computer.

The ephemeral and often-contradictory concepts of an intermediary space, and a non-physical relationship, became interesting intersections to explore in my practice as an artist, in particular, because as both a trained painter and a trained dancer I have always been intensely aware of physicality and body/space relationships. The degree to which physical interaction can facilitate a sense of intimacy is a consistent theme in my artwork. The *Virtually Real* exhibition was conceived because I was intrigued by the contradictory sense of intimacy without physical contact, which the Internet maintains.

The Internet facilitates the notion of the existence of a place that we cannot physically experience, but yet one that connects us to a sense of physical space and time. Perhaps, because of my experience on the theatre stage, I find myself comparing this dislocated sense of physical space and intimacy to the notion of the proscenium arch, which theatrically demarcates an alternate space. In a theatre the performance space is a space that can be interpreted in various creative ways in order to aid the live action unfolding. In this space an audience member can be transported into a different perception of space and can be subjected to an alternate level of engagement. It is a space different to everyday interaction, both in appearance and in the manner in which it proposes interaction. Similarly to the Internet, the theatre creates an entirely new context in which the rules of everyday interaction dramatically shift. This allows the audience/viewer and the performer/artist a platform where an array of concepts and elements can co-exist. I am interested in how human experience is both expressed and manipulated (performed) through technological supports and context (such as the theatre or the Internet).

In the *Virtually Real* exhibition I became interested in how an abstract yet intimate concept, such as virtual friendship, could manifest through a physical medium such as painting. I decided to re-create my social network into a physical space using an installation of painted portraits. The portraits are not illusionistic in style. They have areas of solid colour and form, which is then left to dry and then, painted over again (sometimes three or four times). There is a deliberate attempt to balance form in terms of actual representational shapes with more fluid and transparent manifestations. The result is a somewhat abstracted portrait which is neither about the appearance of the person nor their identity. Their intention as portraits is simply about their displaced relationship to me.

In the exhibition, the paintings were of different sizes and installed at various heights in connected rooms. Their particular spatial placement attempted to define, physically, the

intangible Internet space that I had been accessing over the past few months. After a lengthy process of feeling emotionally vulnerable to the world, yet strangely connected to these virtual individuals, the exhibition became the vehicle through which I could engage the physical world again. My aim was to provide a sensory space where my audience could interact with 'my friends' (the portraits), experiencing my interpretation of a virtual social network, and importantly, physically encountering my strangely personal relationship with my virtual friends. Aside from engaging concepts related to the Internet as a perceived reality, which were mostly influenced by Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), painting the uploaded profile photographs encouraged an engagement with the visual language of photography and painting. How did engaging with a computer-generated portrait influence the manner in which it could be realised in a painted portrait?

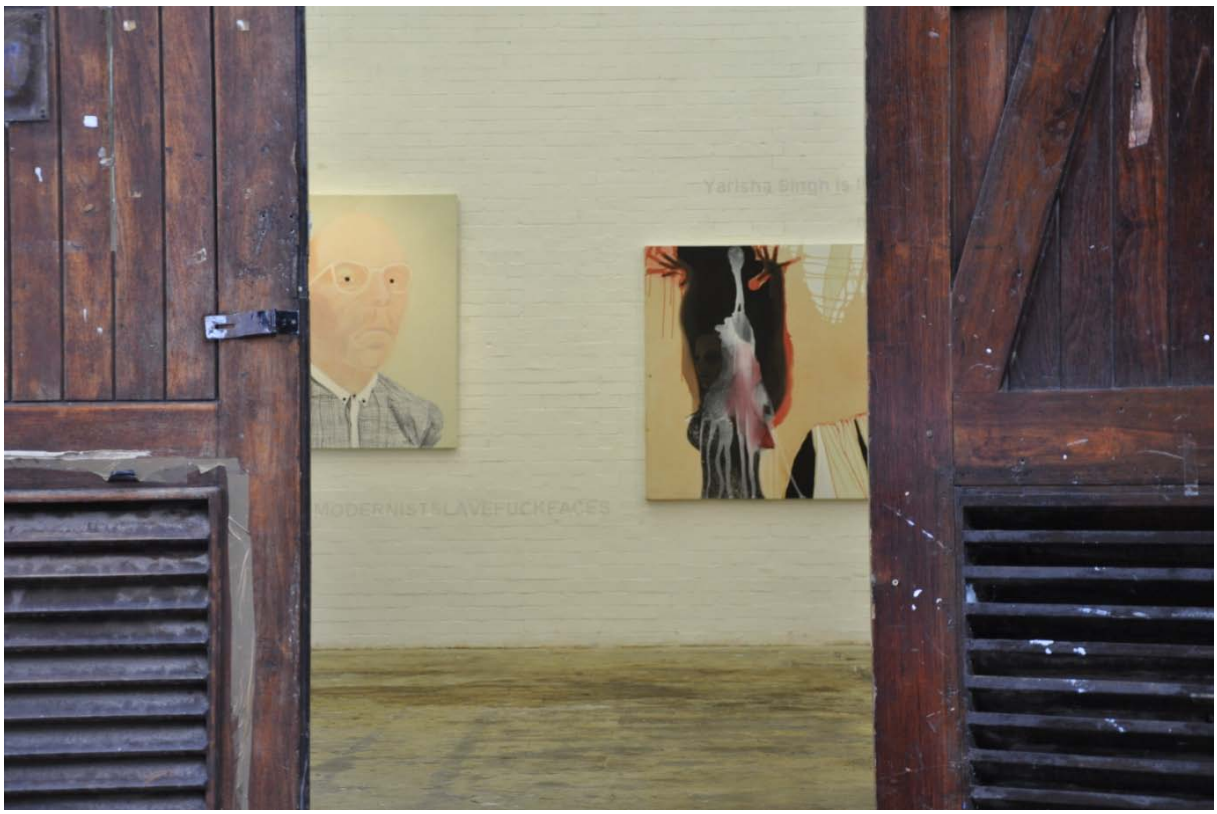

Figure 2 Installation shot of *Virtually Real* exhibition (2010)

To paint the portraits in a hyper-real style did not suit the sense of detached companionship I felt in relation to these people. I could not simply replicate the uploaded personal photograph into paint, as I felt that this type of rendering would not adequately explain my emotional relationship to the particular person. Instead, I began to explore a combined visual and physical process that was specifically aware of the distant yet seemingly intimate experience of the concept of a virtual friendship. I decided that adopting the uploaded photograph was a valuable component in the creation of my own painting, and began to develop a process that used the photograph as an entry point. I printed out the computer portraits on an ink-jet printer and soaked

them in water. Immediately the ink began to dilute in the water, which saturated the image and distorted the friends' faces, leaving solid areas of ink. Once dry, I felt that the saturated, vaguely visible image better explained, visually, the simultaneously intimate and mediated relationship with my friends that Facebook facilitated. I then translated the dry, distorted photographs into my own language of paint.

The physical, painterly process of attempting to capture the doctored photographs through the medium of paint resulted in a shift in the way I normally painted. In order to capture the leaks and blotches created accidentally through my invented process of soaking the photographs, I had to adapt the traditional easel style of painting. I put the canvas on the floor and developed a wash technique whereby I would fill empty water bottles with paint and water and pour layers of thinner paint over more pronounced solid areas. I then had to wait for the paint to dry before I was able to view the canvas in an upright position, only to place it back on the floor in order to develop the multi-layered ethereal effect I desired. The physical technique or act of repeatedly soaking the photographs and then moving the canvas from floor to wall aided in reflecting on the emotional distance between the prescribed photograph and the emerging painterly image. The act of constantly negotiating between the image on the floor and the drying paint paralleled my personal understanding of my relationships to these virtual friends, which is also about a sense of negotiation. That is, in order to capture what my own virtual relationship to these individuals is about I have to recall my personal, physical connection to them as well as navigate their computer personalities or their Facebook profiles; their images, status updates, other friends and comments.

The manipulation of the individually uploaded original photographs, and the layered and physically laboured manner in which my doctored photographic portraits were being painted, resulted in a more personal and intimate manifestation, different from the original photo. The imagery shifted into a space that considered the photograph and reproduced it in a more physical enactment, which better facilitated its relationship to me. I have come to define this process of physical and visual manipulation, experimentation and chance, as 'performative'.

I align the concept of "performativity" or "the performative" to Judith Butler's understanding of the term. Butler explains "performativity" as an interdisciplinary term which can be used to describe the capacity of languages (speech, painting, gestures) to act or consummate an action, or to construct and perform an identity (Butler 1990). I understand, that my action to create such a particular process in the Virtually Real exhibition is inherently part of my identity. Butler explains that

> Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance'

> is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance (Butler 1993: 5).

In my work performativity includes my experience as a ballet and contemporary dancer. Ballet is about practicing and repeating a specific vocabulary and spatial order. In my experience, it is only through understanding this disciplined and structured way of working which does not openly accept difference that, as Butler infers, a freedom in movement can be discovered and expressed (Butler 1993). Contemporary dance uses the strict vocabulary of ballet but allows for individual invention to filter into the type of movement, which is created. It uses either the inadequacies or capabilities of the individual body, for example, an inability to physically lift ones leg above 90 degrees might influence a series of movement which restricts the dynamism of movement; keeping it all at one level or making it appear more grounded.

For Butler, gestures and speech acts do not express an interior identity; they perform or enact that very identity and even its assumed quality of interiority (Butler 1990). In this way, like the way in which I developed my painting process in Virtually Real or the example of an inability to lift one's leg, performativity reverses the idea that an identity is the source of more secondary actions (marks, speech, gestures). Instead, it inquires into the construction of identities as they are caused by performative actions, behaviors, and gestures. However, these acts are not simply performed by individuals. Rather, the production of cultural signification for bodies relies on and is enforced by discursive power and so they are always already situated within larger social contexts.

It was through the realisation that my process had emerged from my actions, experience and behaviour as both dancer and painter that I was persuaded to explore further what happens when these visual and gestural languages, which are so much a part of my personality, collide. In the *Virtually Real* exhibition, for example, it was only through manipulating the alternate language of photography to suit my own language of painting, that I was able to capture the physical disconnect I felt towards my Facebook friends. More importantly, my invented mode solidified the notion that developing a process in relation to another visual language has the capacity to affect and change one's own visual language. I came to understand this process and mode of working as not only ritualistic and performative, but vital to the final reading of the work.

The *Virtually Real* exhibition was a turning point for me as an artist because elements of my experience as a performer (particularly the dynamic between chance and control, whether it be using the body as a tool or developing a physical process in order to create) came to the fore as a central mode of working, and influenced my practice as a painter. It is because of my experience in the traditionally separate art forms of dance

and fine art that I choose to conceptually read my artwork as an on-going performance. For me, the process of creating, and the creation itself, are interchangeable elements. I understand them to be in a constant state of flux, and as such my practice has become an attempt to unify diverse modes of working, in the full knowledge that they will possibly never be fully resolved; instead they will continuously evolve.

The Art Object and Movement

The *Virtually Real* exhibition solidified an understanding that my act of painting has always been intrinsically connected to my experience as an individual, the experience of creating an image, in addition to the image itself. The painting medium (as evident in *The Virtually Real* exhibition) lent itself to a type of performative or active process, through which a unique image could materialise. The following dissertation and accompanying exhibition are an exploration in further developing my language of painting by attempting to combine it with my alternate language of performance (dance and theatre). Through exploring the manner in which these art forms intersect in the creation of an artwork, I will offer a different perception or alternate entry point to the way the experience of art objects can be read in an art discourse. I would like resultant manifestations in my exhibition to be considered as part of a process of translation, as a process of change. They have materialised as a result of thinking through and conflating qualities ascribed to painting and performance media.

As they appear in my exhibition, they are artefacts or objects, created or enacted, as a result of human action. Artefacts are containers of human experience, embodiments of thought and knowledge made into material form (Jacobs 2013). The artefacts or forms in my exhibition have developed in combination with my playful, observational process of creating, which cannot be divorced from a strong sense of physicality developed during my professional dance career. They exist as a simultaneous reaction and reflection on that process, emerging from an intense observation of my own self-awareness, emotional states and physical actions during the evolution of an artwork, giving rise to a constant search for interpretation (Leder 1990: 78).

When I create, I understand performance and painting to hold equal value. Rosalee Goldberg has held the historically popular view that the influence of performance on more commodity-driven arts such as painting was that it could only be understood as a mode that fed into the transitional moments or ‘‘performative moments’’ in the development of new painterly or sculptural forms or styles (Wood 2007: 23). Goldberg’s position perpetuated the notion that performance should only be considered in a secondary, more influential role, in relation to art objects, since its ephemerality holds little value, especially in a consumer-driven market (Wood 2007: 23).

However, Lily Diaz-Kommonen expands on the incarnate process of creating art objects when she describes the process as the ‘‘active reflection that manifests itself in the

engagement between the mind and the body'' (Diaz-Kommonen 2004: 3). In emphasising the action between how the mind and body engage, and characterising it as ''active reflection'', Diaz-Kommonen is able to reference Butler and re-evaluate how the ephemeral nature of performance, its experiential capacity, has become of equal importance in the creation and reading of an artwork today.

The subtle difference between Goldberg's and Diaz-Kommonen's observations is this term ''active reflection'', since it implies a contradiction in the simultaneity of 'present' and 'past', or 'action' and 'reflection'. It suggests a new way of acting or doing; a new type of interaction which positions all types of experience in the same moment. If one considers that our worldly configurations, and more particularly our South African context, are filled with diverse and often conflicting ideologies (which are complicated by fast-developing technologies and a variety of languages), then the notion of communicating or recounting greater multi-dimensionality, enacting or displaying more than one perspective at the same time, seems to better facilitate the complexity involved in communication itself (Chambers 2000: 25). In today's context, identities and languages are subject to histories, memories and possibilities from all over the world, and therefore cannot be lived in a state of understanding that is already fully established. Instead, they are constantly shifting, and because of their inability to remain fixed, I am interested in how they become points of departure in the art-making process, or as Chambers describes them ''openings into the continued elaboration of becoming'' (Chambers 2000: 29).

If a creation is always in the process of ''becoming'', always in between a past and a present, it accepts that it is always moving and therefore never distinguishes its own boundaries. Instead the boundaries of medium, specificity in visual languages become blurry. Understanding the relationship between painting and dancing, for example, requires an attempt to find a meeting point or commonality between the two languages. Painting and dance both have the ability to shift between form and formlessness; they are both able to articulate the abstract nature of emotions and can easily adapt to a new context, situation or experience. They both employ the notion of the body as a vessel (or container) through which human experience can be enacted, and they both use material and/or technological supports – for example, the canvas or the stage to enhance the subject's experiential value. The material or technological supports are often harder to observe in a performance because the creation of one object is not the intention. Instead a performance relies on a broader concept of production, which demarcates three-dimensional space for action, making the notion of a 'container' or art object a more complex concept. The emotional response one experiences whilst watching a performance is often described as immediate or visceral in comparison with viewing a painting because the material or technological supports employed are often purposefully designed to seamlessly compliment the action in the moment. This is purposefully done to focus attention on the perpetual movement of the body, which accommodates time for reaction rather than reflection (Bailey & Leigh 2013).

If artefacts in today's context appropriate the term ''active reflection'', and movement propagates 'reaction', then the intersection between reaction and reflection in the process of art making are the two polarities I am exploring in my practice as a visual artist. 'Reacting' and 'reflecting' are ''doing words'' (to quote my high-school English teacher). They connote action and the varying degree to which that action is performed is how I have conceived the artworks in my exhibition. In my practice, the desire to create artefacts that absorb experiences is constantly in crisis with the desire to move and create in the moment. It is because of this collision of sensibilities that I have developed a way of creating objects that attempts to explore 'reflection' and 'reaction' in the same space, by always considering the object and the viewer in the space. I believe I can correlate these ideas because the reflective process (often associated with creating) is always a somatic experience (Bailey & Leigh 2013).

In this way I consider myself a choreographer. Choreography is the art of designing sequences of movements in which motion, form, or both, are specified. Choreography may also refer to the design itself. The word 'choreography' has Greek origin, meaning 'dance-writing' (Oxford Dictionary 2003). The forms in my exhibition adopt this strategy of creating between motion and form. I believe that movement (in any form) continuously passes from one (im)balance to the next and therefore choreographs the notion of "becoming" (Chambers 2000: 29). I am constantly choreographing artefacts and developing ways in which they might engage movement. The MAFA exhibition itself is simultaneously reactive, like the dancer, and reflective, like the artist. The objects demand a three-dimensional space similar to the human body, with the artefacts and the human body even having an interchangeable relationship. My manifestations attempt to unify movement and artefact through enactment or choreography, and it is through this back and forth interaction between production, object and exhibition that I understand my practice as choreographic and performative.

My work is concerned with both the process of translating more than one language as well as the resultant translation, and because translating experience is multifaceted, it therefore requires visual languages to be interdisciplinary. In his essay, 'The Task of the Translator', Walter Benjamin suggests: "Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express" (Benjamin 1969: 72). Benjamin's text introduces the idea of translation between languages as a mode, a natural way of interaction. In this way translation as a mode must be understood as the central reciprocal relationship between languages. Here, meaning can be found, not in individual words and sentences or colours and forms, but in the mode of translation itself, which constantly attempts to find the balance in communication but never actually intends to resolve it (Benjamin 1969: 74). The mode that I invent in order to communicate through movement and paint is in a permanent state of choreography or becoming, and might never be resolved. If one

accepts that this perseverance to communicate is the ultimate goal, then considering this mode as performative becomes less about a fixed notion and more about a continuous action.

The following thesis will begin with a reflection on the capacity and performative potential of the language of painting. The chapter is intersected with an explanation of my collaborative performance piece *Artist vs Artist (2014)* as well as my *Self Portrait Series (I-V) (2014).* Both artworks explore Butler's notion of performativity, which considers both contextual and individual experience as unavoidable in the creation of an artwork.

I will then introduce Marlene Dumas. Her inclusion in this thesis is particular because when I saw her work for the first time I was profoundly affected by my own emotional response to her paintings. In this thesis I reflect on both her influence on my understanding of performativity in terms of artefact and action as well as her process, which I align with Walter Benjamin's theory of translation.

In relation to Dumas I developed *Pregnant* as a response to the different ways movement can be conceived of in terms of artefacts. The artwork explains my interest in the concept of a simultaneous reactive and reflective experience and is an attempt to explore how movement and artefact and the respective languages employed have an interchangeable dimension.

Understanding Benjamin's concept of translation facilitates a more inclusive approach to art making. Combining languages as a mode of working in a visual field initiates all kinds of interrelated subjects, forcing a negotiation between time, space, materiality, movement and intimacy. *The Kiss* is an artwork that consciously uses materiality to reflect on intimacy (a more ephemeral concept and theme in my work). I will use *The Kiss* as an example of how my conception of intimacy is more physical than Dumas' interpretation.

The recognition that my own painting language is informed by a performative engagement with aspects of daily life experiences, and explores themes that subtly link to theatre and the everyday align my practice with the work of the artist, Robin Rhode. Rhode is an artist whose work explores a multimodal method of production, which feeds the refinement of my own production style. His work also has a strong affiliation to theatre, which nurtures my own interest in the relationship between theatre (dance) and painting.

Although I understand my practice to be less direct than Rhode's, his practice adequately articulates my interest in the conflation and construction between various disciplines and media. My collaborative photographic artwork *Tea Before the Last Supper (2014)* emerged from a disciplined, repetitive meeting with Gina Kraft

(performance artist) where we choreographed movement for her live performance piece. *Tea before the Last Supper* emerged from this ritualistic meeting and as such demonstrates how the performative explores a way of being in the world and exposes how ritual and repetition influence movement in my work. *Surrogate* explores the effect of movement in relation to identity and remains an experimental piece within the exhibition because it exposes how Benjamin's concept of translation requires commitment and endurance to finding a common language.

Dumas and Rhode manipulate a variety of technological and material supports and languages in order to communicate through their own style of visual language. By finding relational elements in these two influential artists, I am able to position and write about my own practice, which attempts to translate the qualities between painting and performance, in order to fuse my own themes around the performing body, intimacy, identity and the everyday. In *Morningview Estate (2014)* I establish these relational elements. I understand this artwork as a progression into my next body of work as it demonstrates the experiential importance of my practice in a more three-dimensional way.

Applying another artist's practice to one's own is almost untranslatable. I have therefore written the dissertation in two separate parts: the artists and theorists and their influence on my practice, and then my personal account of my artwork and practice. These seemingly separate components have been designed to intersect one another where the influential and the personal relate. They are also distinguished by different typefaces and choices of paper. The dissertation exists as a translation of my influences and my artworks, and as I cannot pinpoint the exact moments when these elements combined or re-arranged themselves, I have produced a document that, similarly to my practice, attempts to translate the interrelatedness of things. In this case it is art and text that are attempting to communicate.

# 1. Painting

I understand the act of painting to be active and discursive. This chapter is focused on the medium in order to emphasise the conceptual, inventive and subliminal influences that the act of painting has had on my practice. It is through these qualities that I have not only formulated my own response to the capacity of the medium, but also developed a production strategy in my current exhibition. In my practice, physicality is a predominant element that I consider when creating. The way I paint (my style) is heavily connected to the way I experience my intended subject matter, again this is particular to my self-awareness (Butler 1990). I believe the painting medium lends itself to an experiential way of working, and because of this quality it has the capacity to represent a way of being in the world, rather than simply mirror-imaging it on canvas and stretcher frames. Tony Godfrey describes the material and conceptual capacity that the medium possesses when he says painting "is at the start and at the end a matter of seeing and experiencing" (Godfrey 2009: 411), seeing the language and experiencing what it is communicating. Godfrey admits that words often cannot adequately contain the experience of engaging with an actual painting because painting is a language in and of itself, which has unlimited potential for expression and meaning (Godfrey 2009: 411). Godfrey recognises that a painting language is developed from a unique somatic engagement between the painter and the subject. My dissertation and practice are concerned with how my language of painting is developing. It is concerned with how and what is influencing the act of painting; it is concerned with the process of experimenting with more than one language, including sculpture, installation, video, and performance.

Painting the Experience

In his essay, 'Painting (the Threshold of the Visible World)' (2012), Dieter Roelstraete frames a historical comparison of two German Romantic paintings in order to substantiate painting as a historically flexible medium that can effectively consider the over-arching subliminal emotion of a particular time. Roelstraete identifies two paintings: Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer uber das Nebelmeer* (1817), and Georg Friedrich Kersting's *The Painter Caspar David Friedrich in his Studio* (1812). He examines how Friedrich's iconic painting and status as a legendary landscape painter encounters a certain irony and reveals truths about the experience of German culture at the time when one compares it with Kersting's painting of the artist himself (Friedrich) in his studio (Roelstraete 2012: 30).




Figure 3 (left) Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer uber das Nebelmeer* (1817)
Figure 4 (right) Georg Friedrich Kersting, *The Painter Caspar David Friedrich in his Studio* (1812)

Kersting's painting depicts the artist leaning against his chair, engrossed in viewing a painting that is included in the image but unseen by the viewer. In the background there is a closed window, yet as Roelstraete points out, strangely for a landscape painter, Friedrich has his back to it. The entire painting draws attention to an interior space focused on a window that has no reference to the vast landscapes Friedrich is renowned for. Roelstraete explains that contextually a series of "territorial traumas" were inflicted onto the German landscape at the time, which culminated in the Confederation of the Rhine (Roelstraete 2012: 30). He pairs the traumatic nature of this territorial sub-division with the way Friedrich's particular sub-genre of Romantic landscape painting emerged. He does this by acknowledging the canvas as a technical support and identifying the placement of the figure in *Wanderer uber das Nebelmeer* (1817) as psychologically standing in between an interior and exterior world. Through Georg Friedrich Kersting's insular focus on the window in *The Painter Caspar David Friedrich in his Studio (1812)*, he designates the window/canvas as a motif for a threshold that is symbolic of the perplexing experience of being neither settled nor free in Germany at the time (Roelstraete 2012: 31).

In this way, Roelstraete shows that painting, and the canvas, were more than wood and stretcher frame, as it conceptually assumed the metaphorical function of a window at the time. The canvas could appropriate the outside world inwards, or project to the outside world from within, by providing an imaginative space that could render a cohesive visual parallel to the surrounding emotional instability. Roelstraete explains that the Romantics resolved a conceptual, subliminal way of being in the world by appropriating the canvas (like a window) as a transient space. "The painting marks the

threshold of the visible world; or, as a window onto a world kept at bay, it becomes the exemplary liminal space of the world we choose to inhabit, to call home, to live and work in" (Roelstraete 2012: 32).

Even though the symbolic correlation between the window and the canvas seem somewhat obvious now, given their similar shape and size, I am drawn to how effectively (regardless of whether it considers the canvas or not) the act of painting at that time, and painting today, visually and conceptually manage to capture a sublime understanding of how the world as a whole entity interacts. Roelstraete's comparison suggests that the idea of the canvas was then, and remains today, a material support that has been available to artists and their imagination since its creation as a mobile tableau (Roelstraete 2012: 30). Georg Friedrich Kersting's painting of Friedrich cooped up in his studio, imagining rather than easel painting his dream-like landscapes, attest to this suggestion. Friedrich's imagined landscape conflates the canvas to be the transient, reflective window, and in its natural primed state, a space of possibility. However, Friedrich extended the canvas' potential through his own language of paint, which could not be disassociated from the politics at the time, and therefore influenced his style. Physical experience and interaction influenced style and the appropriation of the canvas as a material support, which suited the notion of both an emotional and physical interior/exterior conflict. Roelstraete's comparison demonstrates that Friedrich's painting language became a flexible binding element between context, emotion and technology of the time. Friedrich (the artist) was able to capture the feeling of the body being 'in between' by negotiating his material supports, conflicting ideologies, language and context; revealing more information about the type of interaction people where experiencing in Germany at the time (Roelstraete 2012: 31).

There is much in symbolic language today that sympathises with the window as an adequate threshold, as bridging the gap between a conscious and sub-conscious state of being. In fact the metaphor of the window might also consider itself in various guises – the photographic lens, the mirror, and the LCD screens on computers, phones and televisions. These material or technological supports (similar to Friedrich's use of the canvas) once again intersect with the way we interact today. Material and technological supports thus also affect the values ascribed to the act of painting.

Helmut Draxler's text, 'Painting as Apparatus' (2010) describes the medium's potential for subliminal communication and establishes painting as a transformative medium. In his text he also acknowledges that painting has always been more than paint and stretcher frames, emphasising the medium as conceptual and therefore a permeable to exploration beyond simply its materiality (Draxler 2010: 108). He makes a compelling case for the medium's slippery capacity to interrogate or reinvent itself throughout history, as well as in the face of criticism. Perhaps what Draxler manages to emphasise, and Roelstraete confirms in his comparison, is that the language of painting, which is

particular to every individual, is able to reflect on human experience because it is a conceptually adaptable medium (Draxler 2010: 108).

The Window

In my practice I have always been drawn to the window motif in painting, not only because it is connected to experience, but also because it frames the drama. A window focuses attention onto a space and forces an intense engagement with subject matter. New media in today's context shift our experience of space and time, and to each other. Built-in windows on technological devices access and challenge Rosalind Krauss's notion of the window motif as a cipher of the deep simultaneity of opacity and transparency (Krauss 1985: 18-19). For Krauss, in her essay 'Grids', a glass window admits light into a room or onto objects, but it also reflects and mirrors, causing a dialectical tension. Krauss explores this further with her concept of the centrifugal and centripetal powers of the grid, with the window in early German Romantic painting a compelling example of this (Krauss 1985: 18-19).

Painters then and now are able to recognise the mediating properties of the glass window, and use their medium to act in between those boundaries inherent in the different forms of the glass – between inner and outer, world and self, visible and invisible, beyond and within, fragment (a small piece of) and whole (an infinitely larger notion) (Roelstraete 2012: 33). The glass window then, is a fitting metaphor for how we mediated ourselves then, and offers an array of options with regard to spatial experience now, if one considers its relatives in the form of LCD screens, mirrors, cameras and computers. Painting practice today is described as inclusive, and is a practice seen to be far more open to collaboration (Draxler 2010: 108). In this way, if the act of painting considers other material supports such as the mirror, screen and photographic/video lens etc., then the metaphoric function of the glass window becomes further complicated as these hybrid glass windows displace space and capture movement in a different way, recording both time and movement, displacing the body and capturing it in new forms.

The process of seeing and experiencing a painting is thus more complicated, and for me involves a more complex negotiation of the material supports available to me. Painting, as demonstrated by Roelstraete and Draxler above, is a language that is always negotiating the networks of which it forms a part. As Graw and Rottmann suggest:

For this kind of painting, what is at stake is not the search for a fundamental essence of painting, as (defining) artistic medium, as specific genre or as symbolic institution. Rather, the practice we focus on here deliberately sets out to undermine the ostensible integrity of painting as a closed-off area of aesthetic activity. Informed by the legacy of institutional critique, shaped by the context of a long-since digital age, it engages with

the economic, medial and discursive networks of which it forms a part, both in terms of production and exhibition (Graw and Rottmann 2010: 107).

This negotiation means that painting is performative as it is constantly encountering other languages, forms and ideologies. Adaptation and invention are therefore playing an ever more important role within the language of paint, and it is this aspect of the painting language that lends itself to a multimodal form of expression. Painting in relation to somatic experience becomes paramount in order to translate our particular way of being in a world that is constantly reflecting on the multiplicity of interrelations between image, practice and artistic aspiration (Draxler 2010: 109). The artefacts in my exhibition adopt this performative understanding of painting. But what does this do to the painting medium when our way of being becomes more about the traffic and movement in and out of the metaphorical transient window space than the properties of the window itself?

Movement in Painting

As a dancer, I believe physicality is emphasised when we negotiate our experience of the world today. Catherine Bernard's article, 'Bodies and Digital Utopia (2000)', explores the effect of new media on the body and space. She explains how the overwhelming influx of technological devices has increased the dissociation from experienced physical reality. She emphasises a shift in the way we interact with each other, and with physical objects. She explains how the lack of physical boundaries, evident in the creation of ''global networks'' such as the Internet, have produced the perception of "an ever-expanding market of limitless access" that challenges our perception of reality and our physical bodily position to such a reality (Bernard 2000: 26). Her observation that the influx of communication devices has ignited a struggle between our physical and social bodies, altering our perception of reality as well as the understanding of an intimate exchange (Bernard 2000: 26), highlights the physical process of art making for me.

David Joselit expands on the emphasised sense of physical activity and movement, apparent in visual language today, when he says:

> Networks, which in their incomprehensible scale, ranging from the impossibly small microchip to the impossibly vast global Internet, truly embody the contemporary sublime. One need only Google 'Internet maps' to turn up Star-Trek inspired images of interconnected solar systems that do little to enhance one's understanding of the traffic in information but do much to tie digital worlds to ancient traditions of stargazing (Joselit 2009: 219).

Joselit, who introduces the idea of the contemporary sublime as visually overwhelming in today's world, inspired *Artist vs Artist (2014)* (a live performance piece currently in

my exhibition) as well as Self Portrait Series (I-V). His words, coupled with Bernard's observation of the effect of technology on culture became a challenge for me to try and encompass or imagine the simultaneity of my place as both artist and dancer in the world.





Figure 5 (left) Yarisha Singh in performance (2014)  Photograph by Anthea Pokroy
Figure 6 (right) Yarisha Singh in performance (2014) Photograph by Matthew Kay

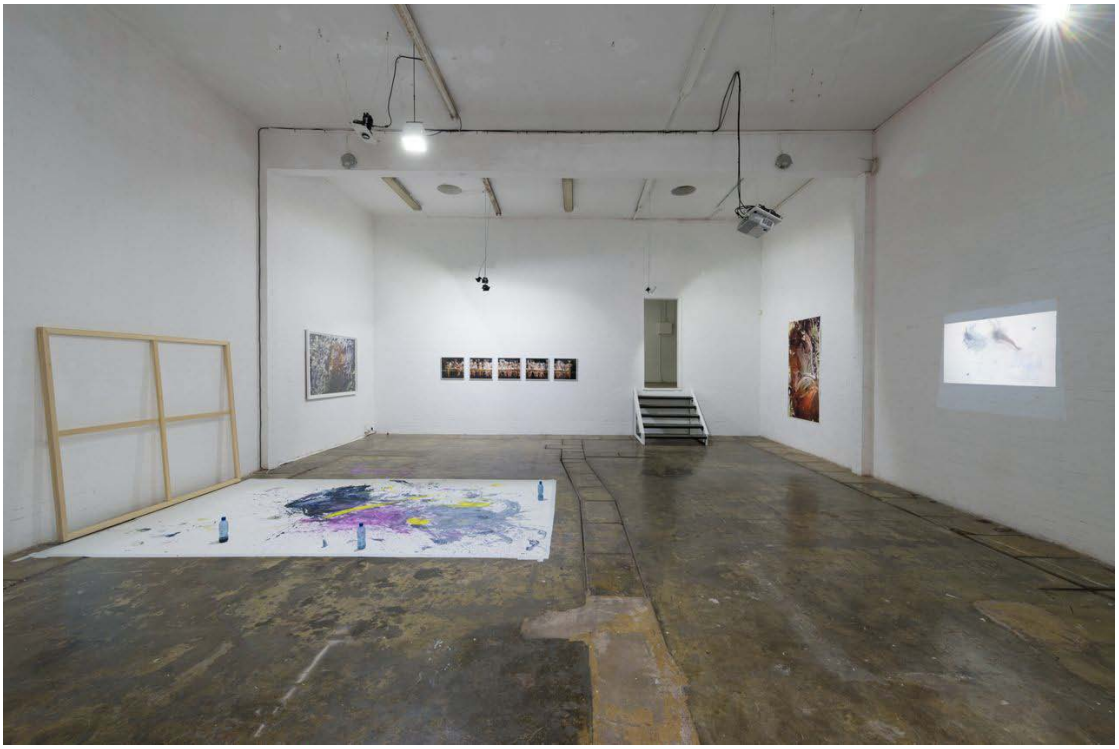

Figure 7 Installation Shot of painted canvas on the floor post-performance, on the opposing side is the live video projection



Figure 8 Yarisha Singh in performance (2014) Photograph by Matthew Kay





Figure 9 Photograph of live video projection on side wall displaying the view from above (2014) Photograph by Matthew Kay

Figure 10 Photograph of people discussing the video projection on opposite side wall (2014) Photographed by Matthew Kay

**Artist vs. Artist (2014) explores how the concept of the painter and the dancer live in the mediated world of technology today. The two visual languages of dance and paint often compete with one another in my world, in the sense that determining which aspects of their respective qualities become more or less visible in the production of an art work often remains a challenging aspect of my practice, identity and language in general. Absorbing the window motif and appropriating the language of video however, enabled me to invent a new space where I could implicate the body, paint and movement in a different way; a way that considers the renewed properties of the transient window space (movement in particular) and consciously adopt paint in order better to frame my identity as multiple and complex.**

**The performance takes place on an all white window-shaped sheet of canvas positioned on the floor. In my MAFA exhibition I have positioned a camera above the white canvas, activated by remote control. The camera**

feeds to a live projection displayed on an opposing wall of the canvas, which depicts the performer performing from above. The performance is a collaboration with another dancer Yarisha Singh (as I am currently unable to perform). Together we choreographed a contemporary dance piece, which had the limitations of paint, floor size and individual influences.

The image is created by choreographing movement in conjunction with paint. The way the addition and reduction of the paint manifests, is specific to the way Yarisha moves her body. The performance was quite aggressive and filled with sharp accents where Yarisha would throw herself to the ground and then slowly and tenderly make her way back up to a standing position. In other words, her physical dynamic can be described as extremely intense with short, sharp jolts and aggressive thrusts, which are then tempered by very slow and controlled movements.

My position in terms of choreography had more to do with directing her volatile movement into the imagery. Guiding her body as if she were in the painting. The collaboration of Yarisha's particular movement and my specific direction resulted in a few interesting manifestations. Namely, the effect of the live presence of the performer as she danced with the paint (her energy), the residual paint marks which are extremely gestural and reminiscent of Jackson Pollock or Yves Klein paintings, the effect of the simultaneous birds eye view video projection which is displayed on the opposite wall next to the floor canvas and captures the entire piece from an alternate angle both during the performance and then loops it once again after the performer has left the space. In this sense Butler's concept of a ritualised production which autonomously developed as part of the collaboration between Yarisha and myself resulted in an experimental artwork which explored exactly how identity can be active in redefining itself all the time (Butler 1993).

The piece is an example of how I perceive my personal adoption of the concept of a metaphorical window space as an active space. The rectangular shaped canvas size and video display reference a repetitive manipulation of Roelstraete's notion of the 'window as a threshold into the visible world' (Roelstraete 2012: 32). In *Artist vs. Artist* 2014 this rectangular window space appears simultaneously in a two-dimensional format (video) as well as three-dimensional format through the activation of the floor and wall spaces, which again is framed by the actual building space. The artwork therefore reflects on how space is transient and is an attempt to activate movement (through various technical supports) as the predominant link to understanding the traffic in and out of these window spaces or rather the struggle between our physical and social bodies (Bernard 2000: 26)

Joselit's suggestion – that a Google search of Internet maps does little to consolidate this vast way of interacting online – is part of the inspiration for my piece, this dissertation, and my exhibition (Joselit 2009: 219). *Artist vs Artist* (2014) is a performance, as well as a reflection on the performative act of interacting. It explores how I relate the convergence of languages in one space to the interrelated complexity of the world. In this way painting in relation to somatic experience does become intrinsic to translating our multi-dimensional way of being in a world (Draxler 2010: 109).

I believe that the process of painting today considers the fact that technological tools (computers, cameras, apps, programs, etc.) not only complicate physicality but also deepen the concept of the transient window

space. Within these new window spaces, the bipolar concepts of inner and outer, world and self, visible and invisible, beyond and within, fragment and whole are absorbed, reproduced and importantly enacted within the window itself, exposing the body (as I have attempted to represent in Artist vs Artist) as a vehicle that can process and display a variety of perspectives.

Interaction therefore does not only consider the reflective, transient glass window, screen or the lens, but also the 'act of' – for example, Google-searching information, viewing an artwork, making a painting or producing and uploading a video. It is a more layered and complex form of interaction, heavily focused on communication, movement and mediation. These terms suggest an active engagement of some kind and, in light of my experience as a dancer, and subsequent interest in the relation between movement and painting, influence how I develop a new way of ascribing value to my painting practice. Draxler suggests that the image and art have always been isolated concepts, and that therefore painting in this context is able to establish itself in the sublime tensions between people, objects, concepts, time and spaces (Draxler 2010: 108). As my practice demonstrates, I understand it to function in this capacity as a kind of visual translator, acting discursively between media.

My practice is partial to swapping between properties specific to glass (in the form of mirrors, lenses, LCD screens, windows), and the body as an active co-conspirator in challenging the language of painting. Artist vs Artist (2014) recognises that our world today is a combined choreography that regularly switches between interacting via screens and face-to-face bodily contact. It therefore explores how painting can function either as an element performing in the tensions between these positions, or reflecting on their performative engagement, which at one moment understands interaction as immediate and reactive, and the next as measured and reflective.

Why the focus on the performative tension between bodily relations, spaces, and visual languages? Because ultimately the concept of straight-forward observation and interpretation, as in the tradition of easel painting or point and shoot photography, cannot contain the sense of entanglement between languages, time, space, intimacy, drama and diversity apparent in our society today (Wood 2012: 10).

## Self Portrait Series (I & II)

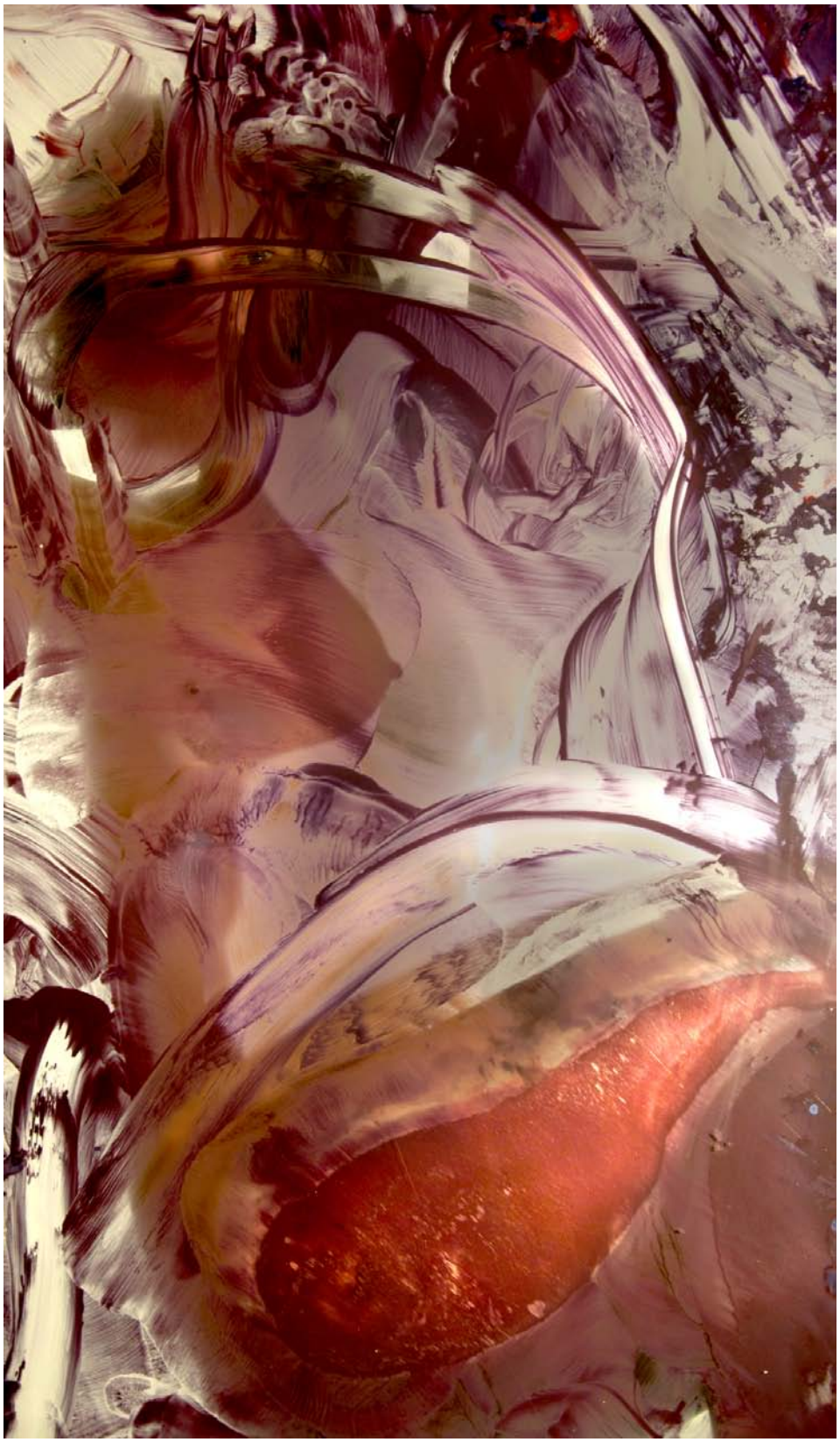

Figure 11 Self Portrait II (2014) Mixed Media



Figure 12 Self Portrait I (2014) Mixed Media

In the MAFA exhibition I have only displayed Self Portrait (I&II) but the entire series consists of five images. The Self Portrait Series (I-V) explores many of the same themes as Artist vs. Artist 2014 however the challenge in the Self Portrait Series (I-V) was to capture my own identity in one static image. The process in which I attempted to do this is vital to understanding the work because it encompasses how I perceive painting and the moving body to be of equal value as well as explains why the languages of painting and dancing are interrelated.

In much the same vein as *Artist vs. Artist* (2014), I felt the need to create a space that was alternate to traditional art production spaces such as the photographic studio, or the stage or the gallery. Instead, I produced a structure that consisted of scaffolding, a piece of wooden chipboard (2m x 1,5m) and a bulletproof sheet of glass (1m x 800cm). I then proceeded to jigsaw a 'window' into the chip-board that could adequately fit glass sheet securely in the middle of the board. Once secure I raised the glass and board platform approximately 2m above the floor onto the scaffold and secured the structure. Spaces I create whether they be on the ground or above it are always considered somewhere between the gallery and the stage.

I then proceeded to place my camera underneath the structure framing the glass window space in the viewfinder of the camera. I decided to use tempura paint as part of my performative act. Armed with paint, water and a remote controlled flash I climbed on top of the structure and choreographed a movement sequence using the tempura paint. During the performance I was able to activate the camera option at random times and the resultant images depict abstracted bodily forms integrated with more painterly gestures.

The homogeneity of the resultant photograph allows the dancing, the body and the paint to exist on one plane. The photograph fuses the imagery into a strange mixture of illusionistic and fantastical forms that both

expose and hide my body. The images reflect on the conflicted struggle between wanting to perform and needing to manipulate a material substance such as paint. They speak of a certain shyness as well as a braveness that are predominant polarities in my personality. In my view, a portrait is far more complicated than a simple reproduction of imagery and it is therefore pertinent to examine the way in which these portraits were produced.

Performing my identity is crucial to creating a self-portrait. Iterability is about repetition in different contexts and as Butler suggests implies 'that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production' (Butler 1993: 5). In *Artists vs. Artist 2014* and *Self Portraits (I & II)* repeating the need to create an alternate space, understanding movement as the link between materiality and performance and using invention as a process in which limitations can be produced and boundaries can affect the nature of art production have become part of my ritualised production strategy.

*Self Portrait Series (I&II)* inquires into the construction of identities as they are caused by performative actions, behaviors, and gestures. The portraits explain how languages collide and manifest as part of my personality.

# 2. Painting and the 'Performative'

If a painting practice is no longer a window onto the world, but considers the world itself as a stage onto which, as Roelstraete suggests, "the utopian wholeness of the world can be enacted", then it also implies a performative negotiation; it considers an action-based modality in its manifestations (Roelstraete 2012: 33). My understanding of the performative links to this metaphor of 'passage' through the metaphorical window, or the performative in relation to the status of objects within networks defined by their movement from place to place, and their subsequent translation into new contexts (Joselit 2009: 219). In this way the body, movement, change and process variously inform my notion of the performative in painting, and are emphasised to various degrees in my art-making process. In *Artist vs Artist 2014* the notion of the performative was a physical interaction that used the gestural body in an aggressive manner in order to emphasise themes connected to change, progress and identity. In my artwork titled *Pregnant,* the performative took passive form in an installation of mirrors that distorted and reflected the contemplative movement in the moment. As physicality can be expressed in various degrees of intensity (from aggressive to tender), I understand that my definition of the performative can have a more subtle influence on the dynamics of creating or art making, whether it be in the production or exhibition strategies.

Marlene Dumas

In order to detail my notion of the performative aspect of painting, I would like briefly to discuss Marlene Dumas' exhibition *Intimate Relations* at the Standard Bank Gallery (6 Feb – 29 March 2008). I have been criticised in various discussions and critical sessions by a variety of professors and artists for my use of Dumas as an adequate example of an artist who embodies performativity. It has been argued that her practice is heavily rooted in a painting tradition and does not consciously and effectively explore my definition of performativity.

However, I would like to substantiate that my reading of Dumas practice as performative is mainly focused on her production and exhibition strategies. The reason Dumas work applies so specifically to this paper and my practice is because of the manner in which her work negotiates artefact and language; that middle ground between expression being 'reactive' and 'reflective' simultaneously (Bailey & Leigh 2013). Her practice does lean more toward painting (artefact) then performance but the subtle, performative way in which her paintings materialise is the reason why her work has been so influential to my own practice.

Upon viewing her exhibition *Intimate Relations* I was struck by my own emotional reaction to the style of the individual paintings as well as how they were placed and positioned within the space. The subject matter of the paintings appeared, at first, to have no connection and as the imagery was neither illusionistic nor abstract there was a need as a viewer to try and figure out what the relationship of each painting was to another.

The imagery in the paintings originates from Dumas' process of collecting private and public imagery, mainly from magazines and personal photographs. Magazine and newspaper source material is generally focused on current affairs, inevitably maintaining a powerful connection to the present, and often contradicting her more personal imagery that implicates memory and intimacy (Bedford 2008: 33). Perhaps it is because of the variety of public places Dumas sources her imagery that the viewer (myself) felt at first, strangely connected to the images, as if I had maybe encountered them before. However, as I engaged them for a longer period I realised that my determination to find a coherent relationship between myself and the images, as well as between the images themselves, became the overriding experience of her exhibition.

The 'act of' trying to find correlations between such an overwhelming display of paintings became a performative game for me which I enjoyed playing as I walked through her exhibition. I understand this negotiation of subject matter in Dumas' process of painting to be as performative as doing a pirouette in front of an audience. It is for this reason that although static in their form, Dumas' paintings seemed to activate the idea of movement through their production and exhibition strategies.

The significance of her practice in relation to my own notion of the performative is located in the act of collecting and reproducing photographs, as well as interpreting what the act of painting the photograph (an alternate visual language) has done to her painting practice. Although her work does not directly implicate the performing body into her practice, it cleverly interprets the mediated body in relation to the physical body. Her process grapples with the notion that all relationships are interconnected and she manifests this concept through the subject matter, as well as the particular framing of her fluid, figurative paintings (Bedford 2008: 33). I will use Walter Benjamin's concept of translation to locate her practice as a mode of working. Translation provides a way of reading artistic practices, such as those of Dumas, and my own, by consciously exploring how concepts and languages are interrelated, and constantly perform in order to gain a more multi-faceted perspective on the relationship of things.





Figure 13 (left) Marlene Dumas, *Genetiese Heimwee (Genetic Longing)* (1984), 130 x 110 cm oil on canvas
Figure 14 (right) Marlene Dumas, *Feather Stola* (2000), 100 x 56 cm oil on canvas









Figure 15 (a-d) Compilation of installation shots of *Intimate Relations* exhibition at The Standard Bank Gallery (2008)

*Intimate Relations* places particular emphasis on how artistic potential in painting is not only confined to the act of producing the paintings, but also through the various values which get ascribed to the act through the appropriation of another language (in this case, photography). In *The Triumph of Painting* (2005), Barry Schwabsky suggests that the photograph could be acknowledged as "a detachable constituent of the reality it pictures" (Schwabsky 2005: 8). In doing so he confirms our context as one which adopted a mediated photographic network as part of our reality, much like the way in which the transient glass window reflected the anxiety of being between a sub-conscious threshold of sorts for the Romantics (Roelstraete 2012: 31). Understanding our reality as photographic also manifests a physically adapted way of seeing; a more fragmented (snap shot) perception of the world, and importantly an even more mediated understanding of our own physicality (Schwabsky 2005: 8). It complicates the glass window space because the lens and recording action of the camera provide an alternate space in which artists can create and interact with it.

A Different Way of Seeing

Dumas' appropriation of the actual photograph as a mediated object through which interaction is possible, focuses attention on her mode of production as well as her thematic preoccupation with 'intimacy' as a subject; particularly between the body and objects in space (Bedford 2008: 33). She explores how the photograph, as an intimate, mediated object, becomes intertwined in our understanding of intimacy and the body today. She recognises the photograph as a cultural indicator.

In *Intimacy and Integrity* (2002), Thomas P. Kasulis philosophically explores the relationship between intimacy and culture. He defines intimacy as "a sharing of innermost qualities", and writes about how human experience can be adopted as an authoritative form of engagement (Kasulis 2002: 33). If intimacy is always a somatic experience, Dumas' appropriation of the photograph allows an acceptance of the object (photograph) as an intimate, legitimate object that has the capacity to evoke the type of physical intimacy experienced between person-to-person contact (Bailey & Leigh 2013). The object itself is imbued with memory, politics, place and meaning. How does Dumas connect her authoritative awareness and exploration of an inner state? How does she understand her personal relationship to such a range of photographs that already signify their own connections to things, people or places? I believe that, following the ascribed modernist understanding of painting as an autonomous process, Dumas considers the act of painting as a personal, legitimate basis for making claims about certain aspects of her current photographic reality.

Her painting language is therefore specifically manifested from photographic culture. Elements such as the placement of the figure (often restricted in a photograph by the frame/view finder), the illusionistic nature of the photograph which often mistakably

construes an idea of truth or permanence and the speed of reproduction that photographic culture can process are all values which are either adopted or subverted by Dumas. They are noticeably central to holding all the relational elements of her painting language together as well as imperative to the way her style developed.

In parts her language of paint is bold and fearless, and in other moments, insipid and shy; but the paintings consistently act as vehicles that allow the viewer the space to slip in and out of the notion of a fixed image because their materiality (the thinner washes which are rendered next to heavier brushstrokes) do not conform to the homogeneity of the photographic surface. The fluidity of the medium of paint in relation to the original photo encourages the idea that the paintings on the wall are not just objects on a wall, but are connected to something greater. That is, her language encourages a mediated way of being in the world as her images negate interpreting the illusionistic 'real' or referent (apparent in the photograph), offering something of a more physical and personalised interpretation of the intimate connection to the imagery in the photo (Dillon 2007: 92).

The formal engagement seems to ignore the referent – for example, the photograph's ability to embrace the instant and offer up a sense of negotiation between the fixed composition of the photograph and the fluidity of the paint. It is through her personal, painterly translation of elements of the original image that Dumas begins to reflect an alternate reality, an existing reality, which uses the photograph as its entry point but then delves deeper into the experience of the original captured space (Dillon 2007: 92).

The simultaneous physical and metaphorical recognition of the power of human trace or 'touch' in Dumas paintings, and her thematic emphasis on emotional experience, connects the notion of human intimacy as embodied to the act of painting (Patterson 2007: ix). Emotions are lived through the body, even if mediation suggests a disembodied perception of the world. In describing painting as a carnal medium in 'Notes on a Carnal Medium' (2005), Penny Siopis infers an immediate connection to the body and sensation. She employs the term 'carnal' as a means to suggest that the medium is of the body; it has the ability to express emotions related to the body (Siopis 2005: 29). Kasulis suggests that intimacy, even when it is not carnal, is still incarnate, emphasising human qualities (Kasulis 2002: 42). In this way Dumas appropriates values ascribed to the painting medium (embodied and autonomous) and photography (mediated), and through her exhibition establishes a particular experience of her work which positions the body in between the physical and mediated world.

Dumas chooses to apply the legacy of the incarnate nature of the painting medium in a photographic context in order to play between those boundaries of intimacy, which include a deliberation between a mediated connection and a physical interaction. Her use of photographs, her thin application of paint, her slippery renderings of human subjects, and her cluttered way of exhibiting the paintings all combine into her own

translation of emotional intimacy; an-all inclusive way of being in a world filled with images that connect to a greater sublime network of people, places and objects (Bedford 2000: 33).

It is not only her negotiation between visual languages (photography and painting) that concentrate her process in a more performative arena. It is also the conscious manner in which she exhibits the paintings in physical space that contributes not simply to seeing but experiencing her painting exploration into how the body can exist in a more performative capacity. If one accepts that our relationships to objects and technologies have shifted the way we perceive an intimate connection to the body, then the exhibition as a whole explores the notion of 'passage' as an active transient space, because of the way one's own body experiences Dumas constructed space. The viewers' bodies become somewhat directed, intentionally choreographed in accordance to the positioning and subject matter of the paintings.

It is at this point that my own exploration of the performative borrows from Dumas. In her exhibition individual paintings were purposefully installed at different levels and heights, and integrate the personal with more popular or accessible imagery (mimicking the way she initially collected images at the beginning of her process). This achieves three things. Firstly, it connected a physical process to a production and exhibition strategy. Secondly, it encouraged the viewer to question the relationship between the various kinds of subject matter presented on the canvasses; this exposes an exploration in language and draws intersecting relationships between usually disparate subjects. Lastly, it forces a physical spatial awareness between the viewer, the paintings, the subject matter and the space; that is, not only Dumas' personal relationship to mediated space, but our own bodily relationship to how we interact with an oversaturation of public and private mediated images (Schwabsky 2005: 8).

Mediation and intimacy are themes that are carried through Dumas' use of photography, her autonomous painting style, and her installation of the paintings as mediated objects themselves in space. They are recurrent themes, which are simultaneously being enacted and represented through her production and exhibition mode. I would describe Dumas' approach to art making as open, all-inclusive and globally aware because she recognises and appropriates various languages and material supports and in doing so, considers visual language as a whole rather than something which requires insular focus. Her approach to visual language ensures that production and final installation work toward a broader understanding of the subject matter. These elements are inter-dependent, and as such can be read like a performance or choreography over time. Her production and exhibition mode can be described as a performative translation between the visual languages of photography, painting and installation, all of which work together to emphasise her personal understanding of a mediated intimacy.

## Pregnant



Figure 16 Pregnant (2014) Mixed media installation



Figure 17 (Close-up) Pregnant installation during the opening night

Pregnant is a literal attempt to understand the world from my new physical perspective. It was conceived when I was indeed, pregnant, in an attempt to capture a different way of seeing the world. The transformation of my own body significantly affected the way I was experiencing the world. Not only did I have to renegotiate my perception of myself, but also the way I physically interacted with the world. Once a day I would look at myself in the mirror and begin to associate my growing belly and the anticipatory notion of birth with fast-changing ideas of places and people. I developed an acrylic mirror sculpture in the form of a belly. The sculpture, like the life of my child, was not meant to be resolved. My intention with the mirror-belly I created is to position it in various environments that capture the uncertainty of the situation, similar to how I felt during my pregnancy. The mirror is a material support which, when one peers into the convex reflective surface, effectively creates that same experience of the unknown. It is represented but it is not indexical and certain. The convex mirror is warped and changes one's perception of the space.

In my exhibition the belly became synonymous with the idea of distortion and the notion of an alternate way of seeing. One belly multiplied into an installation of bellies as the experience of being pregnant was almost parasitic in that the curious bloated feeling became more and more pronounced and overwhelming as the months progressed. The belly was originally developed as a strategy to capture through paint my experience of being pregnant. However, in the exhibition the mirrors are displayed in their original forms as part of an installation, and not as the potential paintings they were intended to be. They exist in my exhibition as artefacts, reflecting the movement around them and in this way become a quietly interactive sculpture. The installation contains my own ideas around the performative capacity of art making that is apparent in this dissertation. The mirror installation perpetuates the gallery space and the participants at the exhibition as uncertain entities that are reflecting my own insecurities in the moment. I am often concerned with how I

personally experience the world, and even though the gallery space is a place I frequent and adopt as an artist, it remains a controversial space, as it is a more controlled experience of the world. The dancer in me understands the need for a defined space, but the gallery is different from the theatre stage; the same internal conflict of where my particular expression should be demonstrated becomes an important challenge in my work. The bellies exist as constructed, static forms that contain and reflect movement of viewers in the space. My work requires a controlled, disciplined environment that is purposefully created (such is the case with the collection and placement of the convex mirrors), and once the rules are established it can be opened up to experimentation. I believe, similarly to the way Dumas exhibited her paintings, that within structure there is freedom in movement.

Pregnant is a piece that appropriately demonstrates the need to portray visually the way I physically experience the world, and invites the viewer into that space. In the world, I aspire to be an inventor (even though I do not possess the skills). This set back does not deter me as I seem to invent strategies such as those in Pregnant, which can best explain how I feel and interact. During my exhibition I hired a photographer to take pictures of the viewers, both viewing and reflected in the mirrors. These images will be used to evolve the piece further; always pushing the multiple ways movement is a part of my creating process.

# 3. Translation

In his essay, 'The Task of the Translator', Walter Benjamin expands on the performative mode of translating languages. He identifies the act of translation as a legitimate mode of production within language, which can describe a creative process that consciously engages with the foreignness of (visual) languages (Benjamin 1969: 72). Benjamin suggests that languages of any kind become vulnerable to change when they encounter one another. In identifying translation as a mode, Benjamin implies that an active negotiation is forced to transpire during this encounter in order to access the sublime element inherent in the artwork (Benjamin 1969: 72). He recognises that attempting to grapple with the foreignness of languages (evident in Dumas' adaptation of the photograph), not only results in a more complex rendering of our world, but also fosters a multi-layered perspective on singular ideas or subjects. For example, Dumas' exploration of intimacy as a theme becomes even more layered. Her paintings imagine a more inclusive world, beyond the image as a singular entity or concept, because their fluid translation of the indexical photographs slip between any fixed meanings. Her thematic preoccupation with intimacy and emotion, and the physical organisation of her works, urge an audience to engage in the act of looking, and once they look, the object itself seems to move and shift in meaning (Bedford 2008: 34). In this way, translation as a mode must be understood as the central reciprocal relationship between languages, and meaning can be found (not in individual words and sentences or colours and forms) but in the mode of translation itself, which constantly attempts to find the balance in communication, but never actually intends to resolve it (Benjamin 1969: 74).

Benjamin's concept, coupled with Dumas' thematic pre-occupation with intimacy and mediation (present in the photograph), offers new insight into understanding Dumas' mother tongue of painting. It ascribes the modalities of translation and invention as integral to the medium, especially in relation to a photographic or technological context. Her painting language (mother tongue) required a reconfiguration in order to capture that same elusive intention (the sublime), which gave the original photo such emotive power. Her language only developed in relation to the way she handled her subject matter. Her painting style adopted a more impressionistic rendering of the photographic reference in order to perpetuate, visually, the act of mediation apparent in the interaction with photography and images in that particular context. This makes Dumas a compelling example of an artist who successfully initiates translation as a mode. It is her ability to capture that experiential understanding of a mediated intimacy, originally inherent in the photograph through the languages of paint and installation.

Benjamin's text implicates the sublime or intangible element, which many works of literature and art contain, as an essential component to consider when translating a

given language or subject (Benjamin, 1969: 69). He believes that in order to translate a close rendering of the original, the translator (artist) has to transform and adapt his/her own language for it to match the often hidden or rather sublime intention (the reading between the lines as it were) of the original text (Benjamin 1969: 69). As a painter who ascribes value to the personal, discursive, intimate act of painting and the body, Dumas succeeds in showing how painting adapts to become fluent and expansive rather than formulaic or abbreviated; an action which can effectively translate the mediated experience of our world both through artistic production and exhibition.

In extending Benjamin's frame, the paintings access "the afterlife" of the photograph as both an image and an object. They do not strive for a likeness of the original, yet they retain its subliminal affect, be it inherent in the subject matter, the composition or relationship to other images (Benjamin 1969: 72). Benjamin suggests that although the translation (painting) is derivative it also exists as a new manifestation with its own merit (Benjamin, 1969: 71). It exists as an artwork that actively focuses on process and language as a way to simultaneously recycle and renew concepts and vocabulary inherent in the original. Similarly, Dumas' paintings, together with her exhibition strategy, are original and therefore have the potential to convey what Benjamin calls a "pure language" (1969: 74). Analogously, where the mutually exclusive differences among languages (painting and photography) can coexist and where the complementary intentions (mediation) of these languages can be communicated.

Dumas' process and fluid perception on relationships has been the catalyst for me in exploring the various degrees that the painting process can conceptualise the way I feel in a world where the influence of languages is so diverse. The accessibility of languages is constantly forcing the act of painting to change and adapt. Dumas is an established artist who has an enormous body of work. Many of my reflections on her 'intimate connections' to things, and her capacity to interweave an array of contradictory issues, come from analysing her mode of working over a long period of time. Her choices reveal an action-based, interdisciplinary mode of working which I admire. Even though there are artists today who are perhaps more conscious about their performative and multimedia approach to art production, I feel it has been somewhat easier to appreciate how Dumas' painting practice in particular understands the act of translation. Her unique painting language, so successfully developed from her process of translating multiple photographs, paved the way for me to identify my own relationship to artefacts, in particular my own fascination with intimate moments and how they can translate through various modes.

Her exhibition, *Intimate Relations*, unintentionally revealed to me my own fascination with movement because I recognised a choreographic element to her show. I am not sure that she was aware of the sense of movement that engaged me when I visited her exhibition, but since I understand working in the mode of translation to be performative, it is not difficult to draw a parallel between the actual experience of her

exhibition and the generalised act of engaging with still images in whatever form. I find the process reflective, pensive and physically slow. The experience of her physical exhibition had a similar feel. Although subtle, this slow, experiential negotiation of the subject matter allowed for a personal reflection on my own understanding of how Dumas considers the painting language as a whole; that is, the way her paintings are produced and how they reference each other in space, as well as how the viewer engages with them. The photograph is merely a point of departure for her to expand on her own language of paint, which influenced the way the paintings were installed.

Dumas' exhibition attempts to incorporate the original photos' mode of signification, make the original and the translation recognisable as fragments of a greater language, and emphasise alternate elements such as movement and time which might not have been considered had the languages not attempted to converge. Her work revealed to me that questions around movement, time and space, in relation to the mediated body, can be successfully dealt with through paint. Importantly her experimental mode of working made room for other potential opinions and correlations to emerge from her exhibition.

Much of my work displayed in my exhibition has adopted this experimental mode of working, and through this process, become about understanding my own relationship to a movement as well as a mediated culture. At its core, my work is about identity and my own position in the world. The concept of exploring this relationship is taken from Dumas, but consciously activates movement and the body to emphasise my heightened perception of physicality.

In my exhibition, mediation and physicality are actively working together in the same space at various paces. They are trying to explain the simultaneity apparent in the way I experience my world; it is always immediate and visceral as well as mediated and distant. It is constantly interacting, whether on a reflective or reactive level. Borrowing from Dumas' practice was an attempt to understand my connection to a mediated reality; what it has determined is that movement and physicality help to show that my sense of intimacy (to a greater degree than Dumas expresses) is located in the moment.

What becomes an important theme in this mode of working is the concept of multiplicity of meanings, and the idea that an image can simultaneously reference and embody a wider perception of the relation of things, including actions. Benjamin suggests that in order for translation, as a mode, to signify intention and language simultaneously, one needs to accept the close relationship between languages. He says of this relationship: "Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express" (Benjamin 1969: 72).

Performing the Medium of Paint

*Intimate Relations* shows that the mediated body in photography can connect to a perceived intimate experience of reality through paint. Through her language and exhibition, Dumas established just how normalised this mediated interaction has become. My practice adopted this intimate connection to a mediated reality – which now readily accepts photography, video and the Internet as essential tools in image production – but included my experience as a dancer too, changing the translation to paint into a more physically active exchange. Physicality and movement are imperative to conceptualising my personal understanding of a current reality. Dumas recognised interaction between various static images as a surreal, pensive negotiation. My practice recognises that bodily movement is constantly negotiating photography, video, instant messaging, sculpture, film and physical space and, as such, its encounter with the painting language is more focused on the idea that the static image or artefact is actively recycling itself in the moment all the time.

Movement is much more erratic in my exhibition. My practice actively explores a performative engagement between the two-dimensionality of painting and the three-dimensionality of performance (the movement of the body in space). It shows how this interaction can visually translate our bodily experience in a world where mediation and physicality are continuously disrupting fixed notions of the body, space and time (Bernard 2000: 26).

In this sense, the physical body becomes a site for interrogation, since it has the capacity to represent in a mediated form or physical form or both. My practice, like Dumas', has an intrinsic fascination with imaging intimacy, but with a greater focus on the physical intimate aspects of daily life. Because of my background in dance, it consciously explores themes linked to the body, theatre (movement and imagination) and the everyday. For me, the notion of the performative in painting always considers the body in all forms. My practice plays between the body being revealed and concealed, reflective and reactive, and always connects paint to physicality and bodily presence. For me, imaging intimacy is a more physical experience that considers and engages the phrase, 'being in the moment'. I created *The Kiss* as an exploration in translating a physical, intimate moment into paint.

## The Kiss



Figure 18 (a-d) Process shots of *The Kiss* (2013-2014)

The Kiss explores my personal sense of an intimate moment. Although produced in relation to the experience of kissing my then fiancé, it is also derivative as 'the kiss' is a recurring trope in history of art imagery. An interpretation of a kiss that resonates with my practice is Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* (1908), where Klimt successfully painted the collision between a three-dimensional body surrounded by flat, abstracted forms, transforming it into the two-dimensional space of a canvas, and allowing these stylistically different forms to co-exist. I love his interpretation of this action, this moment. The abstracted style in which he painted such a personal, tender moment serves to explain visually that state of ecstasy one can experience in a kiss. It can be an out-of-body experience that imagines the body consumed by the imaginary shapes and circles that Klimt painted.

I wanted to capture the intimacy I felt when I kissed my fiancé, but I could not conceive of any imagery that adequately articulated how I felt. Instead my mind kept transporting me back to the actual moment. We were strangers to one another, so there was a distance to the way the closeness of our bodies felt. I remember the wetness of our lips. Physicality was therefore more pronounced in my memory than imaginary shapes and symbols. My experience of the moment was about the sense of physicality, and my challenge was about enacting this moment through paint.

In order to express the pronounced sense of physicality in imagery, I asked my fiancé to dip his lips in paint and kiss a piece of paper. I did the same. After contemplating the images I decided that the reproduced lips had a value to the way I determined the moment. They became the images from which I could construct my piece. I took the printed lips and scanned them into a computer, converting the imagery into a digital format. I

then redrew the scanned images in my own hand, re-scanned them, and sandblasted a set of lips on either side of a piece of glass. I felt that this engraving action solidified the moment but that the glass held that distance between our bodies. I then began to negotiate with paint the overlaid sandblasted lips that were masking each other on the glass.

The paint recalled the wetness and action in the moment. The negotiation of attempting to unify the engraved marks stylistically references the action of kissing another person. After emphasising 'the kiss', through engraving and then painting, I asked my fiancé to dip his arms into paint and pretend that he was in fact embracing me. I did the same. The resultant paint marks are a direct translation of the action of the bodies. Trace elements or residues, created as a result of a performative act, can suggest a play between absence and presence of the body (Leder 1990: 78). Exploring the residual capacity of paint allowed me this fluidity and mediated position on various themes, such as the body and intimacy, which as themes themselves comfortably oscillate between a present state and absent or distant state of being, in relation to experience and memory.

The piece attempts to understand how paint and the body can engage a subtler performative act, which would better describe my own experience of a kiss. My experience could not ignore the physicality of the moment and therefore included it in the process of translation. The face-to-face contact and slippery wet immediacy were the intimate features of that moment, and it was those performative elements that influenced how the moment could be visually re-produced through a painting language.

# 4. Mixing Mediums

Robin Rhode

Robin Rhode is an artist who, like me, actively implicates physicality as a performative act, which can affect his 'mother tongue' language of drawing. I will analyse Robin Rhode's practice in order to explore how activating translation, as a mode, can articulate the immediacy of the moment. I will underscore the adaptation of language as crucial to conceptualising experience and, by extension, the art-making process. Rhode's work focuses on how a discursive medium such as drawing can become interrelated with other media. In being preoccupied with using drawing to translate the languages and technological supports of theatre and film, his practice is aligned with my own. I feel his work transports my notion of the performative into a more active state, which can effectively explain how movement and painting can become interchangeable.

Rhode's work uses an array of media to explore themes around human desire – yearning, self-projection and longing (Rosenthal 2007: 11). His earlier work often depicted one or two people as the protagonists of small-scale events or actions that react to or against drawn objects of desire (e.g. bicycle, sporting prowess, and tricks with a basketball or a skateboard). The subject matter is usually drawn onto a city wall or floor in a public space (Rosenthal 2007: 8). In *Untitled (Hard Rain)* (2004) the artist himself is acting as a man caught in the rain. However, the rain is drawn onto the wall behind the body of the man. The performer and the drawn line (the rain drops) appear to react to one another in the same space, and reference a traditionally impossible interaction between the body, existing space and the drawn line. The city as a backdrop adds to the effect of these actions being real processes, as the indexical imagery locates a perceived sense of legitimate, existing space to the seemingly impossible interaction between the drawn object and the body (Rosenthal 2007: 8).

This sense of realism is further reinforced through the photograph (an indexical referent of the reality it pictures), which captures the event (Schwabsky 2005: 9). Not only does Rhode's use of photography reference a time-sequence similar to the way Eadweard Muybridge analysed motion in humans and animals, but the homogeneity of the actual surface of the photograph makes these two languages (drawing and performance) appear to be one (Rosenthal 2007: 9). The resultant artwork exists in a controversial and elusive space because the drawn line and the human being would never have been able to interact so immediately if it were not for the camera. The impossible interaction thus becomes plausible through the lens of the camera and transports the viewer into an alternate space where movement appears to be an active participant within a frame (Rosenthal 2007: 9).



Figure 19 Robin Rhode, *Untitled (Hard Rain)* (2004)

Rhode enlisted the camera as a way to capture the performer responding to the drawn object in a gestural way. The type of gesture has been compared to a silent film, where expression and body language become exaggerated in order to image the best reaction to the drawn object (Sherwin 2011: 119). Michele Robecchi compares this type of gesture with silent movies where icons like Charlie Chaplin became revered for their gestural slapstick comedic interactions. She also draws a comparison with the way Rhode conflates elements of film, theatre and culture into a version of 'Vaudefilm', a fleeting art form that emerged in reaction to cinema. Vaudeville artists attempted to merge media in a similar way to Rhode, inserting film into their live performances by providing a live musical soundtrack to the moving images on screen (Robecchi 2011: 84). They were, like Rhode, attempting to choreograph various languages at once.

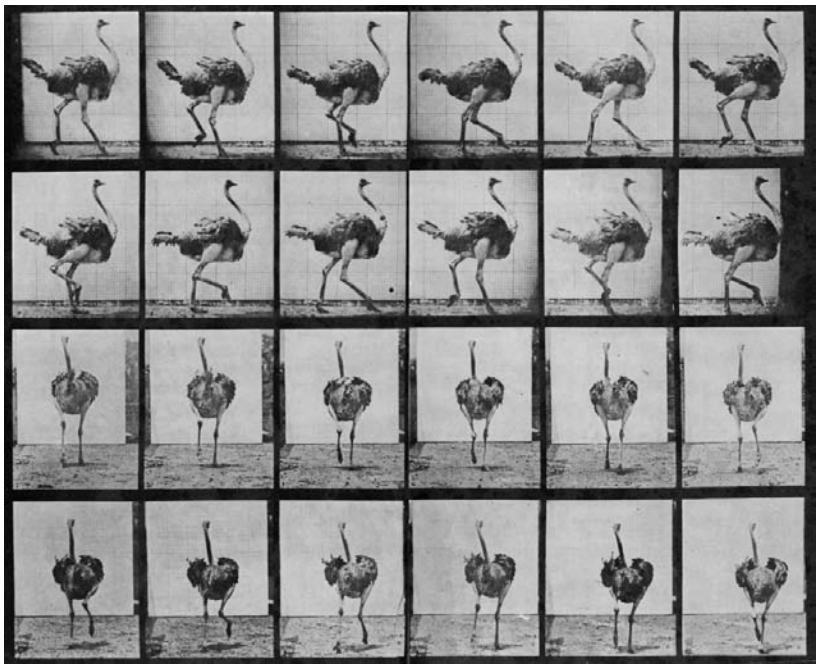

Figure 20 Eadweard Muybridge, *Ostrich Flying-Run* (1884-1887)

Rosenthal defines the role of drawing in Rhode's work as choreography, and in doing so pairs drawing and movement in the same metaphorical space. She says it is

> drawing, in the (German) sense of setting signs in space [*Zeichnung and Zeichen],* making marks, with the body laying down spatial markers (his choreography), but also as the reality of a drawing on the floor, on a wall, on paper. Drawing always stands for itself, but it also is (or represents) a counterpart – for or against – his performances (Rosenthal 2007: 8).

In this way the recognition of Rhode's drawing style as a choreographic conflation between drawing and performance is exactly the same intersection that my practice and piece, *Tea before the Last Supper*, explores. The invented space captured by the frame of the photograph allowed Rhode to consolidate his drawing style as a performative act by giving him permission to activate authoritative ownership of the actual body in space

(Robecchi 2011: 87). Therefore, the notion of the performative in Rhode's work relies on human reaction and movement, in relation to a drawn object, and it is the translation of these elements, using various material and technological supports, which can serve to destabilise the idea of drawing as a reflective process and transport it into 'the moment'.

Instead of the canvas, Rhode adopts an inclusive production strategy using formal theatre and film supports. Theatre and film traditionally transform space through a frame. One could say they typify the notion of the contemporary hybrid glass window because they are focused on the action that flows between the frame of the lens or rectangular space. Rhode's site-specific, framed set design plays a theatrical complementary role in defining the space where the action takes place. It provides credibility to the reactive relationship between gesture and drawing, as it encourages a 'suspension of disbelief' and makes what are essentially charcoal markings plausible as wet raindrops (Rosenthal 2007: 8). The manner in which he makes drawing and gesture perform in a demarcated space reinterprets the idea of the proscenium arch, which historically separated the action from the viewer, by essentially boxing the drama into a complementary role through the camera (Robecchi 2011: 84). The theatre relies on the audiences' predisposition to forget their surrounding environment. But by boxing the action into the frame of the photograph, Rhode eliminates the effort to forget and pushes these traditionally prescribed limitations into an indefinable space. In this way he is able to transport the drawing medium into an active state of being where his drawn objects (the rain) appear to be 'actually' performing or raining (Robecchi 2011: 84)

Rhode's talent is his ability to recognise the conventions of certain media, such as the ability of the photograph to homogenise elements, to frame the action or the gestural body and to communicate visually in space. This allows him the freedom to retain certain elements particular to photography but translate them into a different, more personal format. The crucial subversion in Rhode's practice is the activation of the site-specific context (the urban city streets), which helped to challenge his dominant language of drawing. Rhode's impromptu street performances, such as *Untitled (Hard Rain)* (2004), with its few props references to historical precedents such as Commedia dell'Arte, Royal de Luxe Theatre Company, or the street performance work of Surrealist and Fluxus artists which relied on subverting their context to express alternate perspectives. All of these organisations found success through their ability to bypass a more trained theatre audience in order to access controversial subject matter (Robecchi 2011: 87). However, Rhode's combined use of the camera redirects the street performance and once again formalises it, perhaps in an attempt to make the audience take the message in the narrative more seriously. His work therefore exists in an elusive state – it cannot be termed as film or photography, and neither is it theatre. Whether it should be seen as a live enactment or documentation is almost impossible to say. Thus his work typifies the interchangeable relationship between artefacts and performances.

I align my own practice to his work because it deals with emotional states experienced in the moment and, in order to express the complicated plurality of those emotions. Similarly to Rhode, I appropriate many different visual languages that (by virtue of their capacity to interrelate) can provide as close a translation of those emotions as possible (Benjamin 1969: 72). In *Untitled (Hard Rain)* (2004) (unlike Dumas' reproduction of the photograph), it is the invented performance between the performer and the drawn raindrops that carries the subliminal emotional theme in the work, playing with the analogy of 'freedom of choice' as a way to negotiate a difficult or challenging moment. Rhode sets up this emotional dilemma through the languages of gesture and drawing, but frames it through photography. He draws the miserable, pouring rain cloud and acts out the anticipation of getting wet. His photographic stills use the body (gesture and movement) to build such a convincing relationship to his drawn mark, discouraging the viewer from questioning the legitimacy of the dense downpour of charcoal dots drawn on the wall, and encouraging him/her into pretending they're raindrops, until the actor decides to move from his stationary position (Rosenthal 2007). As he walks (depicted through consecutive frames which allude to movement) he leaves behind him a thick, black, dense column of charcoal markings that (without the participation of the performer) can no longer represent a stormy downpour.

Instead the once lively raindrops become a rather bizarre black drawing on the wall and the audience is left with the ironic and rather comical title *Untitled (Hard Rain)*, as if in that moment the rain hardened into a black hard mass devoid of any personified traits that it previously seemed to express. Sherwin suggests that in this sense "each one of Rhode's decisive, stilled art images is the primary essential gesture: the act of pointing at something to say 'this, not that'" (Sherwin 2011: 119). In this work he proposes that performance, drawing and photography cannot exist without the other, only to then shatter the illusion when he removes the performer and leaves behind simply a drawing (Rosenthal 2007: 8). Rhode's most impressive attribute in this artwork is the recognition that languages are complementary, and that their mode of translation allows them the capacity to exist simultaneously.

The fact that the interaction between all elements takes place simultaneously links this particular performative relationship of the body directly to concepts of time, movement and space in our current context. They are interrelated and constantly negotiating one another in the same moment. While Dumas recognised mediation as interrelated, Rhode recognises simultaneity. His conflated language explores the contradictions associated when dealing with specific codes, secret desires, identities and semantics apparent in our urban and domestic environments (Sherwin 2011: 121). His work is able to stretch the connections between language, the body, time and space to such an extreme point that it becomes impossible to envisage a single medium that represents us, and which we represent ourselves (Chambers 2002: 28).

The physicality enacted by the subject ascribes a more present value to the drawing medium and is therefore pivotal in emphasising time as an ever-present reality. The contradiction of the photograph, and the performance possibly existing at the same time, but never really understanding how and when, results in a kind of timeless platform. By creating a timeless platform Rhode allows reality and imagination to become interchangeable in order to concentrate the message in the narrative. The desire to escape a difficult moment or the feeling that the world is heavy on one's shoulders are the essential intimate elements which Rhode is able to translate successfully through such a manifold combination of languages. The metaphor of a dark, dense rain storm only raining on one person evokes a sense of condemned doom, but the humour illustrated by the actor simply walking away from the worsening darkness alludes to a positivity which brings to mind a quote by Andy Warhol: "They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself" (Warhol 1977). In this light the metaphor examines how one can find one's own way to escape the dark rain, and *Untitled (Hard Rain)* (2004) humorously illustrates that it is as easy as walking away.

## Tea Before the Last Supper



Figure 21 Tea before the Last Supper (2014) Mixed media. In collaboration with Matthew Kay and Gina Kraft



Figure 22 (a-b) Tamara Osso and Gina Kraft photographing, cutting and pasting movement into timelines



Figure 23 Tamara Osso & Gina Kraft in performance (2014). Photograph Matthew Kay

**All the work introduced thus far has been self-reflective and predominantly concerned with my own identity. However, Tea before the Last Supper, and Surrogate, emerged out of my performative mode of working. I began to feel more confident about the performative way I was approaching subject matter, and after discussions with other artists –Gina Kraft (performance artist) and Niall Bingham (print maker) – I became interested in translating their particular visual languages in order to broaden my own. Having established**

(through previous experiments) that encountering different languages causes various problems that require inventive strategies in order to find resolutions, I was excited that collaboration with such specific artists could manifest an even further layered perspective on art making and subject matter.

I began to imagine how many perspectives could be visually reproduced using the process of translation. Gina Kraft's work, like my own practice, has a particular mode defined by her own experiences and opinions of the world. When I approached her with the idea of collaborating, she was working on a performance piece inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, The Last Supper. Her idea was to deconstruct the painting and develop a physical language that could translate into an actual physical performance of her interpretation of The Last Supper. We began to work together, thinking that my experience as a dancer could possibly be of assistance to her. Our strategy began by noticing the gestural quality of the bodies in Da Vinci's painting, and we began mimicking each individual disciple and developing more and more interlacing movement that could animate the still image and bring to life the movement of the characters in the painting and their anticipation of an impending dinner. The comedy of this process emerged when I realised that instead of Gina and I directing twelve performers to create a more natural interpretation of the spatial relationships between people eating at a dinner table, we were frantically attempting to enact all twelve individuals at the same time. We used the video camera to capture our movements and editing programs to cut and paste our individual performances into one frame, which allowed us to see the performance as a whole. We went to great lengths to replicate ourselves another ten times so that we could envisage the bodies required for the final performance.

At the same time as we were replicating ourselves I was enthralled by C.S Lewis's book, Alice in Wonderland, and had just read the Mad Hatter's tea party scene. I could not help but relate the way Gina and I were working to how the March Hare and The Mad Hatter constantly move from one seat to the next, pretending they were beginning the party again at every new seat. In the book the Hatter is accused of killing time, as if time were a person, and as such the revolving tea party is never-ending – when 'time' was killed, it was teatime again! A certain irony prevailed in the sense that the painting we were drawing inspiration from was timeless in its legacy as a painting. Drawing on the tea party scene from Alice in Wonderland I wanted to capture timeless movement in a still image. I wanted to create an image that captured the constant passing of time. The way Gina and I had been tricking time through cutting and pasting ourselves on a timeline was as if we were the Mad Hatter and the March Hare trapped in a frantic tea party where time is never present. I was now beginning to translate Gina's translation of The Last Supper into my own.

I found the humour in the process of production, and Gina kindly agreed to assist me in realising my artwork through our invented process. As we had been working with video and photography, from the inspiration of a still image (the painting), I decided that I wanted to re-create my own still image, capturing remnants of the famous painting but exploring the movement imagined in the Tea Party scene. It became important to display the frenetic manner in which we were working through movement. I enlisted the expertise of Matthew Kay (a photographer particularly interested in movement) and we set up a photo shoot that used slow shutter speeds to capture the movements that Gina and I (dressed as the Hare and Hatter) had been working on for the past few months. I then cut and pasted the stills of the March Hare and Hatter interacting with one another into one image. The resultant image exists as a photographic painting of sorts because light became a tool with which to capture and trace movement.

The captured image is a reflection on the process of choreographing Gina's Last Supper. There was a playful interaction between Gina and myself that didn't inhibit the creative process. I was able to create my own boundaries in relation to her already set parameters and the disciplined, scheduled meetings that we both engaged on a weekly basis ensured our process progressed steadily. The existing image meant to interpret the chaotic manner in which we negotiated the choreography and should be read as the prelude to The Last Supper performance, which will take place as part of Gina Kraft's exhibition.

## Surrogate



Figure 24 (Installation shot) Person both viewed and viewing the video installation Surrogate (2014) Mixed media

Surrogate emerged from printmaker Niall Bingham's idea of collaboration, which is as to be expected, different, to Gina Kraft's. Bingham's exhibition is titled I am Niall, and is mainly about how identity is constructed and never fixed. He is purposefully collaborating with various artists to create painted self-portraits of himself. The influence of the various artists on his own portraits is an attempt to gain multiple perspectives on a singular identity, which not only appropriates Benjamin's concept of translation, but also clearly demonstrates how one subject can articulate such a varied perspective on the painting language.

His parameters were less detailed then Kraft's. Bingham's idea was to allow the collaborator (myself) to express an opinion of who Niall Bingham is and then from there strategize a singular image/painting, which could be painted together. His idea is based on my perception of him as a person, and his strategy was to take my perspective and combine it with his own understanding of himself in order to create the image. Gina and I were working toward a common goal and have in common the language of performance. As such we created a performance within a performance. Niall was urging me to shift my focus back into painting and collaborative painting at that.

I have only known his work as a printmaker and began to analyse the commonalities between print-maker and painter. I became fascinated with the capacity of layering colours, textures and images, and related this, bricolage way of working with the concept of a multiple identity. My collaboration with Niall consisted of identifying Roy Lichtenstein's Ben Day dots and Robert Rauschenberg's introduction of various ready-mades

into paintings as a type of visual plan. Their layered mode of working seemed to identify with both my practice and with Niall's identity as a print-maker.

However, as the weeks progressed and I got to know Bingham better I realised that what I most admired was his particular way of being. Bingham's current position in life is different from mine. He is a single man who runs the print studio at the university. He lives in a commune and is largely free to do as he pleases in his spare time. As a fellow artist, I don't see him much socially because I am married and have a small child, which limits my night crawls. My life as an artist has dramatically shifted focus. It has become less expansive and more insular in terms of movement. Time is not as selfish as it was and my sense of freedom is defined through limitations.

Bingham's project involves working with him to frame his sense of identity. This requires finding a way to construct an image related to him as well as painting a canvas together. Although artists stereotypically seem to be consistently fascinated with themselves, and make work predicated on themselves (as I have done), I found this process of investing energy into someone else's portrait very difficult; particularly because I don't know Bingham very well. The process of collaborating became more about finding relational elements to each other then relational elements in imagery. Thus, based on the idea that he simply must move around town (to interesting and different places) more than me, I devised a solution. I gave him a Go-pro camera and a script that I asked him to follow for seven days. The result was a series of video snippets of mundane information particular to his movements throughout the day.

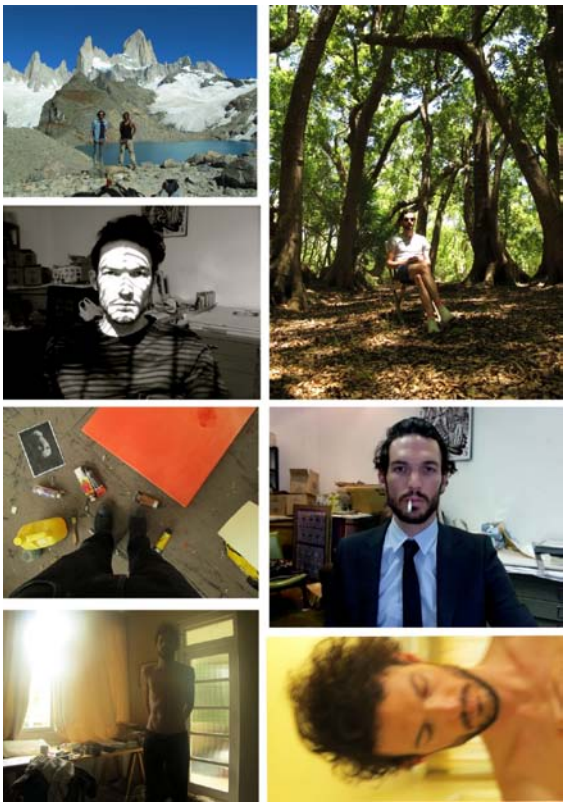

Figure 25 (a-g) Niall Bingham's self portraits (2014). Courtesy Niall Bingham

The voyeuristic process of watching personal footage resulted in Surrogate. I began to notice my own everyday movements and became particularly fascinated with my morning ritual and the bathroom mirror. I often feel very detached from my self-image in the morning, as if the person staring back at myself is not actually me. I often perform a variety of tasks and routines such as brushing my teeth, washing my face and putting face-cream on without so much as acknowledging myself.

I imagined the prospect of opening my bathroom cabinet and peering into the life of another person. Bingham became the first bathroom cabinet daydream. I edited the footage with a hazy filter, which still veiled the specificity of Bingham because even though I now had a better image of the man it was still mediated and not personal. The experience of 'getting to know him for me, involved understanding his movements as more important than deconstructing his image and so the idea of creating a documentary of his movements seemed more compelling then painting. The medium of paint didn't seem to adequately express how I felt about this process of collaboration with Bingham and thus my language adapted to better suit the situation.

I developed my video installation from our collaboration because we agreed that either of us could take from the project as we wished but as Bingham's intention was to create a painting we then had to work within the limitations of canvas, colour, and composition. We have found this process difficult and frustrating as my particular language of painting is conflicting with the way he moves and manipulates paint. In this sense our visual languages have encountered a stalemate and require the reconfiguration Benjamin suggests in order to resolve the differences in our communication strategies. As I understand painting to be incredibly autonomous and comparable to individual handwriting I think we are going to have to compromise by developing a way new of painting. Again this can only enrich our own respective languages.

Bingham's project has been the most insightful into adopting translation as a mode because the challenges we face are forcing a negotiation between materials and languages which will have to result in something completely new in order to resolve our differences. The challenge of constantly negotiating difference is a predominant aspect to living in South Africa. I find the constant attempts to communicate with such a variety of cultures and ideologies so engaging that my entire practice has become concerned with this type of sensitive, back and forth negotiation. Often I find myself communicating with myself! However, I do believe that when two interested people enter into dialogue, a common ground can be established, and it is when this mutual kinship occurs that relationships deepen and a broader concept of one's own ideology and identity can shift and grow.

# 5. The Effect of Movement

Examining Rhode's practice adequately explains the process of developing language. His production strategies relate to my practice as they consciously conflate various elements of drawing (or painting in my work) and gesture to create an imaginative, invented space often displayed (but not confined) to the photograph (Rosenthal 2007: 8). His practice actively exposes how translation, as a mode, does not only exalt his own language of drawing by allowing it to be powerfully affected by a foreign tongue, but also determines how languages (for example the language of performance), once they are intending the same objective, can harmonise and even become interchangeable.

It is the degree to which Rhode has allowed his language to become affected that transports Benjamin's concept of translation into an active realm. Rhode's exploration of drawing through translation is similar to the way I explore painting; he constantly attempts to implicate drawing as an active participant through various languages, be they performance, photography or video. Although painting and drawing have different properties and values ascribed to them, Rhode's mode of translating movement and space is valuable to my own exploration, as I feel the manner in which he attempts to translate movement into drawing has been crucial to exalting his drawing style and furthermore, influential in accepting that the languages of drawing (and by extension my exploration of painting) and performance can influence one another.

*Untitled (Hard Rain) 2004* is similar to the way in which I developed *Tea before The Last Supper*. Both were created out of an action-based gesture informed by the experience of being in the moment. Both were reflecting on an action-based process. The drawn line, in my artwork as well as in Rhode's practice, has a preoccupation with constantly striving to be alive in the work. Rhode's experimentation with the different conventions that other languages offer is always pursuing the need to make the drawing act; to make it perform. This consistent need to translate drawing into a present tense naturally shifts Rhode's practice into a live performance arena, and it is these pieces that strongly articulate the concept of a 'performing media' for me, since my own language of painting is similarly preoccupied with the influence of physical performance and movement.

Benjamin would say of this inclusive process that "the great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language is at work" (Benjamin 1969: 76). Rhode explains how his mother-tongue language of drawing attempts to harmonise his experiences by adopting other languages that in themselves are supplemented and reconciled in their mode of signification. According to Rhode:

> The drawing gives rise to the performance because in most cases the drawing is in a storyboard format. It made sense to recreate the storyboard photographically. From the photograph it made sense to extend the narrative into a series of moving images. The moving images extended into a more filmic narrative, which filters through into a theatrical or operatic sense, and then this theatrical dimension feeds back into the performance. Ultimately, the performance exists as a kind of drawing study, and it is these drawing studies that are the starting points for the works. The idea stems from my reactions to where I am and how I feel at a given time (Robecchi 2011: 90).

*Untitled (Exit/Entry)* (2004) demonstrates how drawing can be performative in the moment. The performance begins outside the Houston Contemporary Art Museum on 15 July 2004, during business hours. The piece was enacted by Rhode and documented by Paul Druecke (Lepecki 2007: 19). Rhode was videoed jumping (fully clothed with a red hood on his head) into the water fountain outside the museum. He can be seen splashing and floating in the water, before running quite urgently towards the museum's front door, and bursting into the main gallery. Once inside he pushed past patrons and dashed in and out of partitions, panels and artworks as if he were looking for something, his wet clothes and shoes leaving puddles of water behind him. This spectacle is documented by the camera operator, whose footage captures the speed with which the performer moves, trying to follow Rhode's footprints when his body disappears in and out of spaces.

Next the performer stops in front of a large white wall and in thirty seconds he draws a car (with a piece of chalk). The white chalk mixed with his dirty wet hands marks the wall in a light grey colour. He executes the drawing with a confident sense of urgency and accuracy. Once the car is complete the performer moves to the rear of the drawn car and attempts to push the car. His wet hands, the drawn chalk, and the force of his body smudge a combination of grey and white markings, which then combine into a darker tone of grey. In the recording the performer slips and falls against the wall in his effort to move the drawing. The intensity of his effort increases and so the clear outlines of the car become more and more abstract and formless, and the crowd becomes more and more attentive (Lepecki 2007: 19).

The performer then moves to the front of the drawn car and repeats the gesture, resulting in even more smudging. The act of pushing the car lasts about 90 seconds, at which point the performer gives up and as quickly as he entered the space he vacates it. The video camera is not as quick as Rhode, and films the performer from a distance leaving the gallery. The documentation ends with the camera tracking the wet footprints into a tree-lined backyard, until the wet footsteps dry up. The camera pans around the empty confined area where there is no evidence of the performer. The entire performance is 5 minutes and 18 seconds (Lepecki 2007: 20).

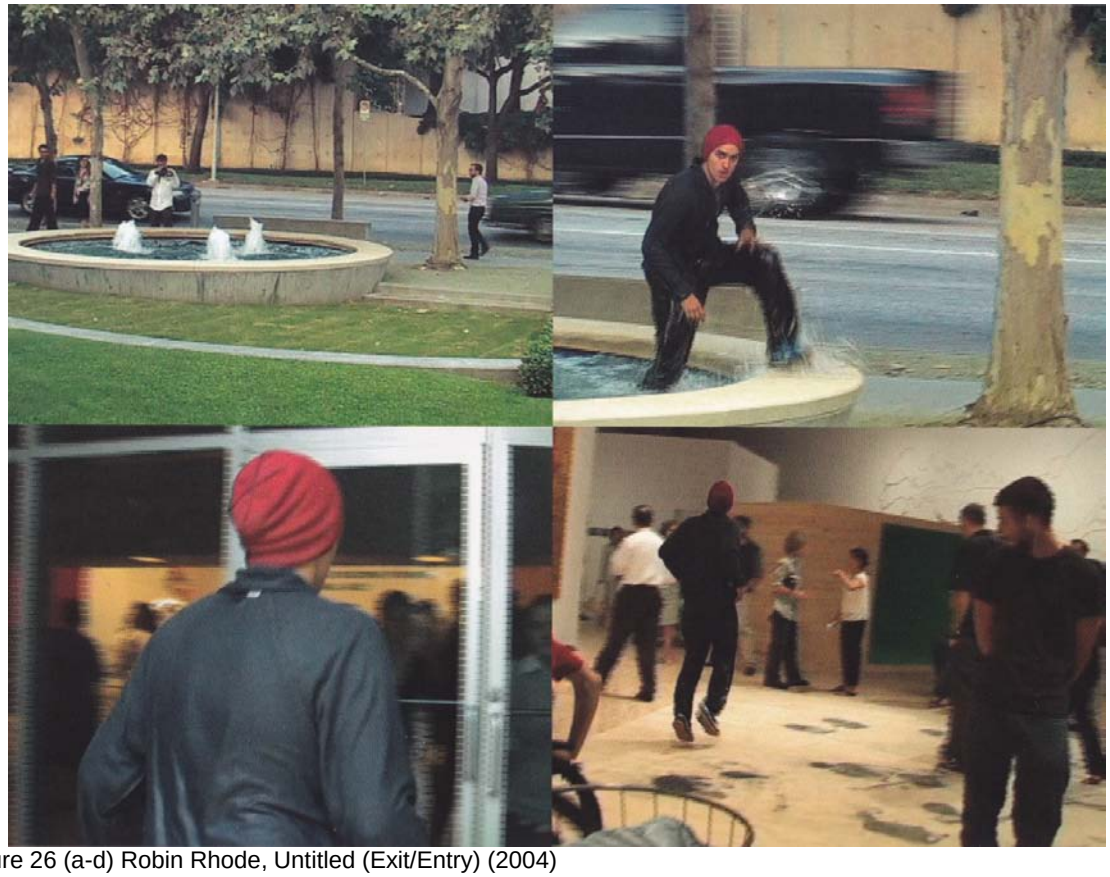

Figure 26 (a-d) Robin Rhode, Untitled (Exit/Entry) (2004)



Figure 27 (a-d) Robin Rhode, Untitled (Exit/Entry) (2004)

This performance evokes an aggressive approach to drawing and frames the artist as an active and complimentary participant in the piece. In *The Kiss* the intimacy of the moment determined the degree to which the physical body needed to be included. As my moment was private I did not consider a live presence. *Untitled (Entry/Exit)*, perhaps more like *Artist vs Artist (2014)*, displays a definite formal and direct relationship between the particular qualities of Rhode's way of moving his body in performance and the qualities of his personal way of drawing line (Lepecki 2007: 20). Their relational qualities are their sharpness, sense of urgency and accurate directness. If, as Rhode has stated previously, his performances exist as drawing studies, then it is in the sharp directness with which he draws the car, and the smudging of that line, which consolidates this relationship between performance and drawing in this piece (Lepecki 2007: 20). Lepecki identifies Rhode's smudge technique (his language) as not only a physical intervention but he also understands it as a type of anti-representational technique (Lepecki 2007: 20). He says: "Smudge is the technique of choice for whatever can be marked as exceeding the proper boundaries of representation, all that can be called 'the scum of paint'"(Lepecki 2007: 20). Lepecki suggests that Rhode embraces the "scum of paint" through his public art performances, and in doing so recuperates the main tropes of action painting, only to deeply and ironically subvert them (Lepecki 2007: 20).

The interactive process in *Untitled (Entry/Exit)* (2004) once again reworks traditional use values of material supports and actions in the making of an artwork. In *Untitled (Exit/Entry)* (2004), Rhode enters the gallery drenched in water, his body acting as the brush, and the gallery space the canvas (Lepecki 2007: 20). This unconventional approach to drawing shifts the potential range of supports for his final drawing by challenging its traditional usage, on the surface of paper, and encourages imaginative solutions. It is now not only conceived on a vertical surface but on horizontal ground (Houston Art Museum) that is politically charged (Lepecki 2007: 21). Rhode's process simultaneously considers that how and where he draws are determined by one another, and as such contribute to understanding his practice as interrelated, multimodal and actively working to determine meaning as something which is always influenced by external elements and is therefore constantly shifting (Benjamin 1969: 74).

In *Untitled (Exit/Entry*) (2004), the manner in which the performer pushes his way through the gallery, the speedy, accurate way he draws the car, the intense manner in which he destabilises the image by smudging it (when he attempts to push it), and the agile way he escapes the gallery space never to be seen again, all intend the emotion; they conspire to determine a sense of urgency or danger which dominates the piece (Lepecki 2007: 23). The languages of performance and drawing form a certain unity and translate an ever-present feeling of danger. Implicating performance into his work results in this temporal paradox that is similar to *Untitled (Hard Rain*) (2004). It contrasts the reactive, energetic gestural movements of entering and exiting the gallery

with the contemplative, seemingly endless time, which the resultant drawing emits after the performer interacts with it (Lepecki 2007: 23).

Rhode succeeds in challenging drawing as a medium because it becomes less about residue and more about an active state; a more performative state that balances simultaneously between an event which has occurred and an event which is occurring. In this way the performance and drawing serve each other in the moment, with the intention to displace time and particularly the present as a stable referent (Lepecki 2007: 23).

Lepecki describes this 'in the moment', almost criminal enactment of Rhode's performance as being connected to his apartheid past, which denied him access to the contemplative institutionalised buildings of art galleries and other spaces alike. He understands Rhode's need – to dominate drawings' ability to be in both a present state and a reflective state – as a response to living in a racially charged territory where one is forced to develop a particular survival strategy and psychology in order to negotiate particular ideologies (Lepecki 2007: 21). Although my own work attempts to displace time, it is far more concerned with constructing an imagined space rather than re-appropriating an existing one. Rhode's way of seeing, and his capacity to use translation as a mode to better situate his worldview, is what remains important in reviewing his practice. His art reinvents an existing story based on sub-cultural codes and marginal experiences; it therefore doesn't rely on a traditional approach. Its value lies in the way that Rhode negotiates his personal experiences (Robecchi 2011: 87).

*Car Alarm* (2003) is perhaps the most poignant of all Rhode's works, for the way it conceptualises the reciprocal, interchangeable relationship between mark making and physicality, which I am in turn exploring in my practice. Importantly, *Car Alarm* (2003) is one of the few pieces that has sound as its departure point, rather than a visual or representational element. It depicts the performer panicked, with the same sense of urgency as *Untitled (Entry/Exit)* (2004), trying to escape from a room as if he were a burglar who had set an alarm off. He slams himself against a wall, and pacing back and forth attempts to climb the flat, vertical surface of the wall, leaving only his shoe marks as the register of drawing. However, the marks register more than a technique to index speed, or the precariousness of representation; they exist as an effect of movement (Lepecki 2007: 23). This is not a way to represent movement but a way to understand life's motions in a moment of danger.



Figure 28 Robin Rhode, Car Alarm (2003)

Lepecki adequately summarises this understanding of the effect of the performative, in relation to a medium such as drawing, when he says:

> The question then is not at all one of theatrics, or of symbolic gestures that would represent a particular sensation (fear), or state (emergency), or mood (excitement). It is mostly a question of when to draw lines and when to smudge lines – to effect and activate movement or to block it (Lepecki 2007: 24).

I understand my own connection between movement and painting, and art-making in general, to function in much the same way. In order to best express my own way of being in the world, I determine when, if or how I should reveal or conceal certain elements. While my practice can relate to Rhode's appropriation of a suspicious criminal act into his art-making strategy (as we are both from a post-apartheid context), I do not experience my country in the same way.




Figure 29 (a-c) Morningview Estate (2014)

*Morningview Estate* is an artwork that also developed from sound, but the process by which it has evolved is in opposition to Rhode's experiences of South Africa. *Morningview Estate* is a community of people who own individual houses within a secure, gated estate. I am a white woman who, although I am as suspicious as Rhode, in my quick interaction with my experience of my city, my movement is more limited. I am not brave enough to perform guerrilla tactics; instead my practice is more guarded. Because of a more sheltered upbringing, which almost never involved contact with the urban streets of downtown Johannesburg, *Morningview Estate* embodies the notion that my movement is more voyeuristic and introspective. And perhaps because of my experience as a dancer I am far less direct in my interactions with my space. This is why

the medium of paint, as Dumas explores it, appeals to my practice – it is more fluid and can represent my distant and mediated interaction with space.

In my work I am concerned with activating or blocking movement through media, in order to translate intimate moments experienced between places and people. My intention is not about enacting, like Rhode, the fast-paced anticipation of an event, but rather it is about strategizing how to enact a deeper sense of connection and communication to my suburban context through values attributed to painting. My exit and entry strategy is about negotiating my quiet observational tendencies, which are informed by my identity as a trained ballerina. Ballet is about understanding vocabulary and continuously revising it in order to create expressive movement. I have a continuous fascination with the glass window motif, movement and painting, which have become the themes and vocabulary I am constantly reinterpreting. My practice revises my bodily experiences and creates structure through various media that connect to imagined spaces. These spaces are focused on interaction between subjects in my particular environment.

## Morningview Estate



Figure 30 Morningview Estate (2014) Mixed media installation

Morningview Estate is where I live. It is situated in the heart of Sandton, in a suburb called Morningside. It is an estate that in South Africa has a particular kind of affluent association. The estate consists of 64 individual houses, ranging in size and value determined by the wealth of the client. The development is designed to provide the tenants with a sense of community and security. This concept is promoted as a luxury in South Africa, and is predominantly supported by affluent individuals who do not have confidence in government protection. The estate has become an intriguing space for me because, although it tirelessly markets and promotes safety and security (boomed off entrances and exits and security cameras at every lamp post), people in the community have still been robbed.

There is a strange irony about estate living. People who buy houses within the estate feel safer about buying property closer to one another, yet they also want to retain their privacy. This is ironic because the houses in my estate look directly into one another's gardens. I became interested in the individuals who live in the estate. They are a wealthy, well-educated, multiracial and international group of people, and the way they conduct themselves can be described as respectable. The artefacts that surround them in their homes are in themselves fascinating.

Initially I wanted to make portraits of each homeowner in their houses, but because of certain constraints, I started to negotiate a new way of accessing my community. I discovered that there is an estate manager who resolves neighbourly disputes, and provides information regarding the estate by email to the tenants. I approached the manager and asked her if I could obtain the addresses of the homeowners at the estate as I

was making an artwork that would require participation from the community. She informed me that it would be a violation of privacy if she acceded to my request, and I would get into trouble if I approached the community with this kind of request. She explained that the estate platform could not be used for monetary gain. I replied that the project is about participation and that no money would be exchanged, but my request was still disallowed.

Every day at 4pm, however, I would walk my little boy, Jack, around the estate. I began to meet other parents, and people who were also enjoying the evening air. I wrote a letter explaining my project and handed these letters out as I encountered someone new. Attached to the project outline were specific questions that probed personal responses to estate living, and insights into the type of people who were living around me. I asked people to answer my questions using smart phones and then to email their sound bites to me. I felt that this was less intrusive than securing a committed time for an interview. The recordings were meant to function as insight into the portraits I was to paint but painting a face to the voice didn't seem to explain the negotiation of personal space that I had to manipulate in order to obtain a seemingly mundane piece of information.

Instead the negotiation of obtaining the information became prevalent, and the idea that these individuals preferred to share their opinions from the security of their private computers in their respective houses became interlinked with the idea of creating portraits. I enjoyed the recordings. They are insightful, detailed and a good reflection of the type of community I live in. They could be described as either selfish or self-contained, but the adjectives I'm more inclined to use are 'shy' or 'polite'. The mauve, grey and white glass, concrete and steel houses seem sturdy in their design but contain an emotional fragility that I find intriguing. I decided to make a sound installation that spoke about this polite interaction mediated by the estate houses.




Figure 31 (left, close-up) Glass sculptures on concrete cylinders (2014)
Figure 32 (right, close up) Glass sculpture, black oxide and concrete cylinder (2014)

**The malleability of glass, which I parallel to the liquidity of paint, became my material of choice. It is fragile and unpredictable but almost gives one the illusion that it is transparent and open. I say illusion because although one can see through a glass sheet it still denies physical access. I began materialising the concept of glass artefacts that reflected the houses in my surrounding estate. The estate is painted uniformly with various tones of grey and white. Owners are not allowed to deviate from this colour palate. The houses are modular and before they were built allowed for a limited amount of additional architectural expression. They conform to a set of rules as set by the developers and now the homeowners themselves.**

**In order to achieve this aesthetic I worked in a glass workshop called The Crucible, and for two months constructed my interpretation of the houses in my estate. Once the glass sculptures were fired I cast concrete cylinders with depressions in the centre of them that were much bigger then the glass sculptures. I imagined these concrete cylinders as the solid foundation that upheld the value systems present within this type of living. I placed a black oxide (a chemical powder known for its effective corrosion resistance) in-between the concrete and the glass sculptures. I also fashioned a rectangular piece of grass made-up of instant lawn on the floor around the cylinders – a common sight in and around the estate.**

**I purchased self-contained speakers that I then uploaded the recordings onto and carefully placed on the opposite wall to the glass and concrete sculptures. The recordings were played simultaneously and looped the sound bites throughout the space creating a certain presence in the space.**

**The entire installation reflects on the type of intimacy I experience in my community and envisages a different kind of relationship from traditional painted portraits. It is an invented perception of my surrounding space. The concrete plinths and glass sculptures together with the oxide and grass components function like a strange alter. The intention was to create a sense of importance with seemingly odd structures. I enjoy that the installation has a clean, contemporary aesthetic that is cold. Its performativity is in the understanding that people have to navigate around the grass square, they are not allowed to interact with the glass sculptures and the variations in opacity in the actual glass sculptures mean that although one is constantly trying to look inside access is continuously denied.**



Figure 33 (Above) People listening to the voice recordings on the speakers as part of Morningview Estate installation (2014)

**The speakers positioned on the opposite wall allow for a glimpse into the closed circuit of estate living but their placement is indicative of the emotional disconnect I feel with my neighbours. The fact that the viewer then has to stand close to the speaker in order to engage the conversation is perhaps the entire point of the piece. I might perceive the estate as a space where interaction and intimacy are restricted but perhaps it is also a space that will require interrogation and persistence in order to find connection.**

# Conclusion

Rhode's influence on my practice is his experimental approach to constructing space with movement. He has transported his drawing language into the three-dimensional realm of performance and theatre, and has simultaneously emphasised physicality as an essential element to the art-making process. His application of translation, as a mode, is not simply about the sterile equation of two or more dead languages, but rather "the mode charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own evolution" (Benjamin 1969: 73). His work demonstrates that the act of attempting to communicate with various languages can result in an exalted language, a 'pure' language (Benjamin 1969: 79). If languages are all interrelated as Benjamin infers, and translation is a performative mode that encourages the translator (artist) to adapt his/her own tongue, and 'let itself go', then Rhode's success as an artist is that his language of drawing has been so open to change itself, that he has succeeded in enriching his mother tongue language of drawing. He has explored drawing so extensively that drawing can no longer be considered his mother tongue. Benjamin suggests that the greatest compliment to a translated linguistic creation would be that it adequately complements its own language: "a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux – without explicitly naming or substantiating it" (1969: 80).

Translation as a mode has enabled me to apply theatre (dance) and painting in a way that accesses my perception of an art discourse. Acknowledging 'theatre' (the inclusion of performer, object, *mise-en-scene* and spectator) is fundamental to understanding the type of performance-based artwork I am intrigued by. 'Theatre', in a traditional sense, put the performer and the object into a dynamic and fictionalised 'performative' state of play. In terms of my practice it is beneficial to understand 'the performative' relationship between performance and the object in terms of a theatrical situation; much like the one Rhode invents. It is a situation that does not fear the creation of objects nor the art object as a prop or stage set (Wood 2007: 23). My exhibition invokes 'theatre' in that through its sculptural and choreographic quality it invites the viewer to buy into a different set of rules, ones that are about identifying the playful game of creating and ascribing value to experience.

At the beginning of this dissertation I recommended that the manifestations in my exhibition be considered in a process of translation. To consider the exhibition as a mobile entity that is constantly revealing and concealing the dynamic individual and social arrangements around production and exhibition. In my exhibition I attempted to retain the qualities of painting, which I enjoy, but rejected any medium specificity, and importantly allowed my practice to be influenced. This allowed me to reintroduce

narratives, figuration and theatre, as well as explore the possibilities inherent in other media such as video, glass, mirror and concrete. My work understands inter-subjective relations and is about exploring the complexity and overlapping of life and art. Wood explains that "the rudimentary grafting together of the real and the imaginary radically revitalises our understanding of culture as a contingent and communal process of enactment" (Wood 2007: 25). My practice and my work adopt Wood's sentiments and through a consistent need to experience and engage various languages I hope to continuously expand on developing my experiences through visual media.

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