A STRANGE ARRANGEMENT:
CONSTRUCTING CONTEMPORARY REDUCTIVE ABSTRACT
PAINTING THROUGH THE ANCIENT CHINESE GARDEN.

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Volume 1 of 3

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ABSTRACT
This project researches a path into the ancient, non-western, non-painting artistic tradition of the Chinese literati garden as a means of reading and generating contemporary reductive abstract painting practices. Moving beyond appeals to geometric space, utilizing Chinese concepts including oscillating opposites and framed views or jing, the research conducted through writing and project identifies a notion of ‘realm’. This place is ultimately defined as a multi-dimensional, immersive space within which reductive abstract painting practices might best (re)form themselves.

There are three volumes with the first setting up the twin fields of the enquiry, charting a path through twentieth century abstraction and ancient Chinese gardens. Here the opportunity is taken to explore gaps in the reading of Western abstraction typically operating within binary modes such as ‘form versus content’. At the same time there is a consideration of the Chinese garden as historical site bound by tradition yet itself continually undergoing a process of change.

Volume 2 draws on multiple sources to create an index of garden devices and effects, many of which are used to generate the practice-led projects of Volume 3. These projects reflect the development and testing of ideas drawn from the Chinese garden as a conceptual and structural model for reductive abstraction. Utilising traditional gallery and non-gallery spaces there is a progression through the initial testing of garden devices in the Formwork gallery project of 2011, followed by the architecturally led Mod Lang (2012) and Here & There/Now & Then (2011-2013). In each case the documentation is interwoven with reading and writing that has informed practice, so recognizing an interlacing of words and things essential to the greater project. Combined with understandings of the garden as a place beyond space-time assumptions there is an emergent ‘realm’ within which the practice-led projects of Concentrated Abstraction (2012) and 50 Variations (2013) are constructed.

Just as the series of formal and conceptual alignments predicated on the unlikely model of Chinese literati gardens drive many of the choices made, the mediums of video, sound, photography, object making, and architectural intervention replace paint applied to canvas and other ‘traditional’ supports. In this strange arrangement between diverse modes of ‘making’ and ‘thinking’ the identification of reductive abstract painting’s potential to operate as a truly multi-dimensional, immersive form is revealed.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface.

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

(iii) the thesis is fewer than 60,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Craig Easton ..............................................
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A note on the citation system:
This paper uses the Chicago in-text, author-date reference system with a single reference list also taking the role of bibliography. Sources are listed alphabetically and by date. In-text citations with corresponding page numbers lead directly to the reference list. Where there are repeat consecutive references to a particular book the in-text reference may be reduced to a bracketed page number alone in that section. Non-consecutive multiple references to a single text may also be abbreviated where appropriate.

Photos are by the author unless otherwise cited. Historical images of other artists’ works are attributed in the list of illustrations.

A note on the translation of garden names:
Pinyin romanisation is used in all photo captions while, depending on descriptive function, the text moves between pinyin and English translations. Different sources also lead on occasion to varied translations, in turn reflecting the richness of the Chinese sources. For ease of reading, those gardens most commonly referred to and/or photographed are listed here:

Lan Yuan      Garden of Enlightenment
Wangshi Yuan  Master of the Nets Garden
Yu Yuan        Garden of Happiness
Zhouzheng Yuan Garden of the Humble Administrator
Liu Yuan       Lingering Garden
Shizilin Yuan  Lion Grove Garden
Ou Yuan        Couple’s Retreat Garden
PREFACE:

What Bugs Me. Post Modern to Post Critical.

When starting to raise a mountain, first set up wooden posts, calculating the correct length and examining the firmness of the ground. (Ji Cheng 1635, 104)

There are, however, well-intentioned people who, afraid that visitors might not understand what is presented before them, place large man-made fish in ponds or clay pandas in front of a Panda Hall like large advertisements. (Chen 2008, 26)

Reductive abstract painting has a problem. It sits at an impasse. On the one hand it is everywhere – canonized and consigned to the history books in the works of Malevich, Mondrian, Stella et al; on the other it is the premiere graphic and architectural product of our times as corporate livery and interior décor. The integration of art and life sought by an historical avant-garde is, by some definitions at least, complete. Success comes at a price. Acceptance leads to invisibility. This problem is one for wider abstraction itself, particularly if one considers such comments as those by Bob Nikas in a comparatively recent monograph purportedly celebrating abstract painting:

…the historical baggage that an abstract painter once carried is now more or less consigned to the “lost and found. (2009, 7)

Painting may go on for a thousand years, but the sense of abstraction as “found” will never change. The “found” state of abstraction is its permanent, irreversible condition. (11)

If history is baggage, and abstraction is simply another readymade we are left with a site ripe for pastiche, parody, simulation. The once valid critical strategies of a classic postmodernism in the hands of a Peter Halley become instead post-critical ‘design tools’ for a Photo-shopped vision of art and culture as one lumbering hybrid. In a kind of back to the future moment, the following from Hal Foster writing in 1983 rings true:

…postmodernism is not pluralism – the quixotic notion that all positions in culture are now open and equal. This apocalyptic belief that anything goes, that the “end of ideology” is here, is simply the inverse of the fatalistic belief that nothing works, that we live under a “total system” without hope of redress… (xi)

But it is exactly this fatalism that is, arguably, predominant in much of what is labeled as abstract art today. What does any of this say for our social politic, let alone an
artist’s belief in aesthetics as a valid language, a solver of problems? In a chapter titled *The Persistence of Abstraction*, Nikas briefly discusses “an abundance of abstract-type painting” (7). This term fits perfectly with the representational abstraction of a Tomory Dodge or Katy Moran brush mark landscape, a Julie Mehretu baroque spatial diagrammatic. Yet it does little to account for the reductive explorations of a Robert Ryman, Brice Marden or Frank Stella. There is something in the insertion of the phrase ‘abstract-type’ painting that almost suggests abstraction will now only be by default. I propose that it is here, in this area of loss, that the traditional formal concerns and heightened historical reflexivity of reductive modes of abstraction might re-insert themselves as markers of the real over a decorative image making. This may be partially via an interest in materials, in processes, structure made visible, apprehension of the object in space, and attendant focus on the experience of that artwork over illusionistic or ‘picturing’ practices. I would argue that none of these strategies are despite content but entirely entwined with it - and this idea of linkage rather than oppositional binary between form and content is one of the vital streams of exploration for this project. That I look primarily to neither modernism, postmodernism, or other western theory or model as the prime motivator or catalyst for this study, provides myself and reader with problem and opportunity both:

Side on I go side on
I crawl to the wall I crawl to the wall
A lovely brick wall a lovely brick wall
I go side on
(The Clean, “Side On” 1982)
Thom Yorke is singing.
I’m in a taxi rushing through downtown Shanghai on a rainy Sunday night. It’s an endless run of on-ramps, off-ramps. There’s nothing but traffic in every direction, some at ninety degrees to my own. Lives flash by. Lights too. A stream of halogen and neon at street level, and from the towers that crowd out the night sky; casting it purple, green, orange, dirty pink. How Radiohead has made it into a Shanghai cab I’m not sure, but I’m going to enjoy it while it lasts. I’ve been in an original old Shanghai market where I ate an original American hamburger and cheesecake. Later I will eat glass noodles outside my hotel. Things have a way of balancing out. The speed of the taxi is exhilarating. I enter the flow.

This was never going to be a project about gardens. Abstract painting and Chinese gardens are not the same. I understand certain things about western abstraction. Sitting here writing this introduction as I complete my conclusion, I now know a little about Chinese gardens. This much I know. What I know or think I know is that finding out more about Chinese gardens has provided, and will continue to provide, some new ways to understand and create abstract paintings. How this happened, or is going to happen, will be clarified as things progress.

I reached this place with no particular interest in Chinese arts or philosophies. Back in the grey mist of 2008 a television show introduced me to the strange world of Taihu rocks, which along with architecture, water and plantings form a cornerstone of the gardens. The celebration of these rocks in Chinese aesthetics as somewhere between abstraction and representation, between nature and artifice, and yet beholden to neither, suggested a path through some entrenched binary thinking neither modernism nor postmodernism suitably avoided. The next summer on holiday in my home city of Dunedin I visited the then new Lan Yuan or Garden of Enlightenment. Part sister-city project with Shanghai, part recognition of Dunedin’s Chinese community this ‘authentic’ garden was constructed entirely by Shanghainese craftsmen using imported materials. As such it immediately signaled questions around authenticity and cultural exchange. How do we maintain ‘authenticity’? What exactly is it? I suspect it is something that offers more than a market exchange, or a stylistic trope for the times. More
immediately, wandering its strange paths something also felt oddly familiar and painterly – at least by my own definition coming as it does out of reductive abstraction.

As with abstraction, the historically located Chinese garden proves to be something of a contested site. In a parallel to certain writings on minimalism,* Craig Clunas in *Fruitful Sites* questions the very existence of his field of enquiry, ‘the Chinese garden’ (1996, 9). Even yuan, the Chinese word for garden, has multiple meanings referring to “open-air spaces as well as space under cover” and avoids European understandings as “external spaces adjacent to houses” (Fung 1998, 211). Rather than a fixed entity offering up a stable template for aesthetic issues, this ‘garden’ shifts, mutates and adapts through changing socio-economic conditions much as any other cultural form (including western abstraction). As a result gardens, rather than being presented as artifact, are constituted as a discursive formation placed within proximity of other discourses (Clunas 1996, 9). It is in the world(s) of such living formations that this research dwells as a way of opening out readings of Chinese gardens and reductive abstraction(s) both.

Christopher Crouch has observed, “…traditional cultural practices have the potential to allow an intellectual and emotional opposition to the emptiness of industrialised cultural production in the same way that was offered by the avant-garde at the turn of the twentieth century” (2010, 15). With this in mind, there is a central question here:

*In what ways can western models of reductive abstract painting be (re)invigorated with reference to the ancient nonwestern, non-painting artistic tradition of Chinese private gardens?*

This question offers multiple threads. One is the value of ‘history’ as a multi-directional tool travelling with us rather than operating as a fixed archaeological timeline. Another is the value of cross-disciplinary practice. Can this be achieved without a loss to the original practice – with all the attendant arguments around Greenbergian modernism’s insistence on medium specificity? What is a medium? In this day, thanks to the last century of experimentation in the arts it is fair to say that ‘medium’ includes a vast array

*See David Batchelor *Minimalism*, 1997*
of materials, processes, technologies, and conceptions that somehow still hold in place ‘as painting’, not despite digressions from the traditional but because of them. It may well be in painting’s ability to move out from itself that it has been able to return enriched, surviving what Daniel Birnbaum calls a “zone of contagion” (2002,158).

Additionally, is it possible to look to the Chinese garden, a specifically Chinese source, as appropriate territory for a Western artist to engage with? How might the risk of cultural tourism be avoided? In an idiosyncratic journey through literature, artworks, and practice(s) these are guiding thoughts.

Does a close reading of the role of ‘the authentic’ in the Chinese garden offer a set of tools for addressing questions of authenticity in contemporary abstraction?

Most importantly, for those who might follow this research, what strategies and structural devices might be revealed to generate an experiential and content enriched engagement with the practices of reductive abstract painting?

The narrow paths should be long and winding; the lofty peaks should be glorious and venerable. The magnificent scenery on either side, the mountains and forests a hand’s breadth away – their subtle attraction all springs from one man’s imagination, and their elegance derives from a mere heap of earth. (Ji Cheng 1635, 106)

With the twin discourses of reductive abstraction and Chinese gardens to become clearer in the chapters to follow, some early definitions might also prove helpful.

The Ancient Chinese Garden

People say I am in the city, but I suspect that I am among thousands of mountains. (Monk Tianru, 14th century. In Johnston 1991, 106)

While touching on the Imperial gardens at times, this research primarily concerns itself with the smaller private or ‘literati’ gardens common to Southern China through the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Exemplified by gardens like Suzhou’s Wangshi Yuan and Zhuozheng Yuan, such gardens were mostly designed by their owners who were, typically, scholar officials or aristocratic members of the literati class (Stuart 1990a, 162).
The difficulty in a neat summation of Chinese gardens has already been intimated, and the key physical elements of water, rocks, buildings, and plantings listed. To this we might add the structural devices of walls, screens and pathways which enclose, configure and ultimately open out these relatively limited (typically urban) spaces, whereby the full experience becomes available in walking through it and taking up a series of framed views section by section (167).

Physically and conceptually the Chinese garden tradition displays an entwined relationship with painting. The Song Dynasty painter Guo Xi said in depicting scenery an artist should do so as if they were among the mountains and rivers themselves, with this state of ‘touring’ taken into garden design (Hu 1991, 27). Designed without any unifying scale, the viewer becomes an engaged participant negotiating the garden “along an expanding and contracting continuum” whereby a rock becomes a mountain, a pond a vast lake (Stuart 1990, 36). Daoist philosophies of harmony with nature become the guiding principles of the garden culture, releasing the creative imagination from the strictures of Confucian control systems easily identified in the regulated building of homes (Keswick 2003, 23).
As proof of the garden as imaginative release as well as physical realm, by the time of the Ming, to write about or paint a garden could be accorded an equivalence to creating and living in an actual garden (Stuart 1990a, 164). It would seem then that an easy oscillation between the material and imaginative worlds occurs quite naturally. The oscillation of opposites in fact, exemplified in that of the large and the small, proves a defining feature of the gardens and contributes greatly to the path my work will follow.

An extended passage from Johnston further captures the complexities of the garden conception with the natural relationship between form and content displayed:

In terms of design... the Chinese scholar garden represented the total expression of a scholar’s experience in painting, calligraphy, poetry, philosophy, botany and the absorbed knowledge of feng-shui. Moreover, this expression was translated into three dimensions, built in hard materials and, because nature is always changing, was never quite finished. The enclosed garden thus satisfied philosophical ideas and ideals, representing in physical form the concepts of Chinese pictorial art and carrying these into reality by means of exquisite craftsmanship. (73)

Readers might also take into account my own use of the Chinese garden complex as a conceptual space in which I seek to frame this greater body of work – both studio practice and the written. As such it provides a kind of alternative field for the acts of seeing, thinking, and making. I may occasionally slip into a capitalized or italicised Chinese Garden to further signal it as this more idiosyncratic space. After all, for Stuart, Ming gardens were essentially an extension of the owner’s ego (1990a, 167). A more complete discussion of garden types takes place in the ‘Garden Histories’ section of this paper, and the picture of gardens will be constructed for the reader in time alongside the ‘picture’ of reductive abstraction. It may be that this very quality of the elusive is also what keeps the garden ‘open’ as a device, such that the generative possibilities for this study remain similarly open.

At the end, the visitor will have no more idea of the plan of the garden than he did when he started, he will feel that there are innumerable parts he never had time to explore. (Keswick 2003, 37).
Reductive Abstract Painting

...abstraction has the best chance of any pictorial attitude to be inclusive about the expanding sum of our culture’s knowledge. It is flexible and expansive. It has no need to be exclusive, even perhaps of representationalism itself. (Frank Stella 1986, 164)

Within the broad field of abstract painting, ‘reductive abstraction’ is used here to refer to predominantly non-representational modes of art making which have often been linked to the more easily historically determined non-objective, geometric, concrete, minimal or formal canons. This is not to say that each of these ‘canons’ doesn’t inform the work. On the contrary, all of these and many besides go into the reductive site, resulting in a conceptual complexity belied by its reduced forms. This “progressive aesthetics of formal clarity” runs throughout and alongside the evolution of abstraction (Spector 2004,16). Within this history one can look to the utopian and spiritual impulse of a Malevich, a Mondrian, or the materialism associated with Rodchenko’s constructivism and much of minimalism. Indeed one may look for something of each impulse within the same works. A recognition that such binaries are not fixed informs much of what occurs in the writing and projects to follow. Painting itself forms an ever-expanding regime. From the time Stella brought his shaped canvasses into play, with Judd and the artists associated with minimalism reworking painting’s formal issues through the object, the reductive has proven itself an ideal site of experimentation. Today, in part due to the practices of minimalism, post-minimalism and conceptual art, plus the breaking apart of mediums within strands of the postmodern, there is to quote Daniel Birnbaum a whole field of painting which moves beyond the “strictly circumscribed zone of expression” that is traditional painting. Instead, ‘painters’ work through genres including photography, video, sculpture, printmaking and installation (158).

The paradox of ‘reductive’ and ‘expanded’ operating together is not lost, and as with many other polarities may find reconciliation in concepts associated with the Chinese garden.

>>>>>>>

This project consists of five chapters presented in three volumes. Custom would suggest reading in a lineal fashion but this is not essential. The writing is intended to reflect the peripatetic nature of both practice and the garden experience.
Chapter 1 is composed of two sections with this introduction setting up the twin fields of my enquiry, posing primary and subsidiary research questions. The following section, *Thinking Paths and Finding Frames* suggests a framework for this research utilizing the Chinese garden walkway in combination with methodological thinking drawn from constructive design research. In Chapter 2, I survey some of the existing Western discourses available to abstract painting in the wake of an identified lack provided by the ‘postmodern’, and also note some touchstone artists for my own practice (including Stella and Ryman). A series of sections or essays follow, with the first addressing the cross-disciplinary and ultimately cross-cultural nature of this project. Thoughts around correlative thinking, oscillating opposites, and the game are introduced, as are Daoism and Confucianism amongst other underlying patterns. The theoretical is then placed within the historical as I tour through garden histories from the early hunting grounds and Imperial parks of the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) through to the Ming (1368 – 1644) and Qing (1644 – 1911), where the growth of a wealthy class alongside the literati creates gardens of intense creativity entwined with painting, poetry and calligraphy. In the next section I return to the West in *History Reduced*, this time trying to find a path through the entrenched binaries of modernism and postmodernism, form and content. Clement Greenberg, Frederic Jameson, Yve-Alain Bois, Rosalind Krauss, and Hal Foster provide positions for (re)evaluation in the light of a complex model of reductive abstraction. A further reading of minimalism and related works takes place searching out some overlooked lineages.

Chapter 3, *INDEX*, draws on multiple sources to create a catalogue of garden devices and effects. Centrally located as Volume 2 this book is intended as a device in its own right, a kind of lens for cross-referencing of Volumes 1 and 3. It may be referenced before, during, or after these other volumes. Within its pages there are only limited references to Western abstraction, and many of the entries touch only tangentially upon painterly concerns. Rather than presenting a synthesis, for the most part, its role is to encourage the interactivity of the garden experience, and place the reader in a constructive position.

This constructive position feeds into and mirrors that increasingly sought for the viewer in the five projects documented in Volume 3’s Chapter 4. The projects reflect the development, testing, and resolution of ideas around the Chinese garden as a conceptual and structural model for reductive abstraction. Utilising traditional gallery
and non-gallery spaces there is a progression through the initial testing of garden devices in the Formwork project of 2011, through to the architecturally led Mod Lang (2012) and Here & There/Now & Then (2011-2013).

In each case the documentation is interwoven with the reading and writing that has informed and continues to inform practice. This interlacing of words and things is essential to the greater project, and finds a special place through the writing of Xin Wu (2012). Combined with understandings of the garden as a place beyond space-time assumptions via Andong Lu (2011), there is an emergent ‘realm’ within which the practice-led projects of Concentrated Abstraction (2012) and 50 Variations (2013) are constructed as multi-dimensional, immersive spaces. From Hui Zou (2011) a definition of jing as a unity of mind and scene, or “a view that appears bright, bounded, emotionally connected, and poetical to the mind” (60), adds further meaning and devices to the work.

These projects operate as diverse thesis. Poly-vocal, open in form; painting, object, digital, video, and installation practices combine with ideas discovered through the gardens in formulating a reductive abstract practice beyond pastiche, simulation, and decoration. Such thoughts are continued in the Conclusion where I summarise selected paths through the Chinese gardens, what this has meant for my own practice, and what the use of conceptions such as that of ‘realm’ might offer the wider field of reductive abstract painting.

If anything, this dissertation is to be read through its images first. As a concrete medium, photography takes a central role. Capable on the one hand of presenting the world ‘as it is’, in addition to functioning as unmediated field data and traditional documentation, it is to be considered in its compositional details and the pairings of different photos as testing, arguments made, sometimes diagrammatic, sometimes poetic. Oscillations between Eastern and Western material, between artworks and their making, between nature and construction, order and disorder, representation and experience, the autobiographical and the generalized, the large and the small, image and text are just some of the conscious choices made. Within the photos, as with the artworks, multiple thesis are intended – all the time bound by a reductive aesthetic focused on materials, process, clarity of form, colour, light, surface flatness, series
et al. At its most extreme, seen within the photo grids of INDEX, these photographic ‘constructions’ are intended to open up the Chinese garden and reductive abstract models to the full range of content and experience (including the autobiographical) as one vast inter-textual system.

Something similar occurs in the frequent use of quotations, drawing as they do on disparate sources and disciplines beyond those of the visual arts or Chinese gardens they reflect an increasing hybridity of practice within contemporary painting. Knowledge from other disciplines, such as architecture, extends new lines of communication and creative thinking. Here, contemporary music also forms a kind of unseen third to the gardens and abstraction; a contemporary poetic bringing with it an interlacing of word and abstract form deeply embedded in our popular culture. Yet in each case a return to the interests of reductive abstraction may be traced.

Regarding translations of garden names, I tend to switch between the original Chinese and the English translation. Sometimes a matter of brevity or style, more often it is a conscious switching that signals an ongoing navigation between the twin fields. I hope to drag the reader into this position I find myself in. So for example, Wangshi Yuan will also appear as Master of the Nets, Zhuozheng Yuan as Garden of the Humble Administrator. At times, depending on sources used, there will be further adjustments recognizing a richness of translations inevitable with Chinese language. Thus the Garden of the Humble Administrator could also become the ‘Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician’, the ‘Artless Official’, or ‘Awkward Administration’. As will become clear, naming plays an essential role in the gardens.

I am no Sinologue, but out of respect to difference, I have travelled deeper down the garden path than ever envisaged.

…debates that surround visual culture are not purely aesthetic ones. An understanding of the ideological issues surrounding the appearance of things and the social circumstances that result in the making of traditional artefacts are as important as how a traditional object may look. (Crouch, 3)
Without falling back on the spiritual/symbolic aspects of the gardens and Chinese artistic culture, sometimes I find myself acknowledging those aspects which might play an essential role on the Chinese side. The spiritual and symbolic are often attached to very specific practical roles. A zigzag bridge may well be designed to trip up demons but equally provides an expanded sense of space compared to the straight line. The literary theorist Andrew Plaks suggests of Chinese literary thinkers in relation to the gardens, “the complementary relation between illusion and truth, though theoretically a two-way street, usually has a logical direction” (1990, 8).

It is in the zigzag path rather than the straight line, that this studio research and dissertation will best present its own logic.

The urban garden, whether the tiniest courtyard or the most complex pattern of spaces, was not only an architectural contrivance, it was also a state of mind, a private world to be shaped as its owner and society inclined. And although ideas which could not survive in the open thrived in its recesses, gardens always provided a window to the greater world outside. (Johnston, 167)
Lan Yuan, Dunedin; Studio, Melbourne 2011
Thinking Paths and Finding Frames.

In the case of a single long and winding covered walkway, when you begin to set up the pillars you should pay attention to the magical effects of changes in viewpoint. (Ji Cheng 1635, 64-65)

Typically…the most important forms of knowledge are the frameworks researchers build to explicate their designs. (Koskinen et al 2010, 168)

But if you’re listening without earphones you won’t get the effect. Each time around there’s more harmonics that are added on bass and on treble, and I went as far as you can go without making the needle hop on the record, which is why I kept it at that time. I made it 16:01 to try to get the fact across that I was trying to be as accurate as possible with the stupid thing. (Lou Reed discussing “Metal Machine Music”, 1975. In Bangs 1987, 189)

This central problem of how to address and redress reductive abstraction as a progressive visual language is, I believe in part, one of framing. That I choose to do so via a conversation with the thinking of the ancient Chinese gardens forms the mainstay of this dissertation and the practice-led projects driving it.

With this in mind I have selected the lang, or covered walkway, of the Chinese garden as the structural model for this dissertation. With its carefully framed views, its zigzag

Yu Yuan, Shanghai 2012

Studio, Melbourne 2011
into gentle curve and flow, its rise and fall, it offers multiplicity – yet as the backbone of any garden also provides structure for a peripatetic body. If the research path I take presents itself as a series of sometimes disparate framed views through Western and then Chinese thought, each is intended to carry an idea in itself, a history, or a physical project which together may be navigated to form a connected experience in the final reading.

To this structural and sometimes poetic model I add that of the emergent field of constructive design research as outlined in Koskinen et al’s *Design research through Practice. From the Lab, Field, and Showroom* (2011). Identified through design practice it questions the use of empirical frameworks for creative design and by implication art making (which it constantly references as a source model). Instead, focus is (re)placed on the object and trajectories of making as generators of knowledge:

> When researchers actually construct something, they find problems and discover things that would otherwise go unnoticed. These observations unleash wisdom, countering a typical academic tendency to value thinking and discourse over doing. (2)

However, rather than rejecting theoretical and methodological contributions, construction is given centre place as key (but not only) means in knowledge construction (5). Such thinking dovetails neatly with the haptic traditions of non-objective, concrete, and minimal traditions (which I contain as ‘reductive’) where the materiality of the abstract artwork and programmatic approaches are celebrated as the ‘real’ over art as window or unfiltered intuition. (The constructive approach also mirrors a well-documented turn towards making and materials we are seeing in much current art making generally. In doing so it is presenting a frame not ‘against’ theory and text but a mode of research appropriate to the discipline.)

On the question of design versus art research, as much as the two tend to different roles in society there are a great many areas of overlap allowing for interdisciplinary use of this approach. In my particular research it is particularly appropriate to be drawing on a design-based research model as there is an interdisciplinary and inter-cultural focus occurring in moving between Western abstract art making and the built as well as conceptual structures of the Chinese garden. There is also a clarity to the model that goes with the aesthetic clarity sought by reductive abstraction:
We are dealing with research that imagines and builds new things and describes and explains these constructions. (6)

At a time when the validity of abstraction and painting itself as a progressive form still suffers the hangover of 80s-90s postmodern critiques of Douglas Crimp* and others, it is not so surprising that an optimistic language might best be found elsewhere.

On the positive role of the arts, Koskinen et al suggest:

Designers trained in the arts are capable of capturing fleeting moments and structures that others find ephemeral, imaginative, and unstable for serious research (8).

In my own case it is in the strange arrangement I have constructed between reductive abstract painting and the Chinese gardens which itself promises a contribution to knowledge as a generative framework others might comfortably follow.

The use of visual pairings throughout this paper will work as both testing and demonstration of links being drawn or created in my twin fields. Clunas notes how the Ming used diagrams as argument rather than relegation to pure illustrative role (1997, 105). This thinking in turn both reflects and drives the individual studio projects, which are presented as a series of exhibitions. Making, writing, and reading are conflated into one peripatetic body moving through and experiencing the different framed views of the twisting lang.

The Prototype

It’s the most ridiculous structure I have ever made and that is why it is really good.
(Eva Hesse. In Nemser 1970, 7)

In the Constructive model ‘sandbox’ culture flags a research practice through making with materials at hand rather than one relying on a complex theoretical base (Koskinen et al, 25). Alongside this comes use of the prototype, which provides another way of thinking through art research and practice. If in design there is traditionally a focus on an outcome beyond the prototype, in painting the object is its own outcome. I suggest that a conscious use of the prototype terminology might further signal, or act as reminder that the art object or painting also has this possibility beyond itself, or a kind of generative ideal. If we hold artworks as prototypes then each remains a preliminary version and so is endlessly generative rather than a perfected ideal. The endgame is avoided. This becomes especially important in reductive abstract practice where there is frequently a heightened emphasis on the serial and sequential project within the artist’s oeuvre. In constructive design research there is recognition that the construction of prototypes also constructs knowledge. A prototype may, as well as product, refer to a system, a scenario or concept that ‘might’ be constructed (5-6).

It may be possible to think of Chinese gardens themselves as prototypes of worlds and/or studios. If the Imperial gardens were to be seen as microcosms of the world’s riches (Keswick 2003, 85), their endlessly changing nature on both structural/anthropological grounds (see Clunas 1996) and on perceptual/conceptual grounds (see Chen 2008) might also allow for thinking through each garden as prototype. There is something active over the passivity of the microcosm and any suggestion of utopias reached. Within the idea of the prototype lies a degree of risk in
the reduction of its function to a subsidiary of the needs of industry. As much as new paths, materials and means are suggested, others (such as the contemplative) may be closed down. But instead, the productive possibilities of the garden manage to embrace both the utilitarian (eg. places of shelter, artistic production, cultivation) and the poetic (as paintings to walk through). In doing so they are exemplary of art that maintains strong, practical social functionality, whilst its mutable form, its lack of the prescriptive, allows a progressive possibility going beyond the unrelenting materialism that was to mark out Russian Constructivism of the early twentieth century. There is no denying the gardens could fulfill the needs of the state, particularly those of the Imperial variety, but importantly they also posed a place beyond it, even when only an imaginary for those disgruntled with Imperial power and bureaucracy.

Ultimately this text itself may also be seen as a prototype, a speculative construction linked to the Chinese use of the imaginary garden:

The Non-existent Garden is the name the Snow-eating Gentleman in Reclusion, Liu Yuhua, has given to his garden. Non-existent means not to have any characteristics at all. What is it that does not exist yet seems to exist? Jin Gu, with its sumptuous splendor, Ping Quan, with its refined beauty…these were all the best gardens of their age…They have all returned to the non-existent. ...Yet if writing is used to prolong its transmission, then Non-having can become having. (Liu Shilong, 16th C. Quoted in Makeham 1998, 203)

The essay becomes the garden, eternally recreated in the reading (203).

*See Clunas Fruitful Sites 1996, 106-107 for a discussion of the garden as a site for acting out a series of social and economic refusals.
CHAPTER 2: THE FIELD

Entering a New World Pavilion (view west), Zhuozheng Yuan, Suzhou 2014
A Discourse. Abstraction will Eat itself.

In the textual turn of art in the 1970s, the field of aesthetic practice expanded, and the disciplinary limits of painting and sculpture broke down. In part this defetishized given forms of practice, yet new fetishisms soon replaced the old. (Foster 1996, 99)

In so many words and pictures, abstraction has been made to appear superficial, unaccommodating of various social concerns, or anachronistic in the postmodern world. (Rosenthal 1995, 9-10)

Old good ideas made new and shiny are now a dismaying precedent. (Donald Judd. In Codrington 2004, 49)

The complex challenges to the formal models of abstraction undertaken by pop, conceptual art, and to a lesser degree minimalist practices in the 1950s and 60s, took abstraction into new realms. Reductive abstraction within the postmodern is most often associated with the neo-geo or simulationist abstraction of Peter Halley, Sherrie Levine and others for whom abstraction acts as another form of representation.

With Sherrie Levine’s abstract paintings a link between appropriation and neo-geo is made explicit. In re-presenting the styles of Malevich, Stella, Ryman et al she evokes their formal rigor only to empty it out in its treatment as design and decoration (Foster 1996, 100). Ross Bleckner and Philip Taaffe take things further by conflating a kind of designer abstraction with an already critically derided op art. If one wanted to argue for the recovery of a marginalised visual language, Foster suggests instead they embrace its failure (100). The celebration of failure and disorder was an effective strategy for Dadaists early in the twentieth century. Here there appears to be a lack of concomitant social programme or connectedness to historical purpose beyond that of pastiche. This celebration of loss feeds neatly into an era of corporate dominated politics where critical languages, aesthetic or otherwise, might form roadblocks of unease. Or in Hal Foster’s words in Signs taken for Wonders, “…the logic of the art follows the given dynamic of the market/history system more than any new modus operandi” (1986, 111).

Yet there is also criticality at work here. It may be that Bleckner merely “lulls the viewer into imagining his intentions are those of op art”, the patterns within the works making references to AIDS (Rosenthal, 18-19). Halley too seeks social meaning in his use of
diagrammatics (19). These diagrams in combination with extreme artificial colour may evoke office floor plans, prison cells, and circuitry.

The problem becomes where this art so easily read as an art of cynicism towards the abstraction that went before, lends itself to the aforementioned emptying out, and the position whereby Nikas is talking of abstraction as a ‘found’ or readymade language. Where exactly does Levine’s abstraction take us once the original work of art loses all authority? The sense of a meaningful critique risks being replaced with a meaningless post-historical pluralism and a retreat into style. And in a parodic recycling of abstraction the question becomes whether there is any remaining critical impulse able to maintain difference, or does the celebration of failure simply contribute to a denial of art’s ability to take a critical position in society? Is it a case of auto-cannibalism? Even within the work of Halley or Bleckner, the seeming denial of the self-reflexive power of the object, of a formal structure’s ability to carry or generate content, lessens the language in the name of literal, text-driven narratives.
One quiet alternative discourse of the nineties came from a grouping of predominantly British artists working outside of the sensationalism of the YBAs, and apart from the then prevalent models of neo-geo and simulationist abstraction. Bryan Muller writing in *Artpress* in 1995, signaled the terms with an article titled “Real Art – A New Modernism: British Reflexive Painters in the Nineties”. With a focus on materials and direct viewer engagement, artists including Jason Martin and Ian Davenport were for Muller representative of a new modernism:

Rather than continuing the syntactical discourse of postmodernism, where an illusionistic referential content was deliberately posited and then deconstructed into its grammatical elements, these artists are interested in the physicality of art and are rejecting representation: of the art event, of art’s grammatical structure, of a style, of an image, and are determined that the viewer experiences the “real” thing. (52)

Each of the artists is known for working in series and using strategies such as repetition and minor shifts in material, process and structure to counter any reading taking their consciousness away from the act of looking as its own reward (52). Whether considering Davenport’s pours from the can, Martin’s canvas-sized brush drag as its own recording of procedure, or Jones’ working back into the layers of his own paintings, this work remains steadfastly non-illusionistic (53-55).

The rejection of illusion is the rejection of ‘picturing’ strategies, which reduce painting to a two-dimensional pictorial record. Instead the focus on the object in its entirety builds a more explicit, complex viewer interaction in which this viewer is involved in actively constructing their experience. While representing a way of thinking avoiding the
endgames of simulationist abstraction, the total rejection of referential possibilities may risk the closed circuit of some earlier models rather than a progression.

With their *Notes on Metamodernism* (2010), Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker suggest a discourse oscillating between modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony as the proper end to postmodernism (9). They call this *metamodernism* and see it most clearly expressed via a neoromantic tendency which they go on to locate in painting, film, architecture and wider geopolitical discourses (8). This engagement with multiple cultural zones, and an identifying of polar opposites as both-neither logic as pendulum (5,6) is in line with my research through the Chinese garden in finding an alternative to the perception of a fixed modern/postmodern binary. The following quotation also works in with some of the conceptions of the gardens unfolding in later sections:

Thus, if the modern suggests a temporal ordering, and the postmodern implies a spatial disordering, then the metamodern should be understood as a spacetime that is both neither ordered and disordered. (12)

Yet, if some of the logic is entirely prescient, the metamodern in favouring a more literary neo-romantic tendency as seen in the work of a painter like British artist Peter Doig has little to say on the construction of abstract painting. And rather than the structure of art making or its materials is more concerned with a “structure of feeling” (2). In this it fails to offer up the fully functioning structural and conceptual model I suspect might be identified in the Chinese gardens.

The relational aesthetics of Nicholas Bourriaud has provided a current generation of artists with another persuasive vision of artistic practice. This favours an art that abstracts the object out into the field of social relations:

The possibility of a *relational* art (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space), points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art. (2002, 14)

This attention to the relational is welcome but for the unease that builds around Bourriaud’s case. In his desire to present contemporary art as relational, and one
supposes anti-elitist, or what he refers to elsewhere as “the falsely aristocratic conception of the arrangement of works of art” (15), one gets the sense that the progressive artwork is consigned to gesture, and transitory states of momentary exchange – at best an “arena of exchange” (17). Further stating, “In observing contemporary artistic practices, we ought to talk of “formations” rather than “forms” “ (21).

In positioning inter-subjectivity and dialogue as the “quintessence of artistic practice” (22), and relegating the artist’s plastic choices and material encounters, we are left with the strategic conversations of the curator determined to create narratives through the plastics of their own medium – that of text.

Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics very quickly becomes its own formalism with the stuff of the artist, the power of materials, process, even meaning given over to the sphere of inter-human relations as if art best functions as one giant Facebook:

So the artist sets his sights more and more clearly on the relations that his work will create among his public, and on the invention of models of sociability. (23)

What we get is a late turn of the politics of ’68, a continual linking of art and the market which effectively disempowers the actual place of the producer-artist, a new attempt at a textual turn determined to reinstate the dematerialisations of one version of conceptual art over the possibilities of material practices.

I am not suggesting a lack of material-based reductive practices exist. I have already pointed to artists currently engaged, as well as a number of historical figures. Anna Temkin’s curated exhibition and accompanying catalogue, Colour Chart: Reinventing Color, 1950 to Today (2008) specifically traces a change of artistic sensibility through the adoption of readymade color running from Duchamp through to the present. Color has become less of nature and more of culture (6). And in this exposition there is an overwhelming identification of artists of reductive intent.
With *The Painting Factory: Abstraction after Warhol* (2012), Jeffrey Deitch explores how the embrace of popular culture and current technologies has greatly expanded the abstract tradition (5). Wade Guyton and Christopher Wool are just two of the artists included for their adoption of alternative technologies (Epson printer canvas monochromes; computer mediated and silkscreened giant blotches or stains respectively). As with *Color Chart*, there is an alternative lens provided through which to view the development of contemporary (and historical) abstraction.

In “Painting Spaces” (2010), Anne Ring Petersen describes a kind of installational painting combining the spatial, physical, and non-physical in ways not dissimilar from those I am envisaging. Ring Petersen sees the experimental energies since the mid-nineties as going into an exploration of painting’s spatiality not via illusionism, but through “relations to objects, space, place, and the ‘everyday’, and in doing so they are expanding ‘painting’ physically as well as conceptually” (126). She uses the example of Peter Bonde who sites his work in a space between easel painting and installation art.
allowing for spatial reading as an environment of cross references, while also offering the eccentrically installed paintings to be contemplated as individual works (126, 128). In such ways “the installational display of paintings turns painting into something more complex, intertextual, contradictory…more spatial…” (128).


Artists as diverse as Franz Ackermann, Julian Opie, Katharina Grosse, and Jessica Stockholder are further cited as dealing with the idea of “paintings to walk into” (131), undoubtedly a place sought by Chinese painters and garden artists. Writing from a similar space, Anne Ellegood in “Formalism Redefined” identifies a turn towards artworks made up of constellations of objects, or forms incomplete on their own, with ‘meaning’ to come from the connections between their many parts (2013, 91). Here ‘opticality’ is replaced by artist as object maker, with a heightened attention to materials and techniques foregrounding process such that the content comes from imagining the quotidian moments of their making (91-92).

Such discourses demonstrate a variety of critical approaches are yet available to abstract painting. However, none of those surveyed offer the complete range of conceptual and structural devices, the continuum between theory and practice, for generating an energized reductive abstraction like that the Chinese garden promises.
Locating my Project.

This is a song from under the floorboards
This is a song from where the wall is cracked
(Magazine, “A Song from under the Floorboards” 1980)

As far as I can ascertain there is no ‘group’ of artists looking at my specific field. There is much writing on western abstraction and a surprisingly large amount on Chinese gardens and their various manifestations in aesthetic and social realms. Of those dealing with Chinese gardens and art forms, the materialist histories of Craig Clunas provide a constant reminder of diversity and a trajectory of the conception, reception and use of art in Chinese culture. In a very practical way the investigations of Gregory Missingham and Alex Selenitsch (2002) look at applications of the garden’s possibilities for architecture in manners not always removed from my own. I have and will bring those relevant to my practice into this conversation. The American abstract painter Brice Marden has engaged with Chinese gardens and abstract painting for a number of years and I will consider his particular approach. Other artists (including Marden) and writers have engaged with Zen methodologies and aesthetics. Knezic (2008) has found parallels between Japanese gardens and postminimalist art. And there are those, who I work at constantly distancing myself from, who would appropriate a totalizing Eastern ‘aesthetic’. These are not my concerns.

Here, instead, I identify some individuals who offer an approach or perceived shared interest feeding into my thinking and making. Rather than those contemporary artists taking an obviously hybrid approach to abstract painting I prefer to signal a more established generation who have consistently worked through painting’s possibilities, rather than arriving at the medium at multiple steps removed, or as ‘received’ aesthetic. For each, abstract painting appears to have remained a tool of positive construction free of parody or endgame abstraction. Their works are complexly layered even in their use of reductive forms.

But, after all, the aim of art is to create space – space that is not compromised by decoration or illustration, space in which the subjects of painting can live. (Stella 1986, 5)
From an articulation of the flat space of a high formalist position seen in the black paintings and shaped works of the late 1950s and 60s, Frank Stella opened up his reductive framework to the deep space of Baroque painting with the brightly painted organic/geometrics of his three dimensional relief works like *Queequeg in his Coffin* 1989. Here was the opportunity for a dramatic painted space, rooted in the material and able to reach beyond the drama of illusionism:

In a sense abstraction gains its freedom, its unfettered expandability, its own working space by eluding the spatial dictates of the real and the ideal image. Clearly, abstraction today works to make its own space. (167)
Known for his white paintings, Robert Ryman paints in series without falling into the trap of serial production. Instead via a reduction to the conditions and making of each painting, each in turn asks what a painting is (Hudson 2009, 20). As such the realm of painting is proved infinitely expandable:

…Ryman's painting crucially derives from a series of encounters - formal, material, institutional, and social - through which actions unfold out of and respond to a discrete set of circumstances, options, and concerns that are different for every painting. Results that are achieved in the practice of painting are primary. For Ryman, the painted sign, the support on which it is put down, the edge that rims it and connects it to the wall, and the wall that finally completes the circuit form the empirical relay that justifies the painting's existence and (potentially) generates it as a painting. (21)

These notions of encounter and the full circuit drawn between object and wall (down to the manner of fixture) might attach themselves to developing conceptions of an inclusive space created in Chinese gardens to be discussed later in this writing. By some readings, one of the important encounters in Ryman’s visually reductive works is with music. Vincent Colaizzi suggests Ryman’s methodology is conditioned through musical performance as much as painting, with his trademark white a foregrounding of, “the substantive and performative qualities of painting, in which each stroke is a record of its application” (2007, 2). And rather than a ground for an abstract image, a Ryman painting is to be considered a three dimensional object, “responsive to changes in lighting and vantage point, reminding the viewer of the continuously unfolding present of his or her perceptions” (3). Visually reductive, the operations of making revealed by the work become a means for returning complexity to the viewing experience.
For Brice Marden, coming out of a modernist inflected engagement with the monochrome in the 1960s, there is a resistance to the notion of reductive form equaling an absence of content. A painting like *Nebraska* 1966 functioned as an object to be read on its own (modernist) terms. At the same time allusive titles, in combination with heavily layered wax surfaces, displayed effects of light and gesture signaling other possible content. In the 1980s Marden turned increasingly to Chinese calligraphy using its patterns of visual organization as a way of capturing the body’s movement within the grid set by the calligrapher (Liu 2007, 220).

Since 1995 Marden has also been a visitor to the gardens of Suzhou and, impressed by the influence of Chinese scholars on the city’s history, moved further into models of cross-cultural painting (225). By 2000 this was resulting in the large scale, multi-panelled *The Propitious Garden of Plane Image* series of 2000-2006. With each iteration containing six panels and reaching 24 feet in length, there was a conscious use of the Chinese handscroll format with each painting also intended as a systematic working through of spectral colour progressions (Richardson 2006, 101). To these formal interests Marden brings the figural presence of images of rocks as calligraphic line which in its overlaying also reads as a kind of ‘drawn’ Pollock. Importantly Marden also wants these paintings to read as “undifferentiated plane” (103), returning his concerns to those of surface and flatness most often associated with modernist painting.

Marden’s interest in fusing the materiality and spirituality of Chinese and Western cultures to create a more inclusive version of modernism (Liu, 228) offers alignments with my own project. And yet the focus placed on the spiritual and Marden’s greater adherence to wall-based models of abstraction, remaining predominantly within
traditional ‘painterly’ mediums, also separates our studies. Invariably too, there are different ways of working through the devices, with no sense of Marden considering the role of the garden as a complete model in and of itself.

The importance of Stella, Ryman, and Marden for this study is in offering a critical abstraction that works through a common history as well as the specifics of its own materials and processes. In such ways it articulates the logic of the object ‘as object’, as well as the act of viewing in a longer continuum. That is, the paintings are able to hold onto a complex relationship to our present. These artists treat abstraction and painting as a generative realm with complex, multi-directional interplays of logic and meaning.

Ralph Hotere, *Godwit/ Kuaka* 1977

From New Zealand come two very different models of abstraction representing localized approaches to formal abstract painting languages, and something more personal in terms of my own biography. From within an essentially formal model of abstract painting, Ralph Hotere (1931-2013) developed an artistic identity in New Zealand through his use of black relatable through Goya, Reinhardt and Rothko, while recognising the metaphysical black of (his own) Maori tribal histories (Baker 2008, 128). The major painting *Godwit/Kuaka* 1977 in its use of geometry clearly aligns with modernist abstraction – as does the reflective black ground. But there is some serious multi-tracking going on here. Sited in an airport, this reflective ground captures the moving human traffic even as it may also be read through the Maori principle of
darkness (Te Kore) “from which all things emerge and recede” (O’Sullivan 2008, 315). This is further supported in the experience of walking the painting’s length with the spectral lines taking the viewer from light into darkness and out again (Baker, 124-125). The central panel of text/poetry also functions formally in punctuating the composition even as its narrative speaks of a welcoming of a native bird and a world cyclical rather than linear (124, 127). In this we witness the coming together of ancient, traditional, and modern fields in an experiential space enabled by abstract painting.

Don Driver, *Relief with Pleats* 1969
Don Driver, *Relief No. 11* 1971-72

Don Driver, *Paddling Pool* 1975

This mixing of materials and associations is developed by another New Zealand artist, Don Driver (1930-2011). Out of what has been described as “a truly eccentric spectrum of abstract and semi-abstract modes” the more purist end is seen in Driver’s relief works of the early 1970s (Smith 1999, 32). Yet even here the horizontal stripes of a work like *Relief No. II* (1971-72) are deliberately destabilized through open-ended composition, the imbalances of its shallow relief sections, and the sheen of aluminium and lacquer panels. From 1969, *Relief with Pleats* presages these open qualities and in
its use of found fabrics highlights the pop qualities of Driver’s abstraction, with the local and the specific driven home in the printed brand name on one of the cloth panels. This use of found text reappears throughout Driver’s art, taking on a central role in the assemblage of *Paddling Pool* 1975 where the ‘Polythene’ text might be read as a concrete statement of the object’s own making, a formal compositional device, and a critique-come-celebration of a distinctly kiwi pastoral. The inclusion of vernacular elements might also be read as a serious intent to deliver an abstraction, like that of Hotere (McCahon and Walters) of the wider world, but also ‘this’ world. A play between the large and the small occurs offering its own alignments with the use of those polarities to be found in Chinese gardens.

As elsewhere, all of these artists provide something more than illustration in offering approaches, consciously or not, which have and will likely feed through my acts of writing and making.

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Lan Yuan, Dunedin 2011; Melbourne studio 2011; Wangshi Yuan, Suzhou 2012
ECNU studio, Shanghai 2012;
Crossing the Threshold.

The door is very ordinary. Once inside, the visitor finds himself in a simple white corridor open to the sky, twenty feet or so in length, with a blank wall at the far end. It is just like the alleyway outside, only painted white and more elegant in its proportions. Serving as a kind of decompression chamber, this passageway separates the noises of the city outside from the enclosed world of the garden towards which the visitor now progresses. (Keswick 2003, 26)

Apart from its unfamiliarity, one of the initial attractions to the Chinese garden was a paradoxical familiarity, which I figured as a relationship to the fractured viewpoints of cubism. This is unsurprising given the intended link between the arts of painting and gardens by their designers, and Chinese painters’ use of multiple viewpoints on one plane (Johnston 1991, 51). Whilst still valid, experience and research have suggested the connection may limit rather than expand readings. This is an early reminder of the easy conflation of ideas between cultures at first glance that requires I maintain difference, even as I seek similarities. The fact remains, cubism was still very much reliant on a fixed central observer beholden to the same Cartesian perspective it sought to challenge. The Chinese garden and the Chinese conception of painted space is one positioning an active viewer already ‘in’ the work looking out (Hall & Ames 1998, 184).

Walk into a garden and you are immediately faced with choices in direction and viewpoints. There is an immediate paradox in that intense subjectivity of experience is made possible by a complex interplay of carefully placed structures and sequences. Pathways continually zigzag, sometimes as if to turn against their directional purpose. Walls don’t simply enclose but fold to suddenly reveal a grand vista, a cul-de-sac, or themselves are cut through to frame a borrowed view. Long covered walkways split in two, revealing hidden places. Intricate carved screens overlay geometry on views of the central lake and ‘mountains’ formed by strangely figured rocks. The lake, or pond, may appear central, disappear for a short sequence of spaces and reappear in ways that make its source uncertain. Mirrors are frequently located at the end of walkways to open out a space even as they double it back on the participant in that space. The lake itself is the largest mirror of all, a grey-green void, or screen of moving and still images both.
Ou Yuan; Zhuozheng Yuan, Suzhou 2014
Crossing Disciplines.

The painter was in a former life the judge of horses Chiu Fang-kao, thus he also understands painting. (Wu Chen 14th century. Quoted in Siren 1936, 111)

An obscure guitar pedal was for him another kind of poem.

(Patti Smith 2013. *Postscript* Lou Reed)

By default I find myself in a cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural area of practice. There is a pathway to be navigated. This includes an attempt at grappling with some Chinese patterns of thought or ‘key concepts’, as well as the historical and aesthetic outcomes of gardens as site. By its nature, my reading has contributed to the growing understanding of inseparability. But in a specifically east/west comparative context, along with the studies of Chinese visual cultures by Clunas, David Hall and Roger Ames have proven essential.

Within Western culture an objectivist bias exists alongside a complex set of alternatives, yet the existing bias always pushes us firstly towards empirical truths. (I can’t help but think here of the continuing public acceptance of representational over abstract art.) This, suggest Hall and Ames in *Anticipating China* (1995), is a result of our history and particularly in its post Enlightenment phase (2). If causal thinking dominates the classical west then correlative thinking is dominant in classical Chinese thought (xvii - xviii). This kind of thinking prioritises change or process over rest and
permanence, with order determined through correlative procedures instead of one ultimate agency, ie. God (xvii).

Whilst encouraging interdisciplinary (re)readings of Ji Cheng’s classic Ming garden text Yuan ye, Stanislaus Fung also warns of the risks in conflating different disciplinary perspectives over adherence to the ‘ways of knowing’ specific to a discipline (1998, 216). This serves as a helpful reminder in maintaining focus in a painting practice and the various formal/conceptual markers an artist might set up over the years. In my own case these include focus on the painting as object in architectural space, an idiosyncratic palette’s specific ‘meanings’, use of motifs travelling between pop and non-objective histories, and the combinations of these approaches. A focus on the object does not have to be seen as a formalizing or conservative move but a recognition, as with Bois on abstraction, that content and form remain inseparable. In actually investigating the object, its processes and materials, rather than via a purely theoretical model there is more chance that I can avoid essentialising Chinese experience (or abstraction for that matter). This is not an appeal to some Eastern ‘other’ but to practical devices and thought systems brought into focus primarily via a study of ancient Chinese gardens as a model that itself undergoes change.

From Hall and Ames:

An immediate consequence of surrendering the transcendental pretense is that ambitious, globalizing assertions which essentialize cultural experience and interpretation must give way to more modest and localized understandings. Theoretical structures must ultimately be replaced by more tentative and provisional narratives. Our project is not at all to tell it like it is; we merely wish to present a narrative which is interesting enough and plausible enough to engage those inclined to join the conversation. (1995, xix-xx)

In The cosmological setting of Chinese gardens (1998), Hall and Ames offer four further interpretive constructs to form a suitable vocabulary. These are ‘enclosure, environs, space/time, pattern/perspective’ (175). Briefly, ‘enclosure’ in the west tends to a finite boundedness while for the Chinese, man (the Emperor) is central and boundaries are permeable (178). ‘Environs’ refers to the natural cosmology of the Chinese that assumes a continuity between nature and culture, or nature and artifice.
‘Space and time’ are separated in a western heritage by our tendency to see things in the world as formally fixed and thus bounded, whereas the Chinese cosmology allows for ceaseless transformation such that ‘things’ become events within a temporal flow (181). Finally, ‘pattern and perspective’ demands a perspective emanating out from the viewer (‘in’ the centre of the painting or ‘in’ the garden) rather than a western objective one, with any resulting sense of pattern or order mutually implicated (184).

Oscillating opposites
Suggested in the above but in need of definition as a key concept is the idea of oscillating polar opposites. In discussing Andrew Plaks’ contention that the garden is attempting a full representation of the world even as it challenges a literal minded grasp of this knowledge, Charles Jencks writes:

The way in which the garden resolves this insoluble dilemma is twofold: it tries to incorporate a bit of every experience within a tight space; and it restlessly oscillates between polar opposites, the yin and yang, the solid and void, or what Plaks has shown to be another archetypal pattern, the five elements – meaning in general ‘many’. In short the garden symbolizes the universe through its formal devices. This partially explains what is so characteristically strange to us about the Chinese garden: its cramming of a density of meanings into a very small space, its tight packing, and its restless changing aspect. So ceaseless is the alternation in moods and vistas that they cannot be totally accounted for in aesthetic terms. (2003, 213)

Western thinking is often characterized in the turn to a kind of binary logic of 1 and 0. One is by implication material presence, its other being absence. Some Eastern
conceptions allow for a continuum. Jasper Johns’ *Numbers 0 through 9* of 1961 provides one clear artistic manifestation of this way of thinking. Via its multi-directional iconography and layered encaustic process, each brush mark maintains its presence in a unified surface.

*Jasper Johns Numbers 0 through 9* 1961

In *The Confucian role of names in traditional Chinese gardens* (1998), John Makeham chooses the notion of play as an appropriate model for interpreting Chinese gardens (187). I am immediately drawn to this having found myself frequently referring to the practice and the histories of abstraction as ‘the game’ in my own writing. Makeham’s words easily transport themselves to the language of painting:

> In simple terms, this model is premised on the view that just as a chess-board and chess-pieces do not constitute a chess game, nor a pack of cards a card game, so too a collection of rocks, buildings, ponds and vegetation, does not constitute a garden; only in the act of playing can the garden be said to exist. (187)

The Chinese garden exists in the performance, which is the participation of its players (187). A painting (and by this I mean the whole extended realm of painting) also has no existence without its players, its viewers and performers. Rules are required to play the game and the same is true for art if form is to be established, with the word for calligraphy, *sha fu*, meaning rules or methods of writing. And yet unlike many of the Chinese arts, rules for gardens are minimal (187-188). This may help explain both their longevity and their ability to change alongside society. There is a difference between the suggestion of rules and their prescription. Greenberg’s effect on modernist painting
only really becomes problematic when read as prescriptive rather than creative or generative rule making. Rules and walls alike can be about defining a generative space (expansion) or about confining, containing (contraction). I think both of these forces come into play.

The use of naming is a key conceptual element in the Chinese garden (Makeham, 92). It is given many roles moving between social, historical, and literary allusions which as well as a kind of intellectual game playing allows the owner/artist to express individual taste while reaffirming community (204). This is able to occur because in Confucian thought taste is validated in community and tradition (205) as yet one more example of the continuum of polarities at work here. Another expression of this is that through ‘naming’, history feeds into the present through a shared network of allusions, becoming progressive once an active viewer engages in the game through the space of the garden.

Happy Fish Pavilion, Yu Yuan Shanghai 2012

Daoism

Daoism, ‘the Way’ begins with a void from which all reality emerges. Instead of a supreme being, it is the Dao itself, which generates reality (Little & Eichman 2000, 13). With Daoism there is a stressing of the oneness and continuity of material and spiritual worlds (Keswick 2003, 85). Everything is in turn made of qi (or breath) and transformed into the patterns of the universe by the creative interaction of the complementary forces of yin and yang. Out of this comes the infinite web of correspondences that, paradoxically, gives a vision of order able to structure daily life (Little & Eichman, 14).
In the gardens, the Daoist emphasis on seasonal change gives added force to cyclical changes such as flower blooms and decay as eternally shifting patterns, rather than a strict life/death dualism (Keswick 2003, 87). Harmony with nature is the dominant force in Daoism, yet nature is not without its magic. Wang also points to Daoism’s indulgence in drinking, alchemy, and magic elixirs for longevity, and how its teachings were meant for an everlasting life on earth rather than after death (Wang 1998, 10-11).

Confucianism
Often pitted against Daoist harmony with nature, Confucianism was actually able to co-exist as a necessary complement (Keswick 2003, 23). Confucianism like Daoism posits a non-theistic beginning, but in its emphasis on scholarship and moral duty to society there was a philosophy of control, which tended to dovetail with the needs of Imperial power. But if Confucianism’s main emphasis was on moral doctrine and social/power relations there was also a respect, in its essential humanism, for modesty and kindness (Wang, 11-12). Confucius’ comment that “the wise takes pleasure in water, the kind finds happiness in a mountain” illustrates this other side of the Confucian spirit whilst providing further links between his teachings and development of the landscape in Chinese painting, poetry, and gardens (11-13).

Buddhism
Arriving in China early in the sixth century, Buddhism was important for the way it managed to contain both Confucian and Daoist ideas within its own framework. If it does not feature as strongly in the record, Buddhist temple gardens tended to be situated in nature, so relying more on the natural beauty of a site than the private gardens which construct their own versions of the natural world. In Ch’an teachings the intuitive mind was given prominence over the reasoning mind with the appearances of the objective world nothing more than symbols of greater inner realities for painters and poets of the time (Siren, p 94). It is easy to draw correspondences with the transcendentalism of Malevich’s Suprematism here. But if for Ch’an “nothing really exists except as a reflection of the mind” (Siren, 95), Suprematism let alone Constructivism was also very much rooted in the material conditions and construction of an entirely real revolutionary present.
**Scholar/Court**

The patterns of Daoism and Confucianism are present in a Scholar/Court bifurcation seen in much of the Chinese arts since the time of the Northern Song. The scholar or gentleman-painter was an accomplished amateur, often a master of ink painting and calligraphy, but outwardly opposed to the role of a professional artist (Siren, 52). The professional in turn was associated with Court painting and Confucian values to the Daoist scholar. The differences may have become over-intellectualised by the time of the Ming yet the model continued at the expense of the formula bound ‘professional’ (132).

A Chinese witticism:

Confucianism is the doctrine of the scholar when in office and Daoism the attitude of the scholar when out of office. (In Johnston 1991, 45)
Chinese Garden Histories.

As allusive as they remain, materially, it is safe to name a Chinese garden as containing artificial mountains and rockeries; water used as lakes, ponds, or streams; buildings, winding paths and covered walkways; plants. (Fung 1996, 85)

For all of Clunas’ questioning, that is really a warning against western (and Chinese) essentialising, there patently are and long have been sites we name as Chinese gardens. Nevertheless, because of their variety, an historical overview is important for a deeper understanding of difference and correspondence.

Han

Each Chinese garden may be different, but in their initial phase there are two broad categories. The first of these are the large Imperial parks of the Qin (221-206 BC) and Han (206 BC-220 AD) characterized by their role in hunting and food production (Makeham 1998,188). A park like the Shanglin Yuan (Supreme Forest Garden) was also the site of Imperial collections of flora and fauna from vassal states, beginning the idea of park as microcosm of the world (Keswick 2003, 44-46). Another early thematic emerges in Emperor Wudi’s Jian tai built in 104 BC with a platform designed for him to meet immortals, and the Lake of Supernal Essences’ three islands imitating the island mountain dwellings of the immortals. The idea of “one lake, three hills” represents the earliest conceptual model for garden design. (Wang 1998, 3)

Six Dynasties

In the Six Dynasties period (AD 220-589) there is a further lessening of productive function and the advent of correspondingly smaller Imperial gardens (Makeham 1998, 188). With this, alongside the partition of the Han empire we also see the emergence of a second kind of much more intimate garden – that of the literati and wealthy landowner (Fung 1996, 85-86). It is this literati or ‘private’ garden, and emergence of the garden as a work of art and site for generating art that is essential to my research. In such gardens we can pose a new if often overlapping set of values combining and contrasting the ‘order’ of official Confucian systems with Daoist nature philosophy, plus a connecting of the arts of painting, poetry, and calligraphy in and ‘through’ the gardens (Keswick 2003, 85). Yet before talking more commonly of the ‘literati gardens’ I should stress that they do not simply ‘replace’ other garden formations which, apart from the ongoing tradition of grand Imperial gardens, include
the productive sites Clunas covers in *Fruitful Sites*, or indeed the temple gardens which with their religious function and generally less ‘constructed’ nature I have largely kept outside the bounds of this study.

The growth of the private garden therefore included those that might rival the splendour of the Imperial gardens (Fung 1996, 86). The most famous of these was Shi Chong’s *Jingu Yuan* (Garden of the Golden Valley). With its artificial lake, winding waterways for boating and fishing, rockeries and architecture it also maintained an agricultural function (86). The other gardens are seen in the light of ever-greater turns towards naturalism, as officials and intellectuals find in the garden a rustic retreat from hard times (Johnston 1991, 2). Mainly located in the Jiangnan area, these gardens are relatively small, rustic formations famous as much for the activities of their talented literati owners (Fung 1996, 86). Of this type was the *Taohua Yuan* (Peach Blossom Spring) of the poet Tao Yuanming who had renounced his official career for the hermit’s life (86.) This theme of escape from the pressures of duty and the elevation of the hermit’s life remains an ideal (if not so often a reality) for the garden owner. The Daoist idea of *wu wei* with its meanings of ‘non-action’ and ‘no action contrary to nature’ provided the ultimate justification for retreat from society like an enlightened sage, ‘pure’ and ‘blank’ (Keswick 2003, 87).

At the same time I remind the reader of the intricacy of the typical owner’s ongoing obligations in a Confucian dominated society and the way the garden fed into this status.

*Tang and Song*

In the Tang (AD 618-907) and Song (AD 960-1279) literati gardens flourished in the form of country estates (*Wangchuan bieye*/Wang River Estate), rustic retreats (*Cao tang*/Thatched Hall), and small urban gardens (*Dule Yuan*/Garden of Solitary Happiness) (Fung 1996, 87). Emperors and wealthy families both easily adopted the idea of the scholar’s rustic hut even as garden owners vied to show off their wealth (Keswick 2003, 100). The relationship between landscape painting and garden design was reinforced with the allusive ink landscapes of the Tang serving as conceptual models for the garden (Johnston, 2).
It was in the Song that the different ideas of pleasure garden and scholar’s retreat meshed in the idea of the gentleman scholar’s urban garden which increasingly engages with infinite experience in a small space to present the totality of nature attempted by the Imperial gardens (Keswick 2003,101). Architecture becomes fixed in the Chinese approach to nature as part of that aesthetic - indeed all manner of garden design becomes a way to give structure, to add the artificial, and therefore improve upon nature (Fang, 31). The deliberate arranging of views and manipulation of viewer perception develop in this period (Johnston, 3). For the Chinese, the labyrinthine complexities of these gardens also go beyond the artificial by maintaining their appeal to the allusion and traditions of the retreats of the scholar painter-poets (3).

Architecture becomes aesthetically fixed to nature in the Song and along with other elements of garden design provides structure and the artificial, thereby ‘improving’ nature (Fang, 31). Paintings of the Song often depict gardens in use, providing a kind of instructional notion for the literati in fusing painterly concepts and the physical act of landscaping. One result is the idea of the garden as a landscape painting in three dimensions (31).
The grand Imperial tradition continued in Emperor Huizong’s Gen Yue, with its massive mountain constructed on the advice of his geomancer, between 1117-1122 (Fung 1996, 87). As a petromaniac, Huizong’s search for the finest rocks and the height required by the geomancer for the birth of a male heir eventually bankrupted the dynasty (Keswick 2003, 68).

Ming

As a young man I was known as a painter. I was by nature interested in seeking out the unusual; since I derived most pleasure from the brushes of Guan Tong and Jing Hao, I paid homage to their style in all my work. (Ji 1635, 37)

So begins Ji Cheng in his On the Craft of Gardens, the only known surviving garden manual of the Ming. In this statement we get the essence of the Ming literati garden – in its analogous relationship to painting and the continuing recognition of tradition through homage. It is this connectedness to the community of shared tradition that provides authenticity for the Chinese garden artist as suggested by Makeham.

It is here in the Ming (1368-1644) and into the Qing that I most comfortably site my conception of the Chinese garden. It may be because with the rise of a wealthy class there is something closest to the contradictions of our own times. There is a growth of organised literati societies and the literati or ‘scholar’ garden dominates and celebrates a deliberate amateurism in wenren hua – painting of the scholar-gentlemen-amateurs. In gardens this is evidenced in more understated, naturalistic gardens over the more overtly impressive axial style of garden (Hardie 2003,11). These axial or rectilinear organised gardens are more common to Beijing and follow established domestic architectural courtyard spatial divisions (Fung 1996, 90). This in turn might be related to Beijing’s traditional role as the seat of power and with it the Confucian order of nesting squares identified through the work of Hall and Ames (1998). With individual expression curtailed under Neo-Confucianism the gardens and their design become a spiritual refuge of the scholar classes (Fang, 38), and the gardens’ rejection of the axial for the flexible becomes something more than a practical/spatial decision, moving into the socio-political realm. Moving from hierarchical space to ‘places’ of intense creativity the designers of the Ming and Qing, more worldly than those of the Song, also brought further dimensions into play with elements of popular culture (39).
One of the most famous of Ming gardens, though hardly small, was the *Zhuozheng Yuan* (variously translated as the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician or Garden of the Humble Administrator) made famous by the painting and poetry of Wen Zhengming who was able to live and work in the garden as a friend of the owner (Clunas 1996, 30). This is also the subject of a forensic-like examination by Clunas in *Fruitful Sites* in which he uncovers the complex interplay of obligation, income generating land ownership, and aesthetics that add another set of intellectual perspectives it is not always possible to ignore in this study. For Clunas, the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician’s balancing act between economic riches and cultural wealth is signified by its choice of a high-value cash crop in fruit (56). And as much as the literati might have liked to position themselves as outside society they were completely enmeshed in it. No matter where their allegiances lay they were receivers of an elite education that marked them out as members of a privileged class:

The late Ming garden was not a set of meanings but a site of contested meanings: readable differentially as a pure space of aesthetics or as luxury object par excellence, a battery of wealth. (102)
The literati garden as ideal continued in the Qing (1644-1911). The strength of this model became such that even parts of the northern Imperial gardens would imitate the more famous gardens of Jiangnan/Suzhou (Fung 1996, 89). Increasingly there was a shift too from the garden as productive into aesthetic site.

The Qing might be read as culmination and decadence of the garden tradition. This in something approaching the plight of a twentieth century avant-garde, the ever increasing popularity of the Daoist literati conception (including in the Imperial gardens) would see it developed, refined. The changing fortunes of the Zhuozheng Yuan illustrate this shift. Rebuilt in the elaborate traditions of the Qing its rustic nature has given way in its newer section to what Keswick variously describes as “a sophisticated maze of fanciful gazebos” and “elaborate elegance” (Keswick 2003, 123). Interestingly she attributes the visual conventions of this tradition in the influence of Qiu Ying (c.1494-1552), who as a highly skilled professional painter, rather than the amateur wenren, expressed a garden ideal (123). The inference is that in over pictorialising the gardens for a commodity market, the gardens in turn (always so closely attached to painting) follow suit. In demystifying or de-essentialising the garden as an unchanging entity Clunas helps clear a space to look at it free of semi-sacred claims.
Today, following a period of ruin, gardens exist in China as relatively contemporary reclaimed sites, and beyond China as a kind of cultural outpost* that despite itself, as my interaction with Dunedin’s Lan Yuan suggests, is still capable of radically shifting the perspective of those who enter. It is, in fact, their flexibility in adapting to and reflecting the needs, wants, and restrictions of wider society that marks the gardens as something more than mute aesthetic forms. Form and content are inextricably linked. It would be nice to think that reductive abstraction, ancient as it is becoming given the speed at which the contemporary art world moves, could share in some of this effect.

*Further discussion of the role of the Chinese gardens in foreign settings is provided in Missingham, “Japan 10± China 1: A first attempt at explaining the numerical discrepancy between Japanese-style gardens outside Japan and Chinese-style gardens outside China.” 2007
Wangshi Yuan, Suzhou 2012; Lan Yuan, Dunedin 2011
History Reduced.

With this section a focus on mid-twentieth century abstraction presents itself as a series of historical moments and interpretations relevant to my notion of reductive abstraction in the present. This in turn reconnects with the earlier writing, A discourse. Abstraction will eat itself. Beyond offering the discussion as yet another framed view on the lang’s infinitely winding path, there is little attempt to conflate this history with that of the Chinese garden. Instead it can be read as a component which (as with the gardens) continually feeds into and comes out of studio practice.

I would not deny being one of those critics who educate themselves in public…

(Clement Greenberg Preface to Art and Culture 1961(a), vii)

“They’re gonna do you in public, ‘cause you’re growing up in public.”

(Lou Reed, “Growing up in Public” 1980)

Here I am quoting Greenberg when it isn’t my purpose to get lost in the entanglements of modernism and postmodernism. I have suggested that it is largely in a desire to escape this seemingly unshakeable binary that I look to the Chinese garden. And yet, there are basic presumptions I work with in referring to each throughout the process of this writing and, more importantly, making. I can’t walk away from it without first walking into it. For the record, I view modernism as more a set of overlapping tendencies to be read from an historical perspective as much as any one shared programme. Having said that, I consider its overall tendency to be a progressive one inclusive of historical, present, and future points on an historical continuum. In this sense there was often a search for, if not the practice of, a unified programme. Postmodernism is characterized here as more likely to favour pastiche and a breaking apart of boundaries lending itself to flux.

I have no wish to privilege or confuse Greenbergian modernism as opposed to a much broader series of cultural modernisms, but to this degree there is also a certain recognition of Clement Greenberg’s particular modernism as something that an abstract artist is, even today, working with and against. I will briefly canvass a few lines from Modernist Painting (1961):

It was the stressing, however, of the ineluctable flatness of the support that remained most fundamental in the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under
Modernism. Flatness alone was unique and exclusive to that art. The enclosing shape of the support was a limiting condition, or norm, that was shared with the art of the theater; color was a norm or means shared with sculpture as well as the theater. Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else. (In Harrison & Wood 1992, 756)

Nagging doubts return every time I seek to pull this stuff apart. Instead of a strict limitation, as an artist working with reductive abstraction, I find the call to flatness a positive boundary that may be worked with and against with infinite variation. And then there are sections like these:

> It is understood, I hope, that in plotting the rationale of Modernist art I have had to simplify and exaggerate. The flatness towards which Modernist painting orients itself can never be an utter flatness. The heightened sensitivity of the picture plane may no longer permit sculptural illusion, or trompe-l’oeil, but it does and must permit optical illusion. (758)

> The immediate aims of Modernist artists remain individual before anything else, and the truth and success of their work is individual before it is anything else. (759)

Greenberg is consistently attacked for his prescriptive nature yet he frequently qualifies his grander statements. If he is to be judged on language it might be best to look at the whole, not just the declarative statements. Even when there’s a formidable structure intended, painters usually have the option to change and correct. Greenberg admits in his *Art and Culture* preface to “growing up in public”. If I am being selective in my depiction of Greenberg’s writing, it is to keep its possibilities alive rather than closing it down.

Ironically, if we replace “kitsch” with “global culture” in his 1939 essay *Avant-garde and Kitsch*, Greenberg sets up the same arguments a critic might use today:

> Another mass product of Western industrialism, it has gone on a triumphal tour of the world crowding out and defacing native cultures in one colonial country after another, so that it is now by way of becoming a universal culture, the first universal culture ever beheld. (In Greenberg 1961,12)

A statement like this leads into notions of the postmodern. Frederic Jameson, with *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* (1983), ties emergence of postmodernism to
that of global capitalism, with its formal features supporting the logic of that system. He
discusses this through the disappearance of our sense of history and the perpetual
present of our media cycle. The problem tends towards postmodernism's lack of ability
to lend criticism from within in the way that a more progressive modernism was able
(125).

Jameson is useful in illustrating an oscillation that runs throughout Hal Foster's now
canonical *The Anti-Aesthetic*. That is, his essay is riven with difference and sameness
for modernism and postmodernism. More than ten years from my last reading, most of
the essays have some of this possibility within them. Difference, so eagerly sought,
fades into a continuum rather than a rupture. (Krauss' use of the Klein group comes
close to actually illustrating this non-predicament by posting the way out of a once
perceived static binary. Frampton's *Towards a Critical Regionalism* (1983) relies on
modernist examples and practices which lead architecture beyond the scopic through
fuller engagement with site.

Other features of Jameson's postmodernism (itself a suggestion of multiple
postmodernisms) include the loss of boundaries between high and low - which were
already well at work in the more subversive modernisms of early cubism, dada and
constructivism. More distinctive is the erosion of boundaries reaching into philosophy to
replace it with multi-disciplinary theoretical discourse. This discourse as such is a
manifestation of postmodernism (Jameson, 112). And may be referred to as the textual
turn.

Key amongst Jameson’s listing of postmodern practices is pastiche, which he
distinguishes from parody, which “at least relies on knowledge, even respect, for what it
mocks” (113-114).

In choosing Jameson to define a *postmodernism*, I own up to a clear bias in that he
remains 'critical' over 'celebratory'. I have also jumped from a specific, aesthetic
definition of modernism to definition of a cultural postmodern. This is not entirely by
accident but reflects something of the terms. The prior tried to address culture via the
aesthetic, the latter has more to say of the aesthetic via culture.
Regardless of personal bias, allegiances and otherwise to both sides of the field, one essential difference can be found in a return to the final paragraph of Greenberg’s *Modernist Painting*:

Nothing could be further from the authentic art of our time than the idea of a rupture of continuity. Art is, among many other things, continuity. Without the past of art, and without the need and compulsion to maintain past standards of excellence, such a thing as Modernist art would be impossible. (In Harrison & Wood, 760)

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*The Form Guide*

Yve-Alain Bois’ *Painting as Model* (1993) is another well-established text I turn to. Outlining his position in the introduction Bois names as ‘blackmail’ a number of theoretical positions which threaten to close down any readings of an artwork beyond the dictates of those positions. Those around Formalism are of specific interest here.

While not aligning himself with Greenberg’s overly prescriptive Formalism, Bois signals the way it challenged a French phenomenon of literary writers holding sway over art discourse. He goes on to say that the intellectual seeking to bring painting as a model into their argument, should become acquainted with the specific and historical problems of the area (xvi). This was about giving art its own field of operations, and a certain acceptance of the value of the formal without continual recourse to the overtly literary.

For all of the ‘antiformalism’ that occurs in the late 60s and 70s (and into the present), the reaction is still dominated by Greenberg’s terms (xvii). Think of Stella’s black paintings of the late 50s and his working through of the possibilities Greenberg set up. Thierry de Duve’s *The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas* (1996) in Serge Guilbaut’s *Reconstructing Modernism* looks at this moment in some depth. He suggests that the black paintings fulfilled Greenberg’s call to flatness and medium specificity so completely that they risked converting his “historical account into a theory of sorts, and thus threatening free aesthetic judgement.” The threat then became that of the “arbitrary object” (246). de Duve quotes *Modernist Painting*:
The essential norms or conventions of painting are also the limiting conditions with which a marked up surface must comply in order to be experienced as a picture. Modernism has found that these limiting conditions can be pushed back indefinitely before a picture stops being a picture and turns into an arbitrary object; but it has also found that the further back these limits are pushed the more explicitly they have to be observed. (In de Duve, 246)

As ever there are other ways to approach the moment. The *Painters Painting* documentary of 1973 has Stella casually mention the way he could have chosen to go with a then supportive Greenberg but instead “chose” to align himself with those new artists of his own generation such as Andre and Judd (de Antonio 1973). The social and the formal are never completely separate. Neither are form and content. As Bois notes of the dialectical relationship between Greenberg and his adversaries there was a “closure of a whole universe of discourse whose divisions represented strategic positions on the same field rather than a radical rift” (Bois, xvii). In this statement the pendulum of metamodernism and the oscillating opposites of the Chinese garden are recalled.

*The Two Formalisms*

Bois reminds the reader that ‘formalism’ has at least two readings as a label. One posts a formalism oblivious to meaning, versus the antiformalist wholly interested in meaning (xvii). Another way is provided by the European formalism of Medvedev/Bakhtin:

European formalism not only did not deny content, did not make content a conditional and detachable element of the work, but, on the contrary, strove to attribute deep ideological meaning to form itself. It contrasted this conception of form to the simplistic realist view of it as some sort of embellishment of the content, a decorative accessory lacking any ideological meaning of its own.

The formalists therefore reduced form and content to one common denominator, although one with two aspects: (1) form and content were both constructive elements in the closed unity of the work, and (2) form and content were ideological elements. The principle of contrast between form and content was thus eliminated. (Medvedev/Bakhtin 1928. Quoted in Bois 1993, xviii)

It is the ‘two aspects’ that gives this simple description its power. There is to be no denying of the differences of each while there is a clear recognition that form and
content are some kind of organic whole. One could take this further to surmise a living organism? The whole question of the organic within reductive and non-objective modes of abstraction has long been a vexed one with the purity of the straight line as practiced by Mondrian and De Stijl contributing. And as Briony Fer highlights in On abstract art (1997), Malevich’s Black Square of 1915 with its clearly visible under-painting between the cracks corresponds so well with our “shifting fascinations”. Rather than his pure ‘zero of form’ here is a physical and conceptual composite caught between the structural and the transcendental (8). It is in the ambiguity of such a space that we can read much of what is called reductive, non-objective, or geometric art. It is also in the interplay of such ambiguities that one form of the organic plays itself out in my own work.

With Sculpture in the Expanded Field, Rosalind Krauss reveals a third space for binary operations which, as indicated in the aforementioned writings of Bois and Fer, might be about new positive ‘open’ as opposed to ‘closed’ structures. Drawing on the Klein group model, whereby a set of binary terms turns into a field mirroring itself via polar opposites to open up that field, Krauss names the complex as the sum of such an operation. One that has been previously excluded from post-Renaissance art but which appears in this case (sculpture as not-architecture, not-landscape becomes landscape and architecture) in sites including labyrinths and mazes and Japanese gardens (1979, 37-38):

…the logic of the space of postmodernist practice is no longer organized around the definition of a given medium on the grounds of material, or, for that matter, the perception of material. It is organized instead through the universe of terms that are felt to be in opposition within a cultural situation. (41)

It is telling that Krauss chooses “uniqueness” and “reproducibility” as the key terms of opposition for painting (41). This leads into the obsession with the photographic that was endemic to classic postmodernism. If one was to look at different artists such as the under-represented (for the period) New York painters of David Reed’s milieu as written of in the Katy Siegel edited High Times Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975 (2007) there were other concerns that were much more likely to be turning on such oppositions as making/unmaking (one only needs to see a Lynda Benglis poured latex floor work on the cover to realise the centrality of this proposition). Possibly I
should invoke here another set of opposites: critics/makers. And centers/margins. If we look for dialogues or spaces between these poles we also start to find the productive. Instead of “either/or propositions” Siegel sees “a more complex terrain of possibilities” coming out of the late 60s (30). A new fluidity of mediums beyond Greenberg’s medium specificity enfranchised painters to explore not just video, performance and sculpture, but techniques as diverse as pouring (Lynda Benglis), sowing (Louise Fishman), squeegeeing/dragging (Jack Whitten) Rather than a search for novelty, the experimental process and materials-heavy nature of these works can be viewed as a means of bringing in experiences of the real, the ‘ordinary’ to high art practice (30).

The ‘complex’ involved in such a position is summed up in this quote taken from Siegel:

Underlying what might seem like fundamentally formal categories organized around practices or techniques are social concerns, as well as unifying interests such as sense of self, of work, and of the relationship between a painting and ‘painting’ proper. (31)

This in turn reads as an echo of a paragraph from Foster’s aptly titled The Return of the Real of 1996:

For the most acute avant-garde artists such as Duchamp, the aim is neither an abstract negation of art nor a romantic reconciliation with life but a perpetual testing of the conventions of both. Thus, rather than false, circular, and otherwise affirmative, avant-garde practice at its best is contradictory, mobile, and otherwise diabolical. (16)

From Foster I take the notions of ‘parallax’ and ‘deferred action’ to feed into my practice and play out in my projects. Parallax “involves the displacement of an object caused by the actual movement of its observer” and into its applications in coordinating historical and social axes within art and theory (xii). Put another way, its use in considering the art object, ie. a literal apprehending and translating of the object in real time and space – as well as its critical and historic (re)constructions. [This ‘activated’ viewer has resonances in much deeper entrenched Chinese traditions as will become apparent later.] Deferred action occurs whereby “the significance of avant-garde events is produced in an analogous way through a complex relay of anticipation and reconstruction” (xii). This might be looked at as a model for continuing hopes of a progressive practice in the face of a corresponding end of history highlighted by the placeless-ness of pastiche readings of history. This suggests a more structured or
nuanced use, which applies to my own position on reductive abstract painting as a
practice historically determined by a lineage I have already pointed to as going at least
as far back as Malevich. And yet this same practice shows itself to have continually
evolved throughout a century of making. Rather than the made again neo-geo
appropriations of a Sherrie Levine monochrome, one can see a considered integration
with the quotidian via, say, the readymade monochromes of David Batchelor or the
ongoing interrogations of the physical painting in Robert Ryman’s oeuvre.

David Batchelor, Bow, London 20.08.02; I Love King’s Cross and King’s Cross Loves Me 1997

Foster’s discussion of the historical as vertical axis and formal modernist trajectory with
the horizontal as synchronic, spatial and social dimension is an important one and
informs my own use of these axes in thinking through issues. Instead of celebrating a
lack of modernist impulse on that horizontal axis Foster refers to a neo-avant-garde
(beginning in the 1950s and 1960s) fulfilling the need for a break with the past,
extending their areas of competence whilst still looking to ambitious past paradigms to
create an open present with the vertical and horizontal in coordinated formation (1996,
xi). Instead of definitively denoting a postmodern rupture it could be suggested that it is
the combination of the two that actually best invokes a functional modernism.
Minimalism. And its Posts.

Half or more of the best work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture. Usually it has been related, closely or distantly, to one or the other. The work is diverse, and much in it that is not in painting and sculpture is also diverse. But there are some things that occur nearly in common. (Judd 1965, 809)

If minimalism is to be considered doctrinaire, a return to the writing and the objects themselves casts it as something else. A brief focus on Donald Judd's *Specific Objects* 1965 shows this. Despite or because of its declarative intensity and tight construction, a beautiful oscillation between points comes through in Judd’s writing. The contradictions give the life to it. Much more generous and discursive than is generally afforded, it is full of qualifying statements (as with Greenberg). Borders are set, but remain provisional, permeable. Having fixed some of the terms whereby the specific object replaces painting and sculpture:

Obviously, three-dimensional work will not cleanly succeed painting and sculpture. It's not like a movement: anyway, movements no longer work: also, linear history has unraveled somewhat...Finally, a flat and rectangular surface is too handy to give up. Some things can be done only on flat surface. Lichenstein's representation of a representation is a good instance. (810)

A work needs only to be interesting. Most works finally have one quality. In earlier art the complexity was displayed and built the quality. In recent painting the complexity was in the format and the few main shapes, which had been made according to various interests and problems. (813)

Reflecting on the actual productions of minimalism rather than the image of simple reduction, Foster points up the contradictions of Judd’s specific objects made with nonspecific composition, the obsession of LeWitt’s logic, the hermetically closed cubes of Bell that actually mirror the world around it, stating: “...the positivism of minimalism notwithstanding, perception is made reflexive in these works and so rendered complex” (1996, 36).
Quite apart again from the specific object was the issue of the specific space in which the object sat. Robert Morris’ installation of mute, painted grey, geometric forms at the Green Gallery in 1964 required a negotiation, if not exploration, of the surrounding space of the gallery in finding one of an infinity of viewing angles. These works demanded action and thereby interaction by the viewer in that now activated space. Regardless of reductive forms, minimalism here, as elsewhere, should be seen as very much an expansive practice. In pure painting terms it is worth considering Stella’s shaped canvases in a similar light where, despite their adherence to surface flatness, their strange shaping and increased stretcher depth highlights their physicality within the gallery, and therefore the act of viewing in space.

Briony Fer adds other angles of enquiry, applying psychoanalytic models to find in Judd’s pristine surfaces a neurotic anxiety as opposed to Anna Chave’s ‘rhetoric of power’ (1997, 151). Varnedoe in *Pictures of Nothing* also questions the rewriting of minimalism that somehow associates its objects with the mighty US industrial complex, finding, “minimalism is just plain odder than that” (2006, 54). Rather than mass produced, Judd’s metal works were fabricated by a small Long Island metal shop and Varnedoe goes further to suggest something “small-time and peculiar” in much of minimalism’s fabrications that has a lot to do with old-fashioned craftsmanship and a nostalgia for small-product America’s custom body shops and aluminium siding businesses (54). The moment too that we broaden the canon to consider the work of Robert Irwin, John McCraken and the rest of the LA ‘cool school’ with the celebration of auto-paint and fiberglass, things slot into place.
And of oddness, Judd’s *To Susan Buckwalter* 1964 is a row of four galvanised iron cubes with a blue lacquered strip of aluminium running across the front; its intensity of colour and unbroken stretch (kind of) holding these boxes together as they float on/off the wall. About now you start to wonder about Judd’s dislike for illusionism and realise again it is tempered by what is possible via structural devices (as opposed to picture-space illusionism) and humour. These things are funny, as Varnedoe says, ‘odd’, ‘weird’? Think the specific object of Judd or any other of those associated with minimalism; think Stella’s shaped paintings with their self re-iterating forms, Andre’s magnesium floor pieces (art for walking on), the manufactured sublime of Flavin’s fluoros, the repeating structures of LeWitt, Morris’ mirror cubes in the landscape. Quoting Stella’s “What you see is what you see” is declarative of what’s there, but it’s also a challenge to ‘see’. The specific object invites a non-generic narrative. The openness of the forms continually plays this out.

Things get odder still looking at Morris’ ever-changing practice or Eva Hesse as representative of what gets labeled as post minimalist. Morris’ earlier works focus on easily perceived cubic forms as the basic unit of language in line with his theories of the gestalt, carrying this into various modular formulations with the implicit possibility of variable configuration (Batchelor 1997, 39). After the mid-60s Morris moves away from preoccupation with shape to materials and process in works he would call *anti-form*,
exemplified by the felt works such as *Untitled (Tangle)* 1967-68 (40). Writing in *Minimalism* (1997), David Batchelor finds a performative base to the act of dropping the soft material to the floor such that rather than a fixed form we experience a series of instances. In moving beyond the fixed form, Morris is influential for the post-object, process-based work to follow (40).

…I did some that were not rectangles and then they grew and grew. They came from the floor, the ceiling, the walls. Then it just became whatever it became.

(Hesse in Nemser 1970, 6)

With Eva Hesse the false binary between organicism and minimalism is restaged through the shifting formal, material, and expressive languages of works like *Hang-Up* and *Metronomic Irregularity II* 1966. Both play off framing devices, errant line and a strange rehearsal of the monochrome. For Fer these works portray, amongst other things, different rehearsals of a kind of “blank space”, an “economy of loss”, which feeds into and out of other minimalisms of the period - so dislodging the “rational frame” with which they tend to be viewed (130).
Similar contradictory impulses are apparent in the critically engaged works of pop. Warhol's (mis)use of commercial screen printing technique in a work like *Triple Silver Disaster* 1963 pairs a repeat image of the electric chair with a smeared silver monochrome providing an oddly physical confrontation between viewer and subject. Rosenquist’s *F1-11* with its architectural scale, which actually wraps around the viewer, forces physical engagement beyond and into the already cut-up nature of the imagery. And as for minimalism travelling in the other direction there has always been a pop aspect to its celebration of the real, the use of industrial materials and readymade high key colour. Finally, I open David Batchelor’s *Minimalism* and there’s a photo of Dan Flavin’s birthday cake coloured corner-fluoro work *Untitled (for Leo Castelli at his gallery’s 30th anniversary)* 1989. Alright it’s 1989, but the binary separation of glamorous pop from an industrial, non-relational minimalism is patently unsustainable from the moment Stella consciously used house painter’s enamel to make his black paintings of the 50s.
Much of my sympathy with Foster lies in his bringing together of pop and minimalism as historical crux that can be used to read back into modernist art but also takes us forward into the postmodern (1996, 58). My own practice has been in this area for many years and the resistance to such a model continues for many. This nexus or crucible (‘crux’ may be too passive for practice) represents a cluster of ideas and practices that this research seeks to retain, even as it transforms itself through this other model – the Chinese Garden.

Similar to the ‘post’ in much we call postmodern, the ‘beyond’ of Lynn Zelevansky’s Beyond Geometry (2004) suggests a tendency towards new engagement rather than simple rejection of that which precedes it. As with Foster, Zelevansky and her fellow writers look to the decades following World War II as critical for the development of a Western vanguard. In naming “the use of radically simplified form and systematic strategies” as the focus of the study (9), Beyond Geometry is important in recovering a more complete or parallel lineage through the concrete practices of the South American and European avant-garde of the 1960s. This in turn extends the spatial (geographic), temporal (historic) dimensions of western geometric abstraction.

Zelevansky goes on to trace a series of ‘missed’ lineages through the systematic rationalism of Swiss artist Max Bill who worked throughout Europe and South America in the post war period. Whilst van Doesburg (and Mondrian initially) saw dada as a revolutionary ideal necessary to De Stijl’s utopianism regardless of differing aesthetic tendencies, Bill stripped this from concrete art to rely on a compositional geometry formed by a mathematical over intuitive approach, the universal over the individual (14 -15).

We call those works of art concrete that came into being on the basis of their own innate means and laws - without borrowing from natural phenomena, without transforming those phenomena, in other words: not by abstraction. (Max Bill 1936. Quoted in Hillings 2004, 52)
Bill's initial influence in South America sees Grupo Ruptura form in Brazil in 1952. Their rigid approach to painting emphasized two-dimensionality, elimination of the brush/hand through use of gloss enamel over artist's oils, along with a reliance on the modular and the rational. But it is not long before counterparts Grupo Frente (including Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark) turn Bill's terms in on themselves to become the Neo-Concretists - rejecting serial form and pure opticality for experimentation and subjectivity (Zelevansky, 19).

Today it is clearer to me than ever that it is not the external appearance which generates the characteristic of the work of art but, rather, its meaning, which arises from a dialogue between the artist and the material with which he expresses himself. Hence the mistake and vulgarity of the distinction between informal' and 'formal.' In the work of art, everything is informal and formal. (Helio Oiticica 1961. Quoted in Zelevansky, 19)

Oiticica's *Bilaterals and Spatial Reliefs* 1960 were shaped, double-sided monochromes hanging in space such that the viewer becomes a participant in the colour, structure, space and time of the work of art (20).
Nucleus 6, 1960–1963 clearly identifies these interests in a series of monochromes configured as a cluster of enclosures surrounding the viewer. These works could be fit entirely into the developing works of the minimalists if I point to the floating forms of Morris’ sculptures in the Green Gallery show of 1964 or Judd’s own galvanized iron and painted aluminium box/cube forms (Untitled 1963). This thinking through space is also evident in the work of some of the pop artists of course, again turning to Rosenquist’s F1-11. That Oiticica takes them further (in their more resolved series of slippages between painting, sculpture, and architecture) is not the only interest. In this engagement of the senses is the kind of ‘beyond the optical’ experience that Kenneth Frampton argues for architecture in his 1983 essay, Towards A Critical Regionalism. And on this occasion, it is the insertion of this local dimension into a supposedly unresponsive formalist and modernist history that I choose to focus on. Zelevansky almost glosses over it, but mentions how the Nuclei are forerunners to his Penetrables as architecturally scaled structures inspired by the housing of Brazil’s favelas (21). This, as much as other formal concerns, seems highly important in illustrating the linking of the local and the general via reductive modes.

In addition to the specific case of the Nuclei, Oiticica’s body of work offers a model of how an artist can operate away from the centre to create new outcomes specific to their own site which are then able to be reinvested in that centre whether we name it a place: New York, Paris, or a phase: modernism, postmodernism. By extension this also reaches to certain New Zealand abstract artists I cite elsewhere in this project, including Ralph Hotere and Don Driver, and the way in which they engage and disengage from this idea of centre. Jan Vewoert in “Form Struggles” writes of a current avant-gardism moving beyond the rhetoric of global centres and “cult of competitive innovators”, instead recognizing avant-gardist experiments with form in alternative scenarios (2013, 72-73). I think each of these artists are evidence of an early and ongoing navigation of such scenarios. Extending further, to return to the central proposition around which this project oscillates, is the way in which I will navigate my own work’s journey between a contemporary reductive abstract model and the historical/present space of Chinese gardens.

With Oiticica and groups like the Madi and Art Concreto-Invencion can be seen the full multi-perspectival range of possibilities opened up by cubism, the role of the
readymade, the performative and chance elements of dada, the politic of the real in constructivism, the criticality and inclusion of mass culture by pop, minimalism’s shift to a new category of art objects and embrace of entirely new materials, plus conceptual practice.* Each of these examples has syntactical and semantic dimensions that make art entirely expansive even where, as in minimalism, the forms take on externally reductive modes.

From the preceding section I draw out these histories, works, and ideas as proofs to the ideologically mired debates of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. If we move out from over identification with (and equally reaction to) Greenbergian formalism, we can see how there are enough proofs, enough ways of enjoying the natural tie between form and content to maintain abstraction’s voice as a progressive visual medium. The possibility is for more nuanced interactions with reductive abstraction where form/content, form/inform are not so much oppositions as points of difference within a continuum, able to be used thoughtfully for explication and construction of a complex abstraction. In the turns of Volumes 2 and 3 many of these thoughts weave through the Chinese Garden as another space of construction, interpretation, and experience.

*See Hillings, 2004 “Concrete Territory: Geometric Art, Group Formation and Self-Definition.” In Zelevansky 2004, 49-75 for a more complete picture of the interwoven nature of form and the political in Latin American concrete practices.
A STRANGE ARRANGEMENT:
CONSTRUCTING CONTEMPORARY REDUCTIVE ABSTRACT
PAINTING THROUGH THE ANCIENT CHINESE GARDEN.

CRAIG EASTON

Volume 2 of 3

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CHAPTER 3: INDEX

The Void Collecting Studio, Wangshi Yuan, Suzhou 2012
In contra-distinction to the common situation in which the work or contribution follows an initial statement of problems, I would argue that the task of reading *Yuan ye* is not simply to start where one's predecessors have been located but involves the articulation of a new beginning in a virtual nowhere in the midst of one's 'predecessors', now construed in a wide sense of interdisciplinarity. (Fung 1998, 225)

Your thoughts will travel beyond the confines of this world of dust, and you will feel as though you were wandering within a painting. (Ji Cheng 1635, 118)

**On Reading.**

There is no easy way to describe a Chinese garden. You construct it from a multitude of materials, structures, and concepts.

With INDEX I attempt an initial, if somewhat selective, cataloguing of the devices of the Chinese gardens. Elsewhere I have written that the garden is not an essential form over time, and lacks a cohesive written record. As the earliest extant instructional text, the primary source most often turned to is Ji Cheng's *The Craft of Gardens* (1635). Also of importance in the compiling of INDEX are the resources provided by Johnston (1991), Fang (2010), Fung (1996), Keswick (2003), Chen (2008), Stuart (1990), Yang (1982), Hu (1991). In thinking through the gardens’ lessons for (architectural) design, and in the ordering of the following devices, Missingham (2001) is of special note.

INDEX features a particular emphasis on those devices relating to, and from, an extended field of painting. The listing of these devices also goes to ‘methods’ as it is
through this process that relationships and possibilities for future making are triggered in and through the Projects.

Many of these devices are structural-material, equally many conceptual, others poetic, or personal. A great number are clearly tangential to even the most expanded notions of abstract painting. There are pleasurable difficulties in separating structural from conceptual or non-physical devices. Borrowed views are ostensibly tied to windows and landscape views but also have a place with literary space. The scroll belongs to painting and calligraphy but also to pathways and in-motion viewing. I provide some guidance, but in the end it is this non-exclusivity within a bound(ed) format that might also best provide an experience in line with contemporary painting practice. The photo grids provide another kind of cross-referencing, displaying the raw materials of such a practice, as image and idea.

While occasional interpretative comments are made on links with Western abstraction, or in relation to my own practice, for the most part this is intended as INDEX or catalogue pure and simple. Reading of INDEX might take place in lineal fashion, equally as a cross-referencing space entered from multiple points. Conceptually the book is intended as a kaleidoscope or dragon eye device, with its many parts available for reading individually but also as overlay lens for reading back onto Volumes 1 and 3. Following this logic, some may find it more helpful to approach INDEX after those volumes. For compiler and reader alike it is a reference tool, a body of knowledge, which may be brought into contact with the writing and making at diverse points. INDEX remains incomplete and open. INDEX is a constructive device.
Opposites

One way of reading the gardens is as sets of oscillating opposites previously highlighted in *Crossing disciplines* of Volume I. This catalogue itself relies heavily on such a device. From Plaks an extended passage which further captures the dynamic nature of these oppositions and illustrating their value in thinking through established binaries in western abstraction without simply representing western dualism:

In speaking of the “dualism” in Chinese thought, we must make it clear at the outset that we are not referring to an absolute categorization of all phases of existence into two distinct classes of phenomena, or even to a relative distribution along a single continuum ranging between the two hypothetical poles of yin and yang. Instead, what we have is a whole series of axes, or continua, along which the myriad phenomena of existence may be ranged according to the degree of intensity, or presence, of various qualities…In fact, the many sets of conceptual polarities, which serve as frames of reference ‘or the perception of reality, are overlapping schemes not reducible to a final two-term analysis. (1976, 44)

Some oppositions particularly useful in negotiating the gardens include: large/small, moving/still, winding/straight, geometric/organic, natural/artificial, open/closed, abstraction/representation, separation/connection, solid/empty, weight/weightless, light/dark. Note that some of these pairs are also matched with further correlative pairs. In fact such pairings could extend indefinitely.

Opposites and therefore differences are recognized and celebrated. The co-ordination of opposing objects, states and ideas can be related to the *Book of Changes* and the Confucian concept of “Harmonious yet different” as well as yin-yang common to Daoism (Hu 1991, 12-14). Instead of irreconcilable ends of a single axis here is an understanding allowing for the whole realm of transitional possibilities. The visual photographic pairings, like much of the written structure of the wider document, should also be read in this context. It is not hard to see the way this thinking gets us over the hurdles associated with form and content, nature and culture, text and image binaries. In doing so there is the possibility of a vastly expanded ‘continuum’ in which reductive abstraction might operate.
Garden As Painting/Painting as Garden

Shadowy temples should appear through round windows, like a painting by the Younger Li. Lofty summits should be heaped up from rocks cut to look as if they were painted with slash strokes, uneven like the half-cliffs of Dachi. (Ji, 43)

If one discusses painting with a view to its faculty to render distance, one must admit that it does not equal real landscape but if one considers the wonders of brush work, it becomes evident that real landscapes do not equal paintings. (Tung Ch‘i-ch‘ang 1555-1636. Quoted in Siren 1936,138)

The conception of Chinese gardens is inextricably linked to those of painting. On one level this can be seen in the way Chinese paintings of landscape and natural elements were virtual blueprints for garden designers (Hu, 31). Yang (1982) draws attention to the utilization of common compositional techniques including space, tonality, and colour, with the primary difference being that of ink and pigment on a flat surface whereas the garden works from a three dimensional plan (70). In turn, Stuart also points to the way brushstrokes and whole landscape scenes sometimes echoed artificial gardens and their constructed mountains rather than those of nature in Ming artists like Shitao or Wu Bin (1990a, 164-165). But this is about more than similitude, for garden scenery must also feature “the flavor of poetry” (Hu, 34).
Craig Clunas reminds on the importance of avoiding totalizing versions of Chinese painting such as that of Norman Bryson’s *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (1983) – where the ‘performative’ brush is set against the ‘erasive’ layerings of the West (Clunas 1997, 13). Instead, as with garden form and function, multiple discourses of painting existed at any one time. I flag this for the reader, even as I choose to focus on those aspects more closely associated with scholar painting and abstract modes as suitable to my study. There is no claim being made here for an exhaustive study, instead a scattering of perspectives. Just one such perspective would be to follow that of eleventh century historical writer, Liu Tao-ch’un, who lists six qualities for painting:

To be coarse and vulgar, yet strive for brush-work, is the first; to be hard and rude, yet strive for refinement, the second; to be delicate and skillful, yet strive for strength, the third; to be violent and eccentric, yet strive for reason, the fourth; to be without ink (to work in a dry fashion), yet strive for tone, the fifth; to paint in an ordinary fashion, yet strive for quality, is the sixth. (Quoted in Siren, 73-74)

Here is something of a language of reduction - essentials being sought. That the qualities are defined through sets of oppositions (76) is indicative of much thinking running through Chinese painting and garden design.

*The hovering view region / three distance method*
In rejecting singular optical perspective, much Chinese painting tends to time as well as space in asking the viewer to move from motif to motif, rather than to read from a single fixed viewpoint (Johnston 1991, 51).

Although scale remains constant in painting, depth is read through positioning of objects with those at the top further away and those at the base closer (51). There are implications for this in the speed of viewing, with the lower positioning tending to slow the rate compared to the upper.

Within European painting the spectator looks at the scene from a fixed point, providing a sense of solidity and control whereas: “With the Chinese style the ground surface starts from the distance and slips past under the spectator’s feet to a goal infinitely beyond, i.e. below and perhaps behind him” (Needham 1971, 112-113). The model for painting as an immersive field is tacit. And one that for Needham indicated, “an attitude towards Nature at once humbler and more social than that of Western man” (115).
Johnston notes the technique’s correlation with abstraction and the multiple viewpoints of much later cubism, and how the Chinese method of representing three dimensions on a single plane with many viewpoints was the direct inspiration for Chinese garden environments (51).

Using shifting vanishing points, or the ‘hovering view region’, also gave artists freedom in content selection, sequencing, and layout based on impressions and feelings (Wang 2003, 41). The physical and the conceptual, the general and the personal are thus accommodated in the one field.

Walking through a Chinese garden it becomes easier to understand the unusual spatial and directional shifts that occur if one continually relates it back to these understandings of painted space with its multiple vanishing points. The painting concept of ‘three distance’ was used in classical garden design to enlarge the sense of space through spatial distance, distance in height and distance in depth (Hu, 47). This can be demonstrated in the Lingering garden (Liu Yuan). The width of the pond provides spatial distance, the trees on the constructed hill to the north provide distance in height, and in the northwest corner the water flowing from a deep ravine gives distance in depth – all combining with perspective to give a sense of expansion (47).

In the overall system of Chinese art, gardens may thus be understood as being designed to resemble paintings, whereas paintings are made to evoke the disposition of gardens. This reciprocal relationship highlights the discursive nature of Chinese conceptions of space. The central point, however, is that a similar conception of space impinges on all three fields of representation: literature, painting and architecture. (Li and Yeo 2002, 52)

According to Zong Bing (375-443) a landscape painting could offer a spirit journey equivalent to hiking, with a three inch vertical stroke equaling thousands of feet (Stuart 1990, 38-39).

See also Scale, Space, Viewer as Participant,
Wen Zhengming, *The Boat Returns to Port*, 16th century

Zhuozheng Yuan 2014
**Colour/Monochrome**

“Painting must be sought for beyond the shapes”, declared Chang Yen-yuan (In Siren, 29). Chinese monochrome painting was developed by Wang Wei and others around the eighth century BC, and given the established links between ink painting and garden design is likely to have affected the way people looked at gardens (Keswick 2003, 103). Rather than a focus on colour the gardens tend to favour the temporal effects of sun and shadow across white walls, grey rocks and water, with grey, green and white thus becoming predominant (103). This restricted palette (at least in gardens of the southern literati), as in painting, provides visual unity (Yang, 49). Attention to temporal possibilities is an obvious strategy for maintaining a dynamic model of reductive abstraction as something more than two-dimensional motif.

The lake provides the main monochrome in the garden, functioning in different lights as black void and mirror. When viewed by the moving spectator it may also work as an unfolding cinematic image, particularly in passing through the balustrade frames of a lang.

In addition to mirroring effects, actual mirrors also feature prominently in Chinese gardens. Johnston notes how a mirror placed in the back of a pavilion in the Master of the Nets “adds to the kaleidoscopic effect of colour, light and shadow” (Johnston, 119). My own experience in the Yu Yuan’s Happy Fish Pavilion includes looking along the pond to a moon arch wall typically completing the circle in the water below, here forming an aperture through which the fish swim. Turning to leave I am then confronted with my own real-time reflection in a wall sized panel mirror at the pavilion’s back. I am ‘in’ the scene.

See also Walls, Water, Rocks, Viewer as Participant,

**Representation/Abstraction/Real**

Ah, but total lack of resemblance is hard to achieve; not everyone can manage it. (Ni Zan 14th century. Quoted in Keswick 2003, 118)

Attitudes to abstraction and representation may be considered through patterns such as Yin/Yang allowing oscillation along a continuum rather than strict oppositions. That said, there is much in the literature favouring the abstract or non-representational
image/form and separation of the superior paintings (hua) over ‘mere’ pictures (tu). Generally, painting which avoids direct translation of images is seen as more truthful, and therefore ‘real’. See Siren (1936) and Clunas (1997) for an in-depth discussion, but as a rule it is possible to recognize an abstraction that ties itself to the correlative thinking outlined by Hall and Ames (1995). This is one extending networks of meaning ever outwards. In line with thoughts on continuums there appears to be a more ready acceptance of abstract form in Chinese painting and in garden design. The abstract form ‘is’ the real. In early Chinese thought:

There is an unbroken line between image as what is real, image as the presentation (not reproduction) of what is real, and image as the meaning of what is real. Image is reality.

(Roger T. Ames. Quoted in Clunas 1997, 133)

For painting, poetry, calligraphy or garden design the artist is expected to have yi (intention) and a li yi (approach) going beyond the mere copying of nature (Hu, 26). If an artist’s high intentions and inner thoughts are in harmony with the creation of scenery, unique characteristics as opposed to mimesis will be achieved with a state of yi jing (artistic conception): “The viewer responds to all he sees, entering into the work and not wanting to come back out” (26).

See also Rocks and Mountains, Natural/Artificial,
**Scrolls**
Vertical, horizontal, hand scrolls, and juxtaposition of individual frames make up the conventional formats of Chinese painting (Johnston, 39). Materially scrolls tend to silk or paper, while conceptually the notion of framing and an unraveling journey for the eye belongs also to architecture. Other geometric forms are used in the openings in the architecture of the gardens creating three-dimensional paintings, which unfold in space like a hand scroll for the in-motion viewer (39). The designers of Dunedin’s *Lan Yuan* have also written of planning features along the banks of the central pond as a series of encounters akin to encountering scenes on a horizontal scroll (Cao et al 2008, 51). Correspondingly the vertical scroll highlights the use of the three distance method of painting whereby the perception of near to far involved the move from bottom (earth) to middle (*jing*/view) to top (heaven) (Zou, 62). So the format of the scroll as support is strongly associated with a reader in motion. That is, it plays a dynamic role rather than mute support.

See also Walls, Space, Moving and the Still, Painting,

![](image1)

Beihei Park, Beijing; Zhuozheng Yuan 2014

**Calligraphy Text/Image**
The easy interpenetration of text and image can be seen as a distinctive feature of Chinese art in comparison to the European pictorial tradition (Clunas 1997, 187). With the binary opposition of image and text largely resolved through calligraphy there is no need for the false binary of content and form as played out in the art of the West. The calligraphic word/image model also provides a way to transcend the Chinese divide between pictures and paintings (187). According to the Ming elite’s leading theorists,
“the failure of pictorial representation lay in its inferior status to poetry, to the written and spoken sign” (186). For Fenollosa, the Chinese symbol in its additive visual nature over time becomes richer with age, becomes a nimbus of meanings drawn from usage across national philosophy, history, poetry (Pound 1936, 25). Rather than words as singular utilitarian units, the graphic symbol of Chinese language reveals its own making, as a cluster of pictorial elements, and in so doing offers maximum meaning and a true multiplicity of function ideally suited to abstraction (see Pound, 24-33).

See also Naming, Painting,

Poetry
Practices of naming, and use of calligraphic allusions throughout the gardens, means that poetry at some level must be considered. Indeed, painting, poetry, calligraphy, and the garden arts tended to be analogous (Missingham 2001, 16). Missingham quotes twentieth century Chinese garden scholar Yang Hongxun in considering Chinese garden design as “Embodied Poems and Three-Dimensional Pictures” (16). One way of thinking through this might be to say that on a material level poetry creates word
pictures which form as calligraphic word paintings. Such word paintings may then be related to the brush stokes and composition of an ink painting, in turn providing the basis for creating the physical landscape of the garden.

Xiao (2012) writes of the Ming And Qing gardens as “lyric enclave” where the world is captured in verse (ix). Poetry also stretches into poetic ‘moments’. Xiao remarks, “a Chinese garden was a catalog of poetic occasions and painterly images; it referred to a textualized collection of the physical attributes of this world, as well as appropriate human postures for poetic occasions” (188).

Such representations come with their own dangers. For Xiao it is seen in the closed nature of that world defined by poetry and beautiful illusion as a removal from society with a “realistic delusion” or “delusionary reality” of poetry associated with the garden (233). Whilst alive to the possibilities of the poetic moment, reductive abstraction tends in its materials, processes and forms to make its initial appeals to the quotidian.

See also Painting, Literary Space, Jing, Reverie,

Naming
For Makeham, “Names are a key conceptual element in the non-physical dimension of the garden” (192). And instead of working as simple label or description they take on a catalytic, performative role in the social (and therefore political) networks of human affairs (192). A name such as Master of the Nets (Wangshi Yuan) might express a desire on the part of the owner to enjoy the life of a simple fisherman, which in turn attempts to very publically signal a retirement from the dangerous world of political office. If according to Keswick the garden also extends indefinitely in a literary sense then naming is an essential part of that (2003, 24). The Master of the Nets itself refers to a much older poem with its own networks of meaning within the culture. So, rather than simple literal description the naming process works on multiple levels. Throughout the gardens verse from previous visitors is inscribed on stone tablets set into the walls and these work like the colophons around a painting – recording the experience across time. Paired couplets on the side of gateways also make literary allusions “probing layers of literary recollection, adding new insights to old meanings” (Keswick 1988, 27). In carrying the literary knowledge to make possible the deciphering of these
calligraphies it is the traditional reader who releases the full dimensionality of the gardens (Fung 1996, 92).

…no Chinese garden would be complete without calligraphic inscriptions to express the essence of particular scenes. Such inscriptions serve to remind viewers that the “natural” landscape owes both its existence and meaning to human consciousness. (Li and Yeo, 56)

No one type of allusion is sufficient to explain the programme of the garden. (Clunas 1996, 58).

..the proper way to tend a garden was to increase its historical richness until finally it became another kind of labyrinth – a mental maze of interpretations and well-chosen metaphors. (Keswick 2003, 163)

One can choose to see this as elitism at work, or alternatively an acknowledgement of the value of ‘knowledge’. The traditional act of naming was anything but a passive event. In neo-Confucian periods such as those of the Ming and Qing it was especially prevalent, as that philosopher had “…accorded significance to naming as a means of effecting – not merely representing – social and political change” (Beattie 2008, 39). Naming has the ability to transform the ordinary into a meaningful or significant view of a jing (Wu 2012, 68). If we take it out of the confines of Ming or Qing dynasty China into the ‘reading’ of western abstraction, this additional use of naming would seem a helpful strategy in recognizing and adding further complexity to the works. Placing of some responsibility back onto the viewer as ‘informed’ rather than pure ‘receptacle’ is not an unreasonable proposition. For Stuart, “Ming gardens were incomplete without the poetic thoughts that visitors brought to them” (1990a, 170).

See also Poetry, Authenticity, Cueing, Literary Space,

**Jing**

For Hu, individual scenes as jing form the essential units of all Chinese gardens, and these in turn relate to the unwinding of a landscape scroll revealing itself scene by scene (32).

Hui Zou (2011) records the many understandings of jing throughout Chinese history (at its simplest ‘scene’, ‘view’ or ‘vista’). The act of looking as it pertains to painting and the
experience of the gardens was not a simple scopic act, and more about a unity of mind and scene subject to historical change (51). Among meanings ascribed: “flowing brightness” (51); specific views of landscape/garden connected to aesthetic and poetic feelings, exchangeability between jing and a painting, attention to the meaning of physical “things” making up the jing (54); something to be selected and the viewing structured/built around it (55, 58); jing as singular entity, an emphasis on the interactivity between view and viewer (56); inclusive view of natural phenomena (56), particular view in particular place and time (57); recordable/translatable via painting and writing, borrowed (58); hidden leading to appreciation (59); ultimately jing as “a view that appears bright, bounded, emotionally connected, and poetical to the mind” (60). In this multitude of ways the jing extends beyond mere perception of a scene and becomes “a complex personal vision” often generated from “thoughtful contact” with the material world (Wu 2012, 68).

See also Lang, Pathways, Painting, Cueing, Poetry, Magic Space, Borrowed Views,
Since “natural space” is infinite, clear divisions and boundaries are needed to make it visible. Thus, when an interior is separated from an exterior, an abstract threshold is engendered between two worlds, which is made discernible by a physical boundary. (Li and Yeo, 53)

As already suggested, the treatment of space within Chinese gardens is closely aligned to that within Chinese painting and especially changing or multiple viewpoints (Beattie 2008, 40). Painterly techniques including layering, sudden contrasts of light, moving
between finely detailed areas and flat monochrome expanses – all contribute to the strange experience of moving through a garden. A telling passage from Keswick, writing primarily of Shanghai’s Yu Yuan, but broadly applicable to gardens (and activation of space) as a whole:

Unlike Western architects who might try to expand tight spaces by joining them together, the Chinese designers increased the feeling of space by dividing it up with screens and walls. By layering the available space with gateways, by allowing glimpses of swooping rooftops and patches of light, they managed to suggest that space extended infinitely and magically beyond its visible confines; for the aim was always to represent nature’s infinite change and mystery as well as to provide seclusion. (Keswick 2003, 140)

It is important to remember that Western concepts of geometric space are not the only ones available. Instead of the lines, planes, and solids of Western geometric space, and time as straight lineal duration, is the classical Chinese idea of boundless transformation or wu hua (Hall & Ames 1998, 180-181). In the gardens this might manifest as a meandering movement through continually changing scale, multiple viewpoints, interval between taking up these views, and the constructive use of memory in appreciating its traditional scenes and poetic allusions (182).

See also The Void, Naming, Painting,
**Literary Space**

If networks of meaning are generated through naming and literary allusion, then new spaces might accompany them. Li and Yeo suggest that Chinese culture is distinguished by an interweaving of architectural and literary narrative space, arguing for the text as a means of uncovering the unseen workings of Chinese architecture—and through to a general conception of Chinese space (49)*. Working through the eighteenth century novel, Cao Xue-gin’s *Hung Lo Meng (A Dream of Red Mansions)* Li and Yeo note common Chinese practices whereby:

…Chinese literature often situates its narratives within architectural settings, while Chinese architecture often exemplifies experiences elucidated through literary texts. (49)

In general terms, spatial arts deal with entities and elements that are present simultaneously, while temporal arts deal with sequences or factors running in succession. However, in the case of HLM, objective time also acts as a spatial “stage” against which the complex narrative proceedings take place. (52)

Fung points out that Ji’ Cheng’s *Yuan Ye* is at times far from logically argued, full of literary allusion and a kind of peripatetic thinking, while the chapter on borrowed views, “has to do with a specific kind of design thinking rather than specific designed vistas in gardens.” And further: “By following the drift of the text, the reader catches the gist of ‘borrowing views’ ” (2000, 129-132).

In sum, *Yuan Ye* asks designers to take on reinterpretation as the process of creation. It offers not a method of borrowing views, but a way of designing a process of thinking. It does not provide historical knowledge but rather continuity of culture; this implies both losses and transformation. The literary allusions or gnomic phrases and stories involved in *Yuan Ye*’s account of borrowing views are the vehicle of cultural continuity and not mere rhetorical ornament. This usage of allusions makes the treatise’s self-referentiality consistent: it is a text on borrowing that borrows from other texts, so that there is no separation between topic and mode of operation. The implied contract with the readers is that they too will metaphorically extend it to other situations. (133 -134)

See also *Painting, Walls, Jing, Naming, Borrowed Views,*

*For further possibilities in reading through the literary see Andrew Plaks, *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber.* 1976.
Garden Records and Imaginary Gardens

The garden might gain continuity via a thoughtful naming if that name is also abstract enough to allow for “creative re-interpretation” over time (Makeham 202). Through additional naming of structures and scenes, these names alone might be enough to recreate the garden (202), such as in the late Ming’s Kang Fansheng’s *Record of the Coming Together by Chance Garden*:

All of these scenes exist only as names, the elements long having effaced the original garden. Thus in order to re-invest it with a semblance of order, I have named it Coming Together by Chance Garden. (Quoted in Makeham, 203)

According to Stuart, in the Ming, “the act of writing about or painting a garden could be equivalent to the actual experience of designing and living in a real property” (1990a, 164).

So for some the garden need never exist at all. Liu Shilong’s *The Garden That Isn’t Really Here* (circa early seventeenth century) was actually considered by its owner the superior garden, as it would remain untouched by time (164):

If I constructed such a garden in reality, its arrangement would be restricted. Constructed in the imagination, however, there are no limitations on its structure. This is what makes my garden superior. (Quoted in Makeham, 203)

The Grandview Garden of *The Dream of Red Mansions* is constantly evoked in Chinese and western writings around gardens. On building a new twentieth century park in Beijing the government used the Grandview as model, demonstrating an ongoing equality between the real and the literary (Stuart 1990a, 164).

See also *Naming, Literary Space, Poetry*.

The Void

Part of the difference in Chinese use of space in painting (and therefore gardens) might be attributed to notions of the void and in particular that of the Great Void of Ch’an Buddhism. Rather than absence, the Void contains all of existence (Siren, 95). So instead of European cubic volume, space is something that goes beyond geometry or illustrative technique to something without limits, and in art would therefore include the
silk, paper or bare ground of a work (97). In the garden we can see how this brings the
walls and lake surface into play as both monochromes and supports for temporal
imagery created as light and shadow. The often irregular spatial positioning of objects
is intended as an echo of the Great Void rather than with purely decorative intent (97).
The very emptiness of a room, a courtyard, or an object provides its potential – with
some form of “emptiness” as opposed to solid form at the core of a garden (Hu, 15).

Also see Space, Painting, Walls, Mystery,

Architecture – the Built

…the Chinese word for space, itself, kongjian, represents the creation and ordering of empty
volumes as a result of the “enclosure,” or bounding, of three-dimensional space by
architectonic elements — windows, thresholds, screens, roofs, etc. (Li and Yeo, 54)

Once a place has a ting we can call it a garden (Traditional. Quoted in Keswick 2003, 132-33)

Architecture provides the dominant landscaping element in a Chinese garden with its
structures also acting as symbol for man. Whilst Ji Cheng’s The Craft provides clear
instructions on the construction of buildings there is variety within the basic forms and
in their relationships to each other.
Buildings should be built according to accepted conventions and “in accordance with the lie of the land. (64)

You must search out the unconventional and make sure it is in accord with your own wishes. The trite and the conventional should be totally eliminated. (66)

A blatant contradiction, or tacit understanding between writer and reader? Or one more representation of the oscillation of opposites that goes on within the garden? It seems too like the sort of contract that could be read into Clement Greenberg’s writing, where the conventions are established, as with Makeham’s highlighting of ‘rules’, and the game becomes the creation of deviations or conventions undone within a ‘field’.

The buildings themselves are largely modular, following set rules of construction in line with a Confucian sense of order and tradition, balanced by the romantic lines of water and rock (Johnston, 75). The rule was also one of central government edict with particular sizes, numbers of modules tied to societal rank. For all their apparent free-flowing naturalism, the literati gardens display traditional hierarchies of ordering (whether social, geomantic or otherwise) with a central point chosen from which major landscaping and architectural structures then emanate outwards (Fang 51). From Confucius, “Do as you like, without violating the rule” (51). While Ji Cheng gives some direction on design, rather than individual design per se, the art is in the positioning of these structures. As such, the buildings function as elements within a wider architecture that is the garden. But even if buildings themselves play a subservient role, their careful integration throughout the garden, amidst the landscape such as atop a mountain or extending over a pond, also alluded to harmony between man and nature (Stuart 1990a, 162).

If Chinese architecture is not overly engaged in formal invention, the use of set forms does not preclude creativity within a framework. Sited in the heart of Zhuozheng Yuan, the Hall of Drifting Fragrance acts as a kind of “ideal viewfinder” to the garden unfolding around it via the four framing facets of its structure (Yuan & Gong 2004, 22). There is painterly effect to be had in these formal structures too, with the use of black paint on beams and cross-pieces giving buildings the restrained appearance of having been traced out like a Chinese ink painting (Yang, 49).

For Keswick the poetic and metaphorical dimension of garden architecture presides:
In a Chinese garden architecture is more playful than useful and, above all, more metaphorical... Holes through a wall can be circular ‘moon gates’, while sometimes they are in the shape of flowers, shells, gourds or vases... pavilions over the water are ‘boats; and five pavilions set together become ‘the claws of the Imperial five-toed dragon’. Rocks, of course, are ‘goblins and savage beasts’... sometimes two pavilions are joined together at the corners to form a butterfly; reality is everywhere transformed into a poetic conceit. (Keswick 2003, 131-132)

An acknowledgement of history and tradition does not have to rely on this metaphorical content or preclude the formally progressive. I.M. Pei’s Suzhou Museum is one current example of garden design being brought into play in a contemporary semi-public space. These thoughts around the value of rules and set forms may well be equally applied to a tradition of reductive abstract painting as a site of continual transformation and reinvention, even where the metaphorical is far from dominant.

See also Rocks, Water, Openwork, Lang,
Site

Following the existing lie of the land may mean any of these skills: designing in accordance with the rise and fall of the natural contours, to accentuate their intrinsic form; or lopping branches from trees that block the view and using rocks to direct the flow of a spring, so that each borrows value from the other. Where a pavilion would be appropriate, build a pavilion, and where a gazebo, build a gazebo. (Ji, 39)

Ji Cheng provides directives for different types of sites including among mountain forests, urban, village, uninhabited countryside, beside a mansion house, river and lakeside. Of the urban:

A pure white waterfall cascades like floating gauze into the mirror of a pool. Green hills stand like an encircling screen beyond the city. (49)

This proves that the hermit's life in a city far surpasses a distant mountain retreat. If you can find seclusion in a noisy place, there is no need to yearn for places far from where you live. Whenever you have some leisure you are already at your goal, and whenever the mood takes you, you can set off with your friends for a walk. (49)

None of which is to say nature is not to be improved upon. From a previous paragraph on more natural sites:

If there are unfordable torrents, build bridges over them, and where there are soaring cliffs, construct stairways up them… (48)

From these quotes something of the easy continuity between nature and culture is evident. Each has a role in constructing the other rather than a straight divide. This has positive implications for the reductive artist looking to models of the organic for abstract practice. And if the curve took precedence over the geometric in garden layout (Yang, 75), this is not to deny the import of the geometric or the straight line. Indeed the winding line avoids the commonplace only through an “appropriate management of its contrast with the straight” (Cao et al 2008, 56). In the gardens, geometry needs to be kept largely separate from its role in Western perspective, so instead of representing one order it is free to represent many.
Of course in the case of the imaginary garden, an appropriate site might also be that of the artist’s mind, or take on concrete form in some other medium such as that of a painting. One such is ‘The Wishful Thinking Garden’ of Yu Sheng-min written about by his scholar friend Tung Yueh in the mid-twelfth century. In the course of writing about a garden that only existed as paintings, his laughter at the idea of a garden with a continually changing location turns to the realization that this might be an entirely appropriate outcome for a ‘Wishful Thinking Garden’ (Fang-Tu 1980, 14).

See also *Pathways, Borrowed Views, Garden Records and Imaginary Gardens*,

**Walls**

… the whitewashed surface acts as paper and the rocks as painting upon it. (Ji, 107)

In line with Ji Cheng, Keswick considers walls to be the critical elements after rocks and water, functioning like the unpainted areas of silk or paper in landscape painting, evoking infinity. And so “the wall which encloses and divides space also serves to extend it symbolically beyond all bounds” (Keswick 2003, 146).

Movement and stillness are both required from the spatial. Beyond avoiding the simple act of enclosure, walls are used to create movement or to define space cells, leading one into the other. More than one writer has related this ordering to the unwinding of a hand scroll, which in its temporal dimension functions like the cinematic storyboard or the musical score over the static viewpoint of Western painting. In this way, “the garden, its space cells divided by white walls simulating mist, became a three-dimensional walk through a landscape scroll” (Keswick 2003, 105). Equally the curves of a dragon back wall such as that around Shanghai’s Yu Yuan or Dunedin’s Lan Yuan might also be thought of as the undulating sweep of a calligraphic brush stroke.

True to the use of borrowed views, the boundary concept within gardens goes beyond standard lines of geographical demarcation to include furthermost visible space (Fang, 124). Instead of thinking of barriers, walls may also lead the visitor through space(s) – are for looking through as much as blocking:

Wooden walls should have many window-openings so that one can secretly enjoy looking through them into different worlds, as if in a magic flask. Pavilions and terraces should be visible through a crack…(Ji, 76)
To the Chinese, the wall is not dominated by its periphery but by its center. Such a conception involves a set of foci which extend space ever outward from the center, allowing the wall to serve as an abstract form, an indefinable position of indefinite solidity. As with the calligraphic ideogram, the logic of this dynamic space is one of contrast and reciprocity. Of course, the principle behind all these contrasts is the opposition of emptiness and fullness. (Li and Yeo, 59)

Other notes on walls from *The Craft of Gardens* direct attention to different qualities and instructions regarding traditional walls whitewashed with paper-pulp and lime; white wax polish for fashion; mirror walls of yellow sand and lime brushed so bright that “you can see your reflection in it” (Ji, 96). But for all of this attention to surface the white wall should also be considered a monumental feature in its own right (Keswick 2003, 146). Within this, possibilities for both the individual monochrome painting as object and the place of the gallery wall as artwork are suggested.

See also *Scrolls, Doors, Borrowed Views, Space, Architecture, Painting,*

![Image](LiuYuan2012.png)

**Windows**

Do not feel restricted to the conventional sizes of windows, but use them as you feel appropriate. Visualize the balustrades as if they were in painting, following the lines of their surroundings. The designs you create should be fresh in style; you should reject the old conventions of monumental building. (Ji, 44)
Windows often function as frames for scenic compositions, and the pattern of windows sometimes form a kind of frame within a frame composition in and of themselves via a pattern of receding layers (Fung 1996, 92). Placement of windows also relied on using appropriate formal contrasts with square between round or straight and curved line in relation, all with the desire for expressing harmony within diversity (Hu, 100).

Walls may be punctured to create ‘leaking’ windows, but windows are as likely to be formed by the open framework of a ting or the pillars of a lang. That is, the concept of window as a dynamic framing device is paramount.

The opposites of separation and connection, emptiness in solidity are fundamental to the gardens and their carefully framed windows and doors (Hu, 13). In discussing windows it is impossible to not consider them in terms of Borrowed Views.

See also Scrolls, Walls, Doors, Borrowed Views, Openwork, Viewer as Participant,
Doors

On the importance of doors:

…the wall around a doorway should be polished smooth; everywhere the door should lead one on to the open spaces and in all directions draw one close to the scenery. (Ji, 93)

The style of moulding around the opening of a doorway should be chosen according to the current fashion. (121)

Grand views should be enjoyed, but the common world of dust can find no entry. (93)

In addition to closure or separation, doors also mark an expansive entry point. As moments of transition, special attention is given to thresholds within garden design as places of pause and reflection (Johnston, 84).

Amongst the many chosen shapes, the Moon gate is the most frequently used opening (84). By stepping through and over the curve there is an emphasis on the act of entrance itself and accompanying heightening of the senses. The formality of a circle as entrance contrasts with a garden's essential irregularity. Visually also, a Moon gate was seen as the best way to concentrate the eye, working like the light stop on a camera (Keswick 2003,148). Round passages are often talked of as moon gates but Stuart asserts their dominant reference being to cave openings, mysterious passageways to other worlds (1990, 42-43). These other worlds are perfectly exemplified in the fourth century poem “the Peach Blossom Spring” in which a poor fisherman finds his way to paradise through a magical fissure in the mountains.

See also Transitions, Walls, Windows, Magic Space,
Openwork

Balustrade patterns, latticework windows, shutters, openwork brick walls, screen doors, and patterned screens between pillars serve to unify the architectural elements while projecting new complexities of geometric relations onto the garden scape as viewing frames and cast shadows. Giving us an insight into the gendering of pattern, Ji Cheng tells us such patterned shutters are known as calligraphic windows in a study and embroidered windows in the women’s spaces (81).

There is often a close relationship between a window lattice pattern and the landscape plants seen beyond such that they blend together (Fang, 79). Conversely, these openwork patterns whether through windows, shutters, between balustrades, or even over mirrors, are also used to provide a layering effect – expanding the sense of space while serving to intensify the point of view. For Keswick the complexity of balustrade patterns may be like a mirror of the garden labyrinth itself, and rather than decoding the garden they extend it through “an infinite number of geometric relations” (2003, 153).

The combination of sun and the geometry of the openwork, plus the cast shadows of stones and swaying bamboo could also be used to create scenes in motion (Hu, 99). Window patterns also tended to curved line or straight line with the curved valued for movement in stillness and the straight line providing a static contrast (100). Opportunities for contraction, expansion, and unity of inside/outside may be exploited via consideration of this latticework/patterning that I place under the descriptor of openwork.

Also under this descriptor could be placed the many shaped ‘empty’ windows and doors used to pierce walls and frame scenes in the manner of a painting, or drawing
the viewer in with revealing glimpses. Thoughtful attention to the nature of the frame itself, whether geometric or organically shaped, meant that it also functioned as a decorative element within the scene (Hu 1991, 93).

See also Windows, Jing, Walls, Moving and Still,

Borrowed Views

If the garden is to be adorned with scenery belonging to another landowner, providing there is a single thread of connection between them, then it is not really separate, and it is quite appropriate to 'borrow' the view. If it faces on to a neighbour's flowers, however small a glimpse of them is to be had, they can be called into play and one can enjoy an unlimited spring time. (Ji, 45)

In this we see how in a very practical way representation goes beyond image making and into a kind of substitute reality ie “an unlimited springtime.” For Wang, the principle of 'borrowed' scenery is perhaps Ji Cheng’s most important contribution to garden
design. Borrowing from one another, the scenes in a garden are linked together in a sequence. A garden becomes related to the surrounding environment when it borrows scenery beyond the confines of its walls (1998, 31-32).

The discovery of the ‘unintentional painting’ goes towards our understanding of the garden’s role as a painting in three dimensions (30). Wang also describes how the artist Li Liweng (1611-80) invented a landscape window for his Mustard seed garden by cutting a window out of his studio wall to view a miniature mountain village he had created beyond. Then, realizing with the addition of some cut paper around the window he could create a frame, he turned this landscape into a painting (29). The framing of such scenes instantly increases a garden’s spatial boundaries (Hu, 95).

Judicious planning ensures that features outside of the garden are also brought into play, functioning as borrowed views, whilst undesirable sights outside are blocked off (Fung 1996, 92). Instead of blocking, Dunedin’s Lan Yuan displays a thoughtful integration of exterior elements into its pattern. The typically zigzag roofs of old commercial buildings sit behind the ‘dragon back’ wall contrasting with the curve of its flow and functioning as gigantic scales on its back. And of a very different order, the holes in the major Taihu rocks on top of the mountain directly telescope Dunedin’s iconic First Church and First World War Shrine.

See also Literary Space, Windows, Openwork,
Scale

Ming gardens were marked by an abandon and distortion of the logical rules of time and space, thereby creating a dreamlike quality. In fact, gardens were built without any unifying scale; instead, each element was independent. The viewer had constantly to reinterpret the garden along an expanding and contracting continuum. (Stuart 1990, 36)

Whether in Chinese landscape paintings or gardens, constant shifts in scale are anything but arbitrary. Rocks were to be read as if real mountains, and the use of visual punning between similar objects of differing scales is common, for example between a table bonsai and a distant pine on an opposite lakeshore (Stuart 1990, 37). Each move plays into the shifting ground of the garden experience with the effect of near and far, large and small amplified. Strange moves in scale are, like those in Chinese painting, about positioning the viewer inside the work looking out. In such ways the viewer becomes more fully immersed in the experience of ‘this’ space. This goes beyond spatial game playing such that:

Ming garden designers believed that the vastness of the universe could be made intelligible if one could “see the small in the large, see the large in the small, see the real in the illusory, and the illusory in the real...” (37)

As constant themes for painters and garden designers, compression and miniaturization offer the possibility of comprehending within the microcosm of painting or garden the macrocosm of nature itself (Johnston, 51). For Makeham the difference between the miniature and the macrocosm is not operational but in its place in the actual “hierarchy of existence” (192).

See also Space, Scenic Clusters, Opposites, Painting,
Moving and Still

Concepts of space and movement give rise to two main garden types: gardens viewed from fixed positions and those where dominant impressions are gained while walking through the garden (Johnston, 75). According to modern Chinese scholar Chen Congzhou this is the first consideration in constructing a garden (2008, 16). In smaller scale gardens, “in-position viewing” with the utilization of fixed angles for lingering observation should predominate. Larger gardens require “in-motion viewing” from changing angles (16). But once again categories work together:

Motion also exists in repose. Sitting in front of a rockery complete with horizontal and vertical holes, lively rock folds and dynamic shape, one would have an illusion of motion though the hill is at rest. The surface of water looks mirror-calm despite ripples. Likewise, a painting may look dead on the surface but is alive and moving all the same. A thing in repose is motionless if it is without vitality. (150-151)

This vitality expressed as the Daoist life force of qi is all-important to Chinese conceptions of space and time. The rapidly changing viewpoints within a garden moving from fixed/spatial views to in-motion/temporal views heightens the idea of change. Between stable space and movement lies time. Devices used include winding views to limit or sequence views, contrasting openness and enclosure, while distortions in scale and of distance further animate the experience of garden space beyond the static single perspective which limits viewing to a single moment in time (Li and Yeo, 52).

Within the Chinese garden, rather than the western separation of time as duration (forward moving, one dimensional) and space as extension (static three-dimensional volume), is something more akin to a spatio-temporal field with spaces arranged much as objects might be (Hall & Ames 1998, 181-182). Time itself is also something to be arranged as the intervals between the arranged perspectives, the vistas (jing), and in the “constructive use of memory” required for appreciation of traditional scenes and allusive elements making up the gardens (182).

See also Borrowed Views, Walls, Scale, Water,
Scenic Clusters

Scenic clusters separate out scenes in a garden whilst conversely interlinking such scenes. These clusters are often related to usage and there is usually one dominant cluster chosen as a focal point of the overall composition. For example, within Zhuozheng Yuan one would look to the Hall of Distant Fragrance (Yang 1982, 70). One of the challenges is to ensure the unexpected remains within such a plan and this is where sudden changes of course and sight lines can result in the sense of many vistas within relatively confined space (70).

See also Space, Jing,

Pathways

The siting of the main hall, water and rockery or mountains, arranging enclosure of space, organizing of pathways, patterns of movement are the garden architects main objectives. These may be further summarized as OBJECTS-SPACE-MOVEMENT. (Johnston, 74)

In the different modalities of pathways through gardens we can recognize the play between the architectural and lineal to a free-flowing naturalism (Johnston, 91). If the distance between a painting and its viewer is traditionally a fixed one, a garden is instead one the viewer physically enters with its pathways as the medium (Yang, 75).
For Hall and Ames (1998) the notion of a dynamic line can be traced to understandings of dao (path, way) with the suggestion that (classical) “Chinese understandings of linearity are dominated by the notion of way or path images which lend themselves to wandering, meandering” (182).

Such pathways may also be the stuff of reworked models of abstraction. Spatially aware practices (in particular those of minimalism) have largely unlocked this fixed relationship although it is still, arguably, dominated by sculptural form in outcome. More problematic is how it might operate ‘as painting’ and this is something I attempt to address through my projects. It is important to add that these ‘pathways’ are also those of the garden culture and wider Chinese communal traditions. So too ‘as painting’ the linkage in practice may be made through appeal to an historical and conceptual body denoting a wider realm. This notion of realm will be drawn out in a later chapter.

A winding path leads to a secluded space. (Traditional. Quoted in Yang, 75)

There is another practical aspect of the Chinese garden path that might be seen to amplify if not change thoughts on abstract painting. Yang remarks on the ordinary road as a straight line with obvious purpose, while the Chinese garden path in its fluidity may follow nature even as it subverts it by blocking views and expanding distance and time spent, to create the large in the small (75). He also makes a comparison between the path and editing film, whereby the layout of the paths is not simply a case of management but about providing ideal viewing angles for a scene, “or to furnish a line of approach that unfolds the different aspects of a scene to best advantage” (75).

This approach may be applied to passages within traditional painting. Think of Pollock’s twisting, broken and pooled overlaid skeins that draw the eye through and across the work. More so think of how a device such as the winding pathway might be used to configure space within a gallery context, drawing the audience into a relationship beyond that of static viewer.

See also Moving and Still, Calligraphy, Viewer as Participant,
Lang

For it to be a proper walkway it should be both winding and long.

(Ji, 71)

It may ascend half way up a mountain or go right down to the water’s edge, following the rise and fall, the twisting and turning of the ground, stopping and starting, curving and bending in a natural way. No garden should lack this particular feature. (73)

In addition to an often organic or calligraphic line following the lie of the land, this covered walkway or corridor was also used to divide and enclose spaces. The balustrades and screens functioned as frames for viewing alongside the lang’s more practical role as sheltered walkways between pavilions (Keswick 2003, 153). Furthermore, in the conscious use of twists, turns, rise and fall, a master designer could manipulate the viewing sequence (Fang, 73), thereby increasing the sense of the viewer participating in the unwinding of a painted scroll and its corollary experience of space and time. In a work of self-reflexivity the lang as structure could become the final
viewing subject. In the Lingering Garden a lang swirls around the hill so that nearing its summit viewers suddenly find themselves viewing the lang itself (73).

The splitting of a lang with a partition wall down its centre could be used to create an illusion of space, especially when pierced with latticed windows (73).

See also Pathways, Scrolls, Architecture,

Bridges
A bridge that zigzags across a pond such as that of the Master of the Nets (or as seen in Shanghai’s Yu Yuan or Dunedin’s Lan Yuan) is not simply for decorative effect but also provides orientation and a slowing down of the viewer experience (Fung 1996, 92). In its continual folding, routes within gardens create sequences of contrast such as light to dark, constriction to expansion (92). So the gardens move between choice, and a careful control of movement involving pause and reflection (Johnston, 84).

A half-moon bridge completed by its own reflection offers the possibility of unity with temporal aspects completing the manmade arch into a full circle. Conceptual bridging also forms an important part of a garden’s role with the more common bridge between man and nature being only one of the many dealt with.

See also Windows, Doors, Walls, Pathways,
Water

You should let the water flow freely as if it had no end, and where it blocks your path, build a bridge across it. (Ji, 57)

The lake, which is exceptionally clear, also acts as a mirror and its…surface is kept at a high level so that it appears to be much wider than it really is. Such visual awareness is also found in the variety of the floor heights of the buildings and covered walkways which surround the lake. (Johnston, 119)

Architectural structures and rockeries are carefully floated just above water level, with shadow lines giving a sense of weightlessness whilst maintaining the sense of intimacy with water (Johnston, 102). To the solidity of the architecture above, the reflection offers up a liquidity that suggests existential as well as pictorial qualities.

Reflection provides an essential way through the abstraction/representation binary. For as Plaks notes in …But a dream, images like moon on water and flowers in a mirror are about insubstantiality and empirical reality both – with attendant liberating effects from “the containing strictures of gravity, sequential causality, and the like.” (1990, 4)

There are also uses of optical devices for mirroring. All are constructions, whether we talk of a carefully sited expanse of water or a man-made mirror, both in turn capturing temporal events. Both contribute to vision as a process under construction beyond a pure physiological event. For Ji Cheng the mirror pond provides “scenery within scenery”, which can only be sought where no scenery is found” (65). “The pond is “empty,” but it becomes “filled” with the scenery bordering it…” (Hu, 40). Again, a half moon bridge or cut into a lake wall becomes a full circle in reflection, connecting above and below. If above is the largely natural world, below is the shadowy space of the immortals, an unseen ‘other’. As in the grotto here lies a space for the magical and the gothic. Keswick notes that no matter how diffuse such meanings became in time they still maintained a background role (2003, 184). Something similar may occur within Western art practice. Returning to Malevich’s Black Square, without denying its rigor as a concrete form, the black void still has the power to summon a narrative of darkness. When painting appears as screen, we project.
With the garden intended to represent nature in its totality, water also plays an essential role in balancing the mountains (Keswick 2003, 179). A practical dimension to this also exists in the re-use of extracted soil to create the mountains (Yang, 56).

For all that it is used to separate different scenic sections around its banks, it is water that unifies the garden (Xiao, 169). The careful configuration of waterscapes to reflect those of the natural world, along with its mirroring effects, serves to give water a central role in the classical Chinese principle of creating the large from the small (Yang, 62).

See also Painting, Colour/Monochromes, Scale, Moving and Still,

**Rocks and Mountains**

For the world of Chinese scholars’ stones has to be a source of inspiration – mysteriously shrouded in feathery mist – to anyone with an interest in transparency, transformation, immateriality, dynamism, in spectacular surfaces, monoliths, or raw lumps of rock, in minimalist or archaic monuments. (Lutz 2002, 111)

Rocks have no regular shape, but there are certain rules in the setting out of rockwork. These rules refer to the veins and the whole bearing of the rockery and correspond with the principles of painting. (Chen 2008, 65)

The rockeries of classical Chinese gardens tend to replicate the wild mountain peaks, cliffs and caves of nature (Yang, 57). To make the imitation mountain was to make it real, with Ming definitions of natural and artificial proving fluid (Stuart 1990, 39). And like a mountain “the rockery must contain a subterranean interior, offering contrasts of darkness and mystery through framed views of the sunlit garden outside” (Johnston, 79).

Individual rocks, frequently referred to as Taihu rocks or stones, are often chosen for their ornamental sculptural qualities even as they represent mountain peaks (Yang, 59). Beyond aesthetic and utilitarian needs, rocks have a special place in Chinese belief. If qi flows through everything then it is in rocks that the Chinese see the bones or kernels of this energy, themselves forming a skeleton for the earth (Lutz, 111). For some these raw stones, as with transient clouds, were also associated with “images of a free existence beyond social and political constraints” (116-117).
If Daoist thinking saw the tips of the rocks as “starting points for flights through the heavens”, then the holes became “doorways into the paradise of the immortals” (117).

The Yuan ye says rocks should appear wild. Keswick points out the importance of ‘appear’, for although the rock or individual scholar stone might resemble nature’s terror it is conventionalized. In the act of choosing and polishing a rock or building a rockery it is stylised as well as concentrated (Keswick 2003, 172). In attitudes to these rocks we witness the blurring of distinctions between ‘real’ and ‘artificial’. Even the sought after Taihu rocks could be chiseled before returning to the lake for natural finishing (Johnston, 79). In such a way the rock again becomes “natural” (Fang, 81). There is here an illustration of a manner of the continuum between artificial and authentic, between human construction and nature. Direct representation is not part of the equation.

If shape, material, colour, and surface texture are the principle categories in judging a scholar stone (Lutz, 114), it is necessary to move beyond our understanding of the stones as individual objects of contemplation to their more performative role ‘installed’ in garden space. Chinese rockeries should be thought of as large, complex three-dimensional sculptural compositions, and their importance to the garden is undisputed (Johnston, 79).

Arrangements of rocks reflecting in water are essential to Chinese gardens, and the yin yang nature of the relationship with water expressed in the saying, “Rocks become alive because of water and water becomes more interesting because of rocks” (Yu 2010, 78).

Ji Cheng’s text gives more space to “raising mountains” than any other aspect. He names 16 varieties of rock, each with particular qualities suitable to uses within the garden. Rocks from the Great Lake Taihu are the most sought:

They are naturally firm and glossy, and contain in them such shapes as ‘deep hollows’, ‘eyeholes’, ‘twists’, and ‘strange grooves. (112-113)

References to painting are never far away. Having described the rocks from Dragon Pool in terms of tone, form, and texture:
It gives an excellent effect if these rocks can be arranged together so the cracks look like brushwork in a painting. (113)

Aural possibilities are of interest. Rocks from Lingbi when struck “make a ringing, bell-like sound.” From the Great Lake: “When tapped the rocks give out a faint sound.” Ying Rock: “When struck it does not resonate.” Rock from Hukou: “When struck they admit a sound” (Ji, 113-115).

These multiple references to sound signify its importance as a quality. This adds to the total environment being aimed at in the garden (something relating again to Frampton’s call for an architecture that takes on all the senses).

Rockeries involve selection, but also stacking and balancing. Not just for aesthetics but the experience of space. Precariously balanced rocks were another way of signaling repose and motion (Stuart 1990, 42). They may also have been about creating a sense of danger (Stuart 1990a, 170).

Clearly Chinese connoisseurs developed a particular set of principles for the selection of rocks that included a focus on surface qualities and form (Lutz, 114-115). Some of these might be applicable to an abstract art practice. From Keswick (2003):

_Tou:_ ‘go through’ implies to walk through a passage, physically or in imagination. More importantly are the overtones of holey, vulnerable, transparent, hardly there.

_Shou:_ thin, delicate, feminine. A quality that could be sought even in rocks usually representing yang, or the emaciation of an ascetic hermit. Without visible support, and upright in isolation. _Yuan Ye_ advises single rocks should float like a cloud, with heavier broader weight at the top – indicating states of dynamic equilibrium and the potential for movement in stillness.

_Lou:_ leak or drip. A hole perpendicular to the surface. A series of small holes open to all sides is most desired (175).

See also _Natural/Artificial, Water, Beyond Sight_,

123
Jade Peak, Yu Yuan 2012

Cloud-Capped Peak, Liu Yuan 2012; Ou Yuan 2014

Shizilin Yuan 2012; Hill of Accumulated Elegance, Yuhua Yuan, Beijing 2014
Plants

The path through the bamboos leads into the unknown… (Ji, 48)

A Western garden is planted, a Chinese garden is built. (Keswick 2003, 129)

The permanent framework was formed by buildings, artificial mountains and water. Plants were therefore used in a symbolic way, and judicious use was made of their colour, scent, shape and of their acoustic qualities, all of which attempted to heighten the poetic and aesthetic quality of the garden scene. (Johnston, 63)

In comparison to the western garden, plants are not the primary focus. The co-ordination of planting and architecture runs throughout the gardens in complementary fashion for practical purposes such as shading, but also for scenic compositions through and including windows functioning as frames (Fung 1996, 92). Plants were also chosen for symbolic qualities thereby giving garden owners an opportunity to express feelings such as the bamboo for integrity, pine for longevity, orchid for innocence etc (Fang, 116). Plantings and particularly bamboo are also utilized for their role in throwing shadows across the white walls, creating moving ink paintings. Not coincidentally the most commonly used species such as bamboo, orchids, plantains, lotus et al are those also featured in painting and poetry (Yang, 55).

In fact, you don’t need to have a garden at all. A pot of bamboo casting its shadow on a white wall can be as potent as a lakeside pavilion. (Fang, 7)

The use of plants is also of importance for the incorporation of seasonal change into the garden’s range of experiences. Yet plants need not always be living. They also appear as shadows or in shadow motif like the Plum Tree Shadow Terrace in Hangzhou’s Harbour of Flowers where the tree is maintained as memory through mosaic (Wang, illustration 4). The greatest skill of the plants man was in developing methods to alter the shapes of plants to resemble ‘wild nature’, and placement to most effectively convey a message (Johnston, 67). Plants could also be put to practical use, with branches being trained into shapes so as to frame views (Fang, 39).

See also Beyond Sight, Walls,
Natural/Artificial and Authenticity

A perceptive Chinese critic who visited England in the 1920s was amazed that any civilized person should want a ‘mown and bordered lawn’ which, he pointed out, ‘while no doubt pleasing to a cow, could hardly engage the intellect of human beings’. (Keswick 2003, 28)

Chinese gardens manifest a kind of “artificial naturalness” linked to the scholar landscape which comes from nature but becomes superior to it. (Johnston, 52)

The artist/garden designer in depicting nature ‘improves’ it. (Hu, 26)

Whilst naturalistic and artificial elements sit comfortably together in Chinese gardens, Stuart sees artifice as predominant (1990, 31). Highlighting the Ming gardens’ use of artifice over nature is the careful selection of materials to generate desired effects.
Stuart illustrates this point with the designer’s use of terracotta tiles in the Yu Yuan as something superior to the earthen in providing both comfort and as a kind of mirror surface for “reflecting the shadow of rocks and trees on a moonlit night” (31).

Both through the experience of the garden and through reading the literature comes the idea that these two opposites actually contribute one to the other. And recalling Krauss’ use of the Klein group, out of the two comes another term I suggest here is the ‘authentic’. Consider the attitudes to nature expressed in the earlier quote regarding manicured lawns being most pleasing to a cow. Nature is to be revered, to be sought out but it is humankind who perfects it, frames it…

People nowadays enjoy looking at landscape paintings as much as at the scenery itself. Panels or screens offer countless vista …free to roam without having to wax one’s sandals or take up a bamboo staff.

(Li Yu 1679, preface to The Mustard Seed Garden. Quoted in Johnston, 51)

The ‘authentic’ resides somewhere in this gap between nature and construction, where there is a recognition that each requires its other to reach its potential.

The feeling of material leads to actuality, whereas the feeling of colour is illusory…With the loss of actuality, a garden is reduced to a theatrical setting. And with calligraphy and drawing the loss of actuality will reduce them to mere printed matter. (Chen, 151)

Authenticity also comes through the network of associations built up in the garden including those through the practice of naming and other sources of allusion. The name over a pavilion entrance, (bian wen) provides historic and poetic context for experiencing the space, while further inscriptions around the garden operate like colophons on a landscape scroll to provide palimpsests of meaning (Keswick 2003, 161).

Scholar rocks provide a direct key to ideas around authenticity with their ‘natural’ forms a combination of natural erosion and the work of saws, drills, and chisels (Lutz, 114). It is in confronting the gap ‘between’ that their authenticity is discovered. This is the act of looking and contemplating called guan. Guan marks a performative aspect of visuality for Ming theorists (Clunas 1997, 117).
In their full garden form, whether individual rock or mountain, both are regarded ‘as’ mountains rather than copies in the western sense (Makeham, 190). This way of thinking also goes to thoughts on representation, abstraction, and the real. Within western concrete practice there is certainly a common rationale that through display of materials and process many reductive works are ‘real’ in a way that representation through its use of pictorial mimesis can never be.

The authentic may lie outside notions of connoisseurship or the genuine, and move towards siting in a web of correspondence – available to be tapped into and created. Is Dunedin’s Lan Yuan less authentic for having been built in New Zealand by the very same crafts people who construct gardens in China? More important than place is that it adheres to the model, works through it in new ways for local conditions to achieve an ‘authentic’ experience for those who pass through it. The Lan Yuan, as with any garden visited in China does not easily fall prey to simplistic interpretation or navigation. There is the same sense of encounter and slowing down of the act of viewing Keswick notes on entering its forebear the Wangshi Yuan (2003, 28-29). There are too the elements of architecture, water, rocks, and planting utilized in creating a complex experience. It is the adherence to this code plus progression of it that creates the authentic.

See also Naming, Rocks and Mountains, Scale,

Lan Yuan, 2012; Ou Yuan 2014
Cueing

The place evokes a contemplative mood, and though there may not in reality be any breeze, you still feel as though there was wind everywhere. (Chen, 29)

Missingham (2001) identifies the issue of cueing or orientating of the viewer to the underlying ‘game’ as common to works of art and the Chinese gardens. Implicit qualities, in the gardens’ case, could be cued via strategically positioned calligraphic inscriptions utilizing a vast network of cultural/poetic references (44-45). A great many other codings are available to the participant depending on the level of cultural engagement. For example the extensive use of bamboo in the gardens holds an implicit relationship to the upright male figure, just as rocks are tied to vital energies, and water to the feminine. This is no less true for how we might approach western abstract form or motif. Colour as just one formal element is commonly used to cue particular readings. For example, in my own practice black and white are the classic colours of international modernism but equally represent the colours of my New Zealand homeland. These cues are not essential to reading the work but suggest, like the garden, that there are multiple paths through it.

See also Naming, Poetry, Literary Space,

Vitality

Questions of vitality (with its obvious link to the vital spirit of qi) are central. The vitality seems to come from the active viewer. Vitality may also interchange with the dynamic. Studying the gardens you gradually become aware that you are not working with an imagistic aesthetic so much as the aesthetic as machine for engagement. The configurations of the paths, the doubling of lang, use of optical devices in mirrors, the lake itself as mirror, walls designed as screens for the equally ‘designed’ temporal plays of shadow and light, unexpected framing of views, the many strange aspects of the rockeries including the import given to the way a rock sounds when struck – all of these things remove the possibility of passivity and encourage engagement in this world. As such all may be available to a more complex model of reductive abstraction.

See also Rocks and Mountains, Water, Viewer as Participant, Moving and Still,
**Reverie**

Among the materials used for the enjoyment of a garden, wine appears to have been indispensable. (Wang, 22)

Charles Jencks proposes Chinese gardens mix everyday use and contemplation over the purely contemplative functions more common to Japanese and English gardens (2003, 212). ‘Reverie’ might provide the better descriptor with its more active celebratory connotations and further removal from the sacred.

Think again of Clunas’ study of the Ming garden as a site of multiple economies. Or Wang’s listing of early scholar-hermit practices that point to a mix of creative solitude and cultivated socializing (19). The activities of a group of scholar hermits likely included: meditation, abstract philosophizing, composing and reading poetry, painting, and playing the zither, along with drinking wine, fishing, and making pills for immortality (19). Festivals and family occasions were also observed within the gardens.

See also *Poetry, Painting*.

**Mystery**

“If not for this hill,” observed Chia Cheng, “one would see the whole garden as soon as one entered, and how tame that would be. (A Dream of Red Mansions: Cao Xue-Qin 1717-91, 228)

Mystery is engendered via the semi-reveal of scenic elements at any one time (Fung 1996, 92). In this way it is not usually explicit but comes from the full range of garden experiences, usually beginning with a veiled entry, but continuing so that:

> At the end, the visitor will have no more idea of the plan of the garden than he did when he started, he will feel that there are innumerable parts he never had time to explore. (Keswick 2003, 37)

The role of the mysterious does also have some culturally specific sources tending to the semi-sacred:

> The whole area, a natural work of art, will resemble Yinghu, the land of the Immortals. (Ji, 65)
Grottoes allow the viewer entry to a subterranean world where, as in eighteenth and nineteenth century European gardens, there is an evocation of the sense of fear (Johnston, 90). This is an entirely mortal response and appropriate to the garden as microcosm of a total life-world. Here, fear like mystery or magic may also be one point on a continuum of bodily experience going beyond purely sacred or culturally specific dimensions. There is no reason why such feelings should be excluded from the experience of reductive abstraction. Many key works of minimalism and post minimalism deal with the body and encourage the experiential beyond the simply retinal. Morris and Hesse easily come to mind again but the open-ended cubes of Judd with their dark colour interiors might also be considered in this light. The concept of a gothic minimalism appears.

Within the garden and artwork alike, mystery and its veilings also has one very practical application – increasing the all-determining property of the large within the small.

See also Water, Rocks and Mountains, Doors,
**Magic Space**

A mighty rock welcomes the visitor to a magical other world. Fine bamboos play with their shadows, as if to the music of pan-pipes from over the water. (Ji, 121)

The space of the Chinese Garden might also be read as ‘spaceless’ in the sense that its abnormal patterns interrupt normal social and functional relationships of the city (Jencks, 214). * Out of this may come a ‘timelessness’ which could also be figured as ‘all-time’. Wonder, reverie, whatever we choose to call it, surely operates in such a place. Culturally specific ideas around the sacred may not be necessary to call up this magical/transformative space.

While there is a Magic World made of gold, silver, pearls, and jade in the Daoist construct, Daoist teachings aim at providing happiness in an eternal earthly life rather than an afterlife (Wang, 10-11). This balance of the transcendent with the here and now of the material world is a distinguishing feature of the gardens and another example of an oscillating bi-polarity.

If the sacred event must occur in real time and space, it also marks a shift in status – instantaneous, timeless, and possibly experienced beyond duration (Jencks, 216). Without predicing work on these cultural specificities reconsider the possibility of painting as a ‘magical – transformative’ space. If the magical is normally seen as entirely opposite to concrete possibilities in Western traditions it may at least be accounted for as part of the restless transitioning of opposites discussed elsewhere. Where transcendence is able to be inclusive of the material then the material might also be allowed transcendent possibilities.

Indeed, Zelevansky opens up ways into the magical through her writing on Oiticicia’s *Parangole* (wearable cape works) in noting the appearance of the word “magic” in the artist’s notes, and that there is a form of transubstantiation that occurs with the participant as the central nucleus of their unfolding. (Zelevansky, 21.) Other Latin American artists have also made appeals to the magical alongside concrete practices.

See also *Space, Water, Rocks and Mountains, Jing,*

* Jencks also talks of the garden as ‘Magical Space’.
Beyond Sight
The sounds of pine trees, of brooks, of mountain beasts, of nocturnal insects, of cranes, of lutes, of chess pieces falling, of rain dripping on steps, of snow splashing on windows and tea boiling are all sounds of the utmost purity. But the sound of someone reading is supreme. (17th Century. In Fung 1996, 92)

Sound, along with colours and fragrances could be borrowed (like the views) from a larger environment beyond the garden (Wang, 32). Closer at hand, acoustic effects of plants are also used, so a designer might work with rain dripping on the leaves of banana trees or lotus flowers, or the wind through pines (Fang, 116). This is frequently reflected in the names of sites within gardens such as the Lingering Garden’s ‘Refreshing Breeze Pavilion’, or the Humble Administrator’s ‘Listening to the Rain Pavilion’. Specific varieties of rocks when struck make differing sounds and were catalogued by Ji Cheng. The sensory input of sound might even be considered so essential as to be built into architecture:

To the south of the Daohe House is the Music Chamber in the shape of a half pavilion…the brick is hollowed out, imitating a seven-stringed zither laid on a brick. If one knocks it, the brick will give out pleasant sounds. (Yuan & Gong 2004, 89)

In the same garden, in its position beside a lotus pond, The Hall of Distant Fragrance actively incorporates the scent of the blossoms (Fung 1996, 92). Walkway mosaics, rather than being purely decorative, use texture underfoot as well as pattern to move the visitor beyond the purely visual into an animated participant. These mosaics as such have an active role in defining different spaces, providing changes in rhythm and mood (Keswick 2003, 160).

Not only is the garden a whole or ‘total’ environment, but each element within it also has its own fully developed sphere itself a ‘frame’, which then interconnects with every other. In this attention to all of the elements the classical garden made “living sights”. So as well as its key elements a garden would use seasonal and diurnal change, sounds, animals, and literary quotation as part of its form, meaning that full appreciation will only come from a preparedness to take on this complexity (Fang, 56).

See also Rocks and Mountains, Plants, Naming, Magic Space, Vitality,
Viewer as Participant

Obvious as it might seem, the constitutive role of the viewer in garden appreciation deserves highlighting (Fung 1996, 92). As opposed to the more static orientation of classical European gardens, or indeed the single perspective of much European painting that posits an external viewer, Chinese gardens are configured to garner the viewer as active participant. Arguably it is only in this moment of participation, where space and movement create time that the garden truly exists.

According to the Song dynasty ‘mountain and water’ painter Guo Xi (960-1279), it was important for artists to depict scenes as if they were ‘touring’ amidst it all. This use of multiple viewing angles with changes in distance and backdrops would concurrently aim to place the viewer within that same experience. This was as true for garden designers who themselves were commonly coming from these same ranks of painters and poets (Hu, 27-28).

Space in these gardens was not considered isotropic, infinite and empty, but qualified, relational and dynamic. (Fung 1996, 89)

Contributing to this situation is the utilization of allusive naming, the temporal relationships between elements of design, terrain, and viewer – plus the succession of views triggered by the active viewer (89).

To enter a garden is to take part in its pathways and devices. The performative nature of viewing is highlighted in many garden devices and offers further avenues for practitioners in the visual arts. The most immediate of these is the use of mirrors as experienced in all of the main gardens visited. This is also a function of the natural act of reflection in mirror ponds and lake surfaces where the viewer witnesses themselves in the scene rather than external to it. A jing may also be activated by the presence of another within it, such as a figure on a distant bridge.

See also Painting, Jing, Space, Moving and Still, Beyond Sight,
Stone boat, Shizilin Yuan 2012
On Endings.
At this point I direct the reader back to the reading instructions provided at the front of this Volume. Nevertheless, the references, cross-references (and transitional spaces between each reference) should continue to build so that this short attempt at indexing represents a fraction of the multi-layered space of the garden and any practice that might follow from it. INDEX is to be seen as a device in itself permanently under construction. It remains open and incomplete; a space of frames, screens, mirrors, and pathways.

After passing two partitions Chia Cheng and his party lost their way. To their left they saw a door, to their right a window; but when they went forward their passage was blocked by a bookshelf. Turning back they glimpsed the way through another window; but on reaching the door they suddenly saw a party just like their own confronting them - they were looking at a big mirror. Passing round this they came to more doorways (A Dream of Red Mansions, 242).

A good garden designer must probe and explore the history and art of garden construction past and present as well as study the aesthetic thoughts behind the art, and the historical cultural conditions accompanying each stage of its development. Then every idea of our design will have a precedent to go by, and every achievement of our predecessors, both Chinese and foreign, past and present, will be at our finger tips. (Chen,168)

When he got drunk, he swung the brush and painted the air of the mountains, the haze, the mist, and the clouds without a flaw…
(Ni Tsan 14th century. Quoted in Siren, 111)
A STRANGE ARRANGEMENT:
CONSTRUCTING CONTEMPORARY REDUCTIVE ABSTRACT
PAINTING THROUGH THE ANCIENT CHINESE GARDEN.

CRAIG EASTON

Volume 3 of 3

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The *Formwork* project explored the preliminary possibilities for utilizing a kind of roll call of structural and conceptual devices common to Chinese gardens (written of in the accompanying INDEX). Primary amongst these being the basic elements of architecture, rock, water, plants. As at this point in 2011, experience of the gardens was largely limited to Dunedin’s *Lan Yuan* and written sources, there was a need to account for these unlikely elements within the general realm of western reductive abstraction without falling into pastiche and mere appropriation. Additionally to be accounted for was the notion of viewer as active participant in the layout of what was to be my own Chinese garden. Here, certain works would oscillate between a utilization of changing angles for in-motion viewing and fixed angles for moments of repose.

One such fixed view was provided by the calligraphic brush mark image hung in the gallery entrance with the title of *Material-List*. Inspection reveals, rather than a work of brush and ink, the image is a photographic print made up of text - in this case listing the materials used in the exhibition. Text, image, and materials combine to reference the calligraphic brush plus Western concrete art and poetry.
Formwork more properly begins with the room sheet, and a compressing of space via the numbering of the further-most sited Concentrated Abstraction as the start of the show. This mirror work draws on the title of a Ming garden pavilion in the Wangshi Yuan and its attributed effect in adding “to the associated kaleidoscopic effect of colour, light and shadow” (Johnston 1991, 119).
In-motion viewing is intrinsic to the work, with the combination of the room sheet's directive and the play of mirror reflections intended to form a kind of compression of the long gallery space. This draws the attentive viewer instantly to the back - so that on return the exhibition or garden might open out with the same sense of expansion in a tight space witnessed via the corridors or lang of the *Lan Yuan*.

Within the room sheet another device is laid out in the game of ‘naming’, tending to multiple literary and descriptive allusions going beyond the strong focus on materials inherent to this project. This act of cueing wider aspects of culture and tradition runs across my use of the title, *Concentrated Abstraction*, which in addition to the above mentioned Ming source could also describe the use of seven overlaid spectral colours to produce a dark monochrome painting floating on mirror surface. Colour and monochrome are conflated along with mirror imaging bringing representation, and the ‘real’ into one combined moment.

Returning to the main room, on the long wall is a set of eleven relief constructions. Each relies on, and revels in the simple materials used including composite board, plywood, transparent acrylic, felt, gaffer tape, and acrylic paints. Recalling the discussion of oscillating opposites these constructions are a constant play between the opposites of solidity and emptiness, weight and weightlessness, flat space and deep space, front and back, monochrome and polychrome, reflection and void, hard and soft. Each of these qualities may be read directly through reductive abstract painting while also cueing elements from Chinese gardens such as the openwork of the flower windows and balustrades.

Reflective surfaces recall the mirror function of a garden’s central lake or void through to another world. Weight and weightlessness align with the qualities sought in a garden’s gravity defying rock mountains. The works also aim to balance between the built and the found, or a play between Confucian order and Daoist nature. No one of these elements is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but through applying ways of thinking drawn from my research new ways of making have surfaced. Working within the confines of the small-scale relief has provided a means to conflate painted and architectural space, with new understandings to play out in later projects.
Formwork 2011. Installation view, eleven panels, mixed media, 30 x 23 cm each. Individually titled
Essential to any garden are the core devices of architecture, water, rocks, and plants. The incorporation of architecture is an established part of my practice. But by what means might the more natural elements appear in reductive abstraction?

Lan Yuan. Dunedin 2011; *Unrelated Segments/Stone Classics* 2011. Formply, felt, transparent acrylic, mirror, adhesive vinyl, dimensions variable
Central in the main space sat the formply, mirror and felt floor work Unrelated Segments/Stone Classics. Whilst relatable to the minimalist floor works of Carl Andre or Robert Morris, the changeable configuration was constructed to test the use of the key principles used by the Chinese for rock selection which, paraphrasing Keswick, are Tou (go through, vulnerable, to walk or imagine a passage); Shou (delicate, feminine, without visible support, floating); Lou (leak, a series of holes open to all sides) (Keswick 2003, 175). The formply with its origins in concrete construction becomes a series of delicately balanced and stacked forms which, depending on angle of view, float, balance, reflect and absorb light, offering contrasts of transparency and solidity while remaining as static as a stone. The simple use of black adhesives, mirror, felt and transparent acrylic all play a part in generating the desired tou, shou, and lou.

Unrelated Segments/Stone Classics 2011

In addition to the function of rockery the configuration of this work also represents the use of solid form to take on the role of the central lake within the garden. Its winding, open-ended configuration based on the lake as being without clear beginning or end, with built forms always hovering just above its surface, results in a simple design lesson in the placement of forms. In Ming times there was a particular emphasis on the horizontal arrangement of rocks with those closest to water to be flat and so reflecting the orientation of the water’s surface (Johnston, 79).
From the floor to the wall: *Drenched Orchids (Soft Machine/Drenched Orchids/Cold Fact)* presents the viewer with a companion piece picking up on a re-presentation of the lake and plants. From most viewpoints the centrally framed Type-C photograph *Drenched Orchids* remains an inky-black reflective glass surface recognizing the use of the lake as monochrome in Chinese gardens. From other viewpoints, dependent on both changing and fixed lighting, an orchid floats to the surface again giving the viewer an active over passive role. The use of hard-to-soft and ordered-to-natural transitions of this piece once more draws on simple Daoist and Confucian oppositions without being in any way dependent on them. This extends on either side of *Drenched Orchid* with an amplification of the desire for oscillation over opposition with the playful nature of *Soft Machine*’s painted felt monochrome as void, and *Cold Fact*’s reversed mirror back.
Conceived as an integration of the scroll format, the four digital prints of *Flower & Rock Network* retain the ‘natural’ weft of paper. The digital paintings of each are variations on a Photoshop template constructed in 2008 and each work represents a new layering in an attempt to bring a sense of history, time, and physicality to digital making. Placement of the forms also references the three-distance method of reading (middle, high/fast, low/slow).
Finally I returned to architecture, examining the place of the wall as a permeable boundary through the visually subtle Viewmaster/Here. Rubbing wax onto a masked section of plaster, a simple rectangle created a kind of viewing slot or window directly into the wall. This artwork was intended to cue the use of borrowed views in Chinese gardens whereby carefully cut apertures would function as a picture frame bringing in highly selective views and thereby expanding the space. There was also an intended recognition of the traditional attention paid to the wall’s surface itself, where trowel texture and waxing are used to enliven the surface as a backdrop or monochrome in its own right, as well as suitable canvas for cast shadow. In this strategy, as with others, there is an attention to the craft of making, the changes possible on one surface, encouraging heightened degrees of viewing and activation of an expanded site – here the gallery architecture itself.

**Drawing to a (w)hole**

Eschewing an easy appropriation of exotic imagery or identifiably Chinese aesthetic styles the Formwork project illustrated the potential for reductive abstract practice to engage with the layout and essential devices of literati gardens including the built, water, rocks, calligraphy, naming, as well as the key concept of oscillating opposites. The deployment of these devices (which may be cross-referenced via INDEX) was evidenced in new ways to extend the connection between the artwork and an activated viewer in asking them to negotiate the ‘object’ over a simple ‘window’ or literal representation. This was seen for instance in the role of Unrelated Segments/Stone Classics as taking on the central lake’s role, as well as the stacked verticality of the
rockeries. Mirroring and reflection were also used throughout for maintaining the space as a dynamic site open to changes in (and therefore incorporating) light and movement.

*Formwork* was created as the exhibition proto-type, remaining purposely open and celebrating a manner of exposed construction through the very visible use of materials as opposed to their disappearance into a flattened painted ‘surface’.

Because of the desire to work off the compiled INDEX and to account for essential aspects of the gardens there is, in the final analysis, something like a grouping of ‘set pieces’ in the project. Certainly there is a demonstrated pushing of materials and mediums, plus in layout the establishment of a circuit of viewing. However this does not fully utilize that which the gardens provide – the immersivity of a painting to walk through. The following projects increasingly push into this territory.

Only in the performance does the play come alive, and only in the repetition and continuity of its performance does it truly exist. Crucial to the performance is the participation of players. With the Chinese Garden it is the same: without players there would be no garden because there would be no performance, no play. (Makeham 1998, 187)

*Formwork* 2011. Photo: Rae & Bennet
IN (A) SPACE: MOD LANG
+A private residential project, Foy & Gibson building, Melbourne 2012

Therefore, gardens with views for both "in-position" and "in-motion" viewing can make the area seem to contract or expand. They appear to have been drawn with bold brushes and a careful finish (to use the language of painters) …
(Chen 2008, 35)

How long can this go on? How long can this go on?
(Big Star, "Mod Lang" 1974)

Alex Chilton sings his plaintive chorus to the classic 70s Big Star power pop of Mod Lang. The song title is my bridge into this project. After all mod(ernism) and the lang are spun together right there in another one of those strange arrangements that beg us to reconsider our present moment.

Formwork was purposely literal in its testing and interpretations. It was approached as experiment and demonstration of set elements – with the garden as prototype.

The following chapter and associated projects, as architecturally situated commissions, look more specifically at bodily movement through space coming out of the gardens. Individual motifs are pared back to something approaching a simpler modernist aesthetic of reductive abstraction. In doing so I would argue the image and its aesthetic values ultimately become secondary to the experiential aspects of these works. The space is also possibly to be found as somewhere or something between that of a modern conception and that coming out of a Chinese garden.

I. M. Pei, Suzhou Museum 2012
After the fact, the *Mod Lang* and *Now & Then/Here & There* projects find their parallel (or is it validation?) in a belated discovery of I. M. Pei’s Suzhou Museum (opened 2006). Here is a thoughtful modernism responding to the history of place and time, the kind of regional modernism Frampton calls for. And one I have witnessed on a more humble scale in the work of Dunedin architect Ted McCoy where an architectural vernacular of Southern gothic meets modernism.

![Ted McCoy, First Church Sanctuary and Pacific Street House, Dunedin 2014](image)

The impulse would appear to respond to local form and tradition while making good use of the utility and grace of the modernist grid. That this occurs without resort to pastiche gives the energy of the painting over the picture. That is, in Pei’s thoughtful use and intimate knowledge of the Chinese Garden he has been able to take cues from the gardens without relying on a simple aesthetic reformulation.

![Suzhou Museum 2012](image)

Classic elements of pond, rockery, bridge, pavilion and bamboo are integrated into the innovative landscaping. The white walls and black tiles of the building maintain tradition whilst also functioning as contemporary architecture (Xin 2007, 17). Specific devices
are accounted for including the white walls of the courtyard as paper upon which the carefully positioned rocks and their shadows are the paintings. Borrowed views are carefully framed by interlocking series of decorative windows. A wisteria court lies in the heart of the building, its coiling tendrils maintaining a fluid calligraphic line amidst the geometry.

Experience of Pei, as with the ancient gardens and then that of Dunedin, tells me that the authenticity of these spaces is less about age and ‘provenance’ than about thoughtful intent and ‘authentic’ deployment of ideas.

Joseph Wang discusses the difficulty of reading the ancient Chinese gardens within China, as “a place where history is alive” when these gardens are often over populated by eager tourists such that any original intent is increasingly distant (1998, 64). In asking how the classical garden might be meaningfully incorporated into contemporary living he turns to another contemporary architectural work, the Fangta Yuan (Square Pagoda Garden). Incorporating three architectural relics of differing dynasties, the architects consciously diluted the classicism of the new structures ever outwards to reach a decidedly postmodern perimeter. The conscious use of space and time is exemplary in transcending “the distance between historical China and modern-day Shanghai”, with exploration and experimentation rather than historical imitation being the key (66). These treatments suggest ways to approach a (much shorter) history of abstract art. How for instance we might deal with now historicized forms in a contemporary practice – without recourse to pastiche.

*Mod Lang* was undertaken as a private commission project and represents an exploration of the garden’s possibilities for extending the role of abstract painting in a residential, or lived context. One way of considering this project would be as a reverse testing of the way Pei brings contemporary Western architectural models alongside and into the classical traditions of Suzhou. Here I have attempted to bring a Chinese model into play within a Western architectural and abstract painting tradition.

I had spent a number of years exploring options for this residential space without success. My primary focus was to make a ‘place’ (space plus time/movement) out of this under-recognized space of the walkway or entrance without falling into simple decorative modes or unduly fighting the existing architecture with its strong linear
perspective. Within Chinese gardens, doors and gateways are accorded special significance as transitional zones, and this in combination with thinking through the lang provided the key.

Most of our gardens in ancient times were enclosed ones with a view to creating a sense of infinite space within a limited area. (Chen, 61)
Mod Lang 2012. Acrylic paint on plaster, mirror acrylic, colored vinyl adhesive;

Duck Shooting Corridor, Wangshi Yuan, Suzhou 2012
The formal structure of the lang as winding semi-open corridor of framed balustrades is used as a generating formal device which then, as in the gardens, creates its own conceptual and perceptual plays. Running down the right hand wall a horizontal run of painted black frames rise and fall for a moving viewer. These may be seen as referencing the modernist grid, minimalist painting modes, frames of film - then equally the experience of the lang as an unwinding scroll, and the painted mark itself as calligraphy.

On the opposite wall these frames are mirrored in fractured form intended to evoke views through the frames - with the black lines suggesting geometric spaces. So the viewer not only walks lengthways alongside the wall, but is given the sense of moving up and down and even laterally ‘through’ the wall. In this way Mod Lang posits an active viewer inside the work looking out encouraging both in-motion and in-position experiences. Here we could return to INDEX and the hovering view region of Chinese painting which Johnston notes deals with both time and space, and the obvious correlations with a much later Western cubist model (Johnston, 51). This was also the mode of its composition with a constant (re)checking of each line from multiple viewing angles. It was essential that the work, like a lang, functioned as an independent structure (here a reductive abstract wall painting within the Western tradition) but also as this kind of unwinding scroll which could signal a relationship to movement and therefore time. This easy movement between 2D and 3D space is neatly summarized by Keswick:

…the garden, its space cells divided by white walls simulating mist, became a three-dimensional walk through a landscape scroll. (2003, 106)

Vertical mirrors of the same width as the black geometry are installed at either end from the wall work, looking back to the entry doorway and forward to the window. The window mirror’s backing is a solid orange stripe. Visible from the street it further plays with inside/outside and figure/ground relationships. The same orange then appears as a sandwiched strip in the profile construction of the door mirror strip. All of this is intended to feed into a kind of circuit view and reward for the peripatetic eye. This play across zones, completed in real time and infinitely affected by temporal changes in natural and artificial light, effects a kind of constant replay of the polarities of coming
and going, contraction and expansion - or the experience of the living body breathing, moving through time as well as space.

Of the multiplicity of views suggested in the experience of Mod Lang, its ultimate ‘view’ is to be found in this captured moment, the dematerialized experience created amidst the material structures of the works.

If strictly speaking this goes beyond the wall, the wall and wall-based painting are nevertheless strengthened as a viable site and tool through such studies. With the Chinese placing of importance on the wall as something much more than simple boundary form, it is the heightened awareness of such models that have led to Mod Lang. The wall and its transparent other, the window, become integral generators as well as markers upon which events are played out. Time, space and the viewer as participating body are captured in this reflection within a reflection. The image itself is a kind of diagrammatic of my investigation – the laying together of the twin fields of the Chinese garden and reductive abstraction.
The use of the lang model and viewing circuits continues into the second architectural project. Where there was a relatively traditional use of materials and a certain adherence to ideas and aesthetics of modernist flatness and the wall as picture plane in *Mod Lang*, this next project returns to a more expanded set of painting tools and conditions.

Thus great garden scenes come from alternating angles of viewing between mobility and stability. (Chen, 149 - 150)
NOW & THEN/HERE & THERE

+Architectural commission. 161 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda.

Covered walkways or *lang* act as arteries and skeletal structure for the garden. In linking one pavilion to the other they form a linear pattern connecting key directional nodal points when seen from above, (Johnston, 87)

The level surface of the lake is a boundless expanse of floating light; the outline of the hills is of delicious beauty. (Ji 1633, 120)

Initially taken on as a commercial architectural commission, *Now & Then/Here & There* became an opportunity to apply garden thinking in a public-private realm that somehow mirrors the historical role of the gardens themselves. Could the garden and its devices help navigate this territory?

*Working Drawings 2011-2012. (Digital rendering Martin Schaecher)*

*Now & Then/Here & There* stages its forms as a series of events intended to create a heightened experience of the building for residents and pedestrians alike. How, for example, do you add navigational complexity to such an intrinsically flat space as a building facade?

The central device is an 18-metre long canopy containing a back-lit lenticular (digital) stripe painting. Development of lenticular panels to this scale was highly experimental and required multiple contractors. (Here, as with my collaboration with the project architects,* design and fabrication decisions were figured as creative acts with no interference aside from budgetary or practical considerations.)*

* Martin Schaecher of Ascul Edwards Architects.*
The use of optical devices finds precedence in the gardens themselves with the constant use of mirroring and light effects. Clunas notes that the late Ming and early Qing was a period of experimentation with optical toys such as kaleidoscopes and zoetropes which create competing models of vision. Rather than simple physiological response such devices also help define vision as a creative act (1997, 132-133). With gardens functioning as a kind of release valve for a highly regimented daily life a political imperative might be placed on such creative acts. In thinking through this project, the celebration of optical and kinetic devices in the work of Latin American groups like Madi and Arte Concreto-Invencion could also be invoked where there is a certain alignment of industry and science with a radical abstraction working collectively against the irrationalism of authoritarian political systems.*

The horizontal/lengthways stripes are designed to shift with the pedestrian’s viewing angle so that they become complicit in the construction of the artwork (*Here & There*). Because the angle of approach will change with each viewing the artwork will continue to change – bringing temporal dimensions to the perceived static nature of both building and geometric artwork. This same/change duality could be aligned with the changing reflections of the lake surface in a garden, and from the outset this canopy was given the role of lake (monochrome, void, real-time image capture) around which all else revolves. Equally and somewhat more traditionally given its orientation, it was intended to function as the semi-covered walkway, the lang. In this it becomes a way of rethinking the navigation of this building’s façade. The pedestrian/viewer/participant is able to generate new views of the artwork/scene through looking up and down rather than simply along or across. Indeed, the situation and scale allow multiple angles of approach as an alternative to standard axial viewpoints. As such there is a mode of contract between the building as artwork and the viewer whereby rewards are given for active participation in the scene/work.

From further back a floating black geometric relief structure acts as a sculptural and architectural element visually framing the canopy. The reflective surface of high-gloss black aluminum itself is designed to pick up changing lighting conditions from both natural orders (sunlight through the street’s plane trees, and evening street and traffic lighting). It was intended that the back of the relief feature a high gloss white coating to increase opportunities for a ‘natural’ reflected glow back onto the building’s façade, thereby further extending the reach of what may at first appear as a static form. Although this particular feature was lost in the fabrication process, the cast shadow takes on much of this role. An increased attention to temporal and changing seasonal dimensions is part of any garden design but the Chinese appear to pay particular attention to this aspect:

> There are few flowers that do not wither, but fresh scenes can be enjoyed all year round. (Ji, 120)

The rapidly changing viewpoints within a garden moving from fixed/spatial views to in-motion/temporal views heightens the idea of change (which for the Chinese is also about the vitality of the Daoist life force of *qi*). Between stable space and movement lies time. Devices used include winding views to limit or sequence views, contrasting
openness and enclosure, while distortions in scale and distance further animate the experience of garden space beyond the static single perspective which limits viewing to a single moment in time (Li and Yeo, 52). In both structural and conceptual terms these devices appear throughout *Mod Lang* as well as *Now & Then/Here & There*.
The use of screens to frame and/or overlay views in gardens (sometimes referred to as embroidered windows) was applied to a set of street-level exit gates. A fractured Cartesian screen complicates the axial geometry of the canopy and also has a function in leading the eye into the driveway tunnel. Here rather than dead zone, the subterranean interior is treated as painted space with a series of perspectively altered floor-to-ceiling geometric stripes which offer the possibility of functioning like the vertical frames of the lang. These fluorescing painted stripes are colour-matched, linking to the horizontally orientated lenticular canopy. For the resident exiting the building this simple abstract painting is activated by the action of driving, and further mirrored in a tunnel-length mirror strip at driver eye height. As in Mod Lang there is a framing on one wall which opens up to a changing activated space in its opposite. Taken together these elements are intended to form a chain of interlinked events for in-motion viewing ensuring the experience of the building (and with it abstraction) remains anything but static. Once again the viewer moves into the role of active participant in the construction of their own experience - their own Chinese Garden.
Now & Then/Here & There 2011-2013. Fluorescent acrylic paint, and silver mirror acrylic mounted on composite wood spanning 2400 cm length
Inclusion of the exit tunnel in the commission was the result of thinking through Chinese models of the grotto as a kind of magical space, or entry into other worlds like that of the *Peach Blossom Spring*. Quite apart from the mythic, the grotto becomes a way of thinking through a forgotten space within such buildings.

In these two projects, reductive form is utilised to generate dynamic experiences of space and time, rather than falling into the trap of static or passive decoration. Abstraction and, by extension, aesthetics are shown to have a functional role in society by altering the experience of space in time. My thinking through and alongside the ancient Chinese gardens has made possible both of these results. The Chinese expression of *du hua* translates as the reading of a painting, implying a subject whose vision is moving such that a picture by its very nature cannot be apprehended at once (Clunas 1997, 119). Whether related to the unwinding of the hand scroll or the turns of the lang, the taking on of these conceptions is helping to generate new solutions with experiential aspects and aesthetics entwined in positive ways. These ways expressed via the projects above are intended to offer more integrated approaches to architectural art while extending the role of geometric painting in everyday life.

If there is an aspect of this project to be further investigated it could be some of the strangeness of the gardens themselves – or that which might increase the immersive dimension of the model. These projects are, after all, strongly rooted in architectural space and may still be somewhat bound by the limitations of such a conception. What happens when we broaden that definition of space?

All who were concerned with garden design sought inspiration from painting, and the exceptional qualities of the Chinese garden environment are very much the product of the Chinese method of representing in their paintings three dimensions on one plane, where there is no single viewpoint but many. (Johnston, 51)
Here & There/Now & Then 2011-013; Shizilin Yuan, Suzhou 2012
GARDEN AS REALM: BEYOND SPACE

In Andong Lu’s *Lost in translation: Modernist interpretation of the Chinese Garden as experiential space and its assumptions* (2011), we find a slippery process of interpretation in pursuit of an architecture both modern and national, in which Chinese modernist scholars since the 50s have tended to interpret the gardens within a dynamic series of spatial assemblages experienced within real time – or an essentially modernist space-time schema (499-502). Looking beyond architectural studies, Lu draws our attention to what may sometimes be a (mis)translation of realm as space, arguing “the Chinese Garden as a mental play rather than a bodily exercise” (515). It may be that *Mod Lang* and *Now & Then/Here & There*, to degrees, remain more fixed in that realm of bodily exercise.

In working through the garden pictorial record, Lu finds in opposition to the single spatial scheme of vista and site map/overview of the European garden a selective use and removal of elements to focus viewer attention, plus the use of human figures in activities representing segments of the gardens as ‘specific realms’ – drawing the viewer into the painting/garden as an imaginative realm over the efficient opticality of the European (506-508).
Prescient to this, Siren has noted Chinese painters’ use of space was very different from that of European art. Rather than space as a cubic volume able to be constructed via the application of the laws of geometry, it was (in line with ideas of the Void) something without limits. Forms and tonal values might be used in its suggestion yet it went far beyond these technical illustrative modes to include the material of bare silk or paper, the empty ground (Siren 1936, 97).

Lu successfully problematizes the over-identification (or simplification to the purely scopic) of architectural location and viewpoint in much Chinese garden theory. He does this through the example of The Secluded Pavilion of Parasol Tree and Bamboo within the Garden of the Humble Administrator [Lu uses the ‘Unsuccessful Politician’ translation]. Here he points to how an inner chamber with moongates on each of its four sides is not used to frame particular views but instead the deliberate relegation the visual regime demonstrates: “the introspective experience of seclusion” (514) which in turn may also be read (never limited) through its naming:

…from the inside, its four opposite moongates function as an introspective device other than frames for scenery. An individual sitting among these moongates is secluded from the external world which is reflected in the four ‘mirrors’ and consoled in their solitude by the natural friends of parasol tree and bamboo, which are known to be there rather than seen. (515)

Through the example of this pavilion, Lu presents the Chinese Garden as site of diverse literary and pictorial schema operating not apart (as typical western binaries would have it) but concurrently, and addressing both inside and outside sensibilities of a place. The participant moving through this space is active (and correspondingly ‘activated’) in switching between different mental modes with a resulting interweaving of the immersive and the visual (515).
In this use of Moongates and the ‘frame’ implied for inward as well as outward pictorial function, a line might again be stretched to the western monochrome and Malevich’s *Black Square* with its own twin role as both void and projector. What it may also introduce here is the idea of abstraction’s ability to operate via imagery. The negating of visual incident or deep space might be met in artistic practice with a certain kind of representational photography or even painting where surface, material, and depiction deny entry to the viewer and so work as something more akin to the monochrome. (Some of Gerhard Richter’s hyper-cool realism and the blankness of his subjects would seem to present these qualities.)

Just as Lu calls for a new metaphor of the Chinese Garden as deictic gameplay (523), we might ask for the same to be brought to reductive abstraction. Whilst the effects of experience of the formal object may be both aesthetic and temporal in terms of a body in and through space we can also use devices like naming, viewer interaction, and a continual shifting of focus to direct this viewer to encounter other bodies or realms – of content, immersive contemplation, reverie etc. In such ways ‘realm’ becomes a valuable term in signaling alternative approaches to western abstraction, slave to neither pure materialist or spiritual accounts.
To this naming of ‘realm’ as beyond the western-modernist translation of space-time might be added the web of correspondences between words, things, time, space, and culture laid out in Xin Wu’s *History, Neo-Confucian Identity, and Landscape at the Yuelu Academy* (2012).

Citing Chun-chieh Huang, Wu argues a Chinese pattern of historical thinking which moves back and forth in time in ongoing patterns of reciprocity bringing forth information and lessons to pattern the present, then returning to the past to ascribe meaning, which in turn may be brought back to enrich the present (80). One way of envisaging this looping of correspondences might be as a mobius strip with past and present in continual motion.

The multiplicity of things and phenomena known as *wanwu* or ‘the ten thousand things’ replaced any universal concept of nature in pre-modern China. Accordingly Neo-Confucianism *gewu*, or investigation of things, took central place in learning (Wu, 65). Using the ancient Yuelu Academy as example (AD 976 to present), Wu traces out how the gardens and surrounding landscape reveal an “interlacing of words and things” (66).

In the twelfth century meeting of two philosophers at the academy, Wu shows their naming of two pavilions (*Pursuing the Middle Way* and *The Greatest Height and Brilliance*) as operating on a dual level. The first locational, the other a textual reference to the Confucian classic *Doctrine of the Mean* (66). Thus bodily and spiritual ascent is conflated in what Wu calls bodily thinking – practiced through a study of the diversity of things and also the Confucian classics. In this there is a bridging of the experiential/material and the intellectual/moral (67), which points to possible bridging strategies for reductive abstract practices wishing to celebrate concrete practice whilst remaining open to other content. The engagement of thoughtful naming becomes a strategy to add material, philosophic and experiential substance. Within Chinese culture naming is a transformative act, a complex act of personal vision bringing meaning to things and sites in the material world (68). If naming can form a bridge between the object and the experience, it can also provide the bridge into realms of time. Wu identifies a pattern of “here and now” and “there and then” in the paired poems composed by these same philosophers. The first alludes to things as they exist, the second transports the mind (71). This thinking via the poems and the
landscape/site as concrete thing is for Wu to “be understood as part of the construction of history in China, which is not a narrative that unfolds in time but rather depends upon an unending circulation of correspondences between the different times and spaces of the past and the present” (73).

If we feed Wu’s “web of correspondences between words and things” (78) into Lu’s use of realm there is a rich space in which abstraction is able to play itself out through thinking between the object and our experience of it in space and through text, and in time. That it is able to do so without recourse to the decorative, being defined by or collapsed into representational and narrative modes offers valuable tools for this project.

It was with Lu’s notion of realm that I discovered the freedom to construct Concentrated Abstraction. The idea of the site or object as the concrete thing which holds time and space together and facilitates a dialogue between these points comes from Wu (72), but has consequences for my own thinking around the importance of material practices.

The projects are not intended as illustrations of these ideas and in some cases come prior to the discovery of the writing, which is not to say they are not enriched by these concepts. Another frame in the lang is created. The works/things may occur within it.

Again I argue for authenticity occurring in the deployment of these webs of correspondences more than the historical object via provenance, age or even cultural specificities.

The garden is portrayed as a dynamic configuration where the scene changes with each step. As you look at, and move through the garden you also become part of it as other participants watch you within it (Fang, 16).

Such thinking easily translates into strategies for the gallery. Here I think of the encouragement of heightened acts of looking which turns viewers into performing figures for observation from further away. In this sense the exhibition is able to use the microcosm of the object in all its fine detail to expand outwards into the greater viewing
space of the gallery – and then back again. In the process the whole space is activated.

Spatial effects and the use of borrowed landscapes allow garden architects to avoid the kind of rigid boundaries which would limit the sense of space and the imagination both (Fang, 17). Space is indeed intimately conflated with imagination, and Lu’s writing on the importance of ‘realm’ as opposed to the Western use of ‘space’ is essential here.

It is the understanding of the fluidity of boundaries between interior/exterior, the borrowed landscape or the ‘perfect’ object of focused attention that gives the visitor the illusion of walking through a natural space (Fang, 17). This distinction between space and realm is an important one if within ‘realm’ we reclaim another kind of space where we can rediscover ‘content’ – previously hacked from the formal body.

CONCENTRATED ABSTRACTION
+ East China Normal University, Shanghai. November 2012

Where Formwork consciously worked with inclusion of analogous forms for the essential elements of the Chinese garden (architecture, rock, water, plants) and layout devices, Concentrated Abstraction represents a more organic approach possibly born of a confidence working within the field for a greater length of time. It also relates to conception, relying on direct response to the ECNU gallery site as well as the gardens of Shanghai and Suzhou. By this I mean there was an immersive/experiential mode to the research quite removed from the largely studio/text-based research to date. Even in the case of Lan Yuan fieldwork there was a distance created by constantly reading the garden as transplant and translation that, despite its level of authenticity, meant a continual mental switching which just didn’t occur in China. At the same time I was interested in testing notions of the authentic beyond something linked to provenance, through age or cultural origin, and more to a conceptual authenticity that might be possible through maintaining and even progressing an originary concept.
With *Concentrated Abstraction* I was conscious of Lu’s identifying of ‘realm’ as a means to think through the layers of physical/experiential and mental play. To this I would now add a belated reading of Wu’s language of “correspondences” as something I was working with but until now not sufficiently, or as simply, named.

The ECNU gallery configuration, essentially a gateway entrance to an inner space cell surrounded by movable walls, provided a unique architectural opportunity to work within something that might approximate my first-hand experience of the inner courtyards of Shanghai and Suzhou’s gardens. The possibility of a journey through the exhibition space as something without strict ordering was to be realized with sliding walls adjusted to create space cells and gaps that could be viewed as verticals within the works, spaces to catch connecting views, or to enter.
A refusal to number the individual works encouraged further negotiation of the whole space beyond assigned viewing routes. The place of naming was consciously prosaic in places to allow for translation whilst signaling connections to place or function, to garden design and concepts, as well as personal-poetic associations (Shanghai Blue/Orange, Gateway, In/a World, Trouble Lantern/Slow Dazzle). The reuse of Concentrated Abstraction as a title from a key piece in Formwork also assists in developing a web of correspondences across the time and space between exhibitions. Networks of meaning are thus able to extend in multiple directions.

In line with the Chinese tradition of a radiating central point in architecture the exhibition could be considered to begin and expand from the interior, with my first-time incorporation of a large screen video problematizing any neat space-time continuum.
within the exhibition. *Lan Yuan/Dongchuan* held multiple functions. In the focus on an image of Dunedin’s *Lan Yuan* displayed on my laptop there was an immediate signaling of distance and translation between the modern transplant and the older ‘authentic’ gardens of China – specifically the *Wangshi Yuan*. Another layer of meaning was in the laptop’s siting within the geometric confines of my newly assigned studio within the ECNU Dongchuan art department. The hand-held camera also frames the view through the open door to the interstitial zones of the hallway and bathrooms beyond. Alongside the entry of personal content via the Dunedin based imaging, there is further diaristic content in the video having been shot in the first minutes of my arrival placing the work literally and conceptually at the heart of this project.

*Lan Yuan/Dongchuan* 2012. Digital video, 2:07 duration (looped)

The image may strongly signal place but, in its mirroring akin to that of a garden lake and the static, repetitive view, there are intended references to the monochrome in the same way we might consider Warhol’s 24 hour film of the Empire State building.

*Andy Warhol, Empire* 1964
Along with the use of video, *Lan Yuan/Dongchuan* also brings sound into my work for the first time with the capture of a student's traditional music scales drifting into the studio. After all, it is not just the views which are to be borrowed:

If you can have a Buddhist monastery as your neighbor, the chanting of Sanskrit will come to your ears…With the grey-violet vaporous morning or pale evening mist, the cry of cranes will drift to your pillow. (Ji, 45)

That these sounds remain ‘abstract’ scales allows for a natural fit with the reductive nature of the artworks, forming something of a readymade bridge with sound art practice, as well as an aural bridge between the ‘here-now and there-then’ of the Dunedin and Shanghai imagery. The question of how to meaningfully include the performative and acoustic elements of Chinese gardens was solved in the heightened consciousness of my surroundings that Shanghai provided. If I am to make a claim for the authenticity of the piece, it is that it comes directly out of a confrontation with the materials at hand (those ‘found’ materials here including sound and light).

In fact, it is the aural dimension that truly lies at the heart of the experience of *Concentrated Abstraction*, with its repetitive notes radiating outwards from the all-important central realm to confront the viewer/participant before all else. As with the mirror lake so often at the garden’s heart, this sound and vision is looping with neither beginning or end.

If *Lan Yuan/Dongchuan* forms a structural and conceptual core for *Concentrated Abstraction*, then *Shanghai Blue/Orange* both adds to and disrupts this experience. Taking advantage of video screens positioned at either end of the transversal corridor crossing the central entrance to the gallery space, these alternative entry points further the importance of thresholds as places to prime the visitor’s senses, whilst also celebrating the peripheral zones of the gallery.
The video plays in and out of reductive abstraction as monochrome painting, but for the use of readymade Chinese corrugated papers instead of painted colour. A hand-held camera pans the surface, wall, and framing edge of the alternate colours to produce a stripe painting in motion. The soundtracks on each section are again found, coming from the site of the studio; in the blue video incidental atmospherics of the studio; in the orange section The Clean’s *Side On*, adding the dimension of music and another personal link to the culture of Dunedin and site of the *Lan Yuan*. This addition of a (changing) acoustic element common to gardens is often signaled by naming such as the *Listening to the Birds Pavilion* of the *Yu Yuan*. Fighting with that of the (louder) central video, a certain attention to the edge of the space and other realms is drawn – just as the visuals also oscillate between colour and edge. In this can be identified an echoing of the wider conceptual thematic of oscillating opposites recorded in the earlier quoting of Andrew Plaks.

Clockwise from top: *Concentrated Abstraction* 2012, Installation view; Shizilin Yuan 2012; *Paper Room/Fuzhou* 2012, detail. Coloured corrugated Chinese paper, 5 sheets approx. 110 x 70 cm each
Through the use of sliding walls the participant is able to literally step between the electronic/video monochrome and the source material functioning as *Paper Room/Fuzhou*. In this way there is the possibility for a realignment by the viewer in which the qualities of close viewing and immersion in the colour and surface texture of the papers might equal the electronic glow and attractions of the screen, which in turn are revealed to be this simple source material. The physical enters the de-materialized space of the screen and the intensity of the screen transfers to the material. This stepping across boundaries encourages a kind of gameplay whereby the viewer is immersed in the ‘act’ of looking, or more properly ‘seeing’, over the passive eye. In the naming of *Paper Room/Fuzhou* lies a further appeal to this gameplay. Fuzhou Road is widely known as the premiere art materials district in Shanghai, and its inclusion means that as well as *Paper Room*’s simple descriptor for the gallery space there is an allusion to this whole world and history of making outside the gallery. The viewer is being offered another mental play beyond the bodily, which properly moves beyond space and into Lu’s use of realm in describing the Chinese garden as mental play over bodily exercise (Lu, 515).

![Concentrated Abstraction, Gateway 2012. Installation view](image)

The main gateway to the gallery and the exhibition was carefully framed, in line with its traditional role in signaling a point of transition and the accompanying heightening of the senses. *Gateway* featured two figure-height vertical panels of mirror acrylic with painted geometries which when read as one, and in relation to the space, form an octagonal gateway form common to Chinese gardens. But if it is something to look and move through, the mirrors also occasion a looking back (literally outside; metaphorically in time). Another aspect of this early staging of the mirror is (as seen in
my other projects but heightened here by the figurative dimension) a desire to immerse
the participant in the experience of the space from the earliest stage.

In the Chinese Garden, occupants often find themselves facing concurrent pictorial and
literary schemes, which address the outsideness and insideness of the same place: as
individuals move in and out of buildings, they frequently switch between different mental
modes, and obtain interweaving experiences of immersivity and visuality. (Lu, 515)

To the side, *In / a World* provides a different framing of space - one to look rather than
walk through. Two locally constructed stretcher frames are used as support and source
for some simple painted geometry. In this way the stretchers become both support and
painting, while their overlapped forms suggest a new interiority for the white wall they
frame or pierce, like a set of dual screens discovered in a pavilion of the Garden of the
Humble Administrator. Here before going through the entrance proper is a kind of
miniaturization of the experience, the framed mental play required of realm beyond or
alongside the bodily. One kind of space tips into another instead of being set against it
in typical binary mode.

![Zhuozheng Yuan 2012; In/a World 2012. Acrylic on wood, screws, 30.5 x 61 cm](image)

In similar ways the idea of following any neat viewing path disappears. The interlocking
of orders, or kind of chain effect, of *Mod Lang* and even *Now & Then/Here & There* is
replaced by the immersivity highlighted by Lu in describing ‘realm’, and by Ji Cheng’s
descriptions of paintings to walk through. This hyper-dimensionality is suggested in the
spaces of the *Lan Yuan* but it is in the encounter with Shanghai’s *Yu Yuan* and the
gardens of Suzhou that its effects are fully realized. Attempts to analyse this difference
are problematic. It is hard to ignore the palimpsests of age visible in the Chinese
gardens that add visible and evocative layers of history/time to the experience. But
more than this romantic tendency I think it is the complexity of the spaces themselves
and the sheer number of competing and overlapping devices at play. Documentation of
these sites goes some way to expressing this aspect. It is in this complexity, I believe, rather than the patinas of age or purely on cultural specifics alone that authenticity lies. And there is no reason why the contemporary garden, like contemporary abstraction cannot share in this complexity. I am suggesting again, the key to it is recognition of this space Lu has identified as ‘realm’ in all of its manifestations.

*Distant Fragrance* 2012. Gaffer tape, approx. 180 cm x 220 cm;

Hall of Distant Fragrance, Zhuozheng Yuan 2012
Elsewhere artworks have been further generated by, and cue, experiences found within the gardens. At the left hand end of the inner entrance (with Paper Room at the other) sat Distant Fragrance. Its title an obvious local reference to the famous main hall in the Garden of the Humble Administrator, this black gaffer tape work seeks to extend a relationship between the modernist grid and the screens of Chinese architecture, serving structural, layering, decorative, and framing functions. Here the bands of the existing partition walls were incorporated into the taped grid. In places walls were slid slightly apart, so that flickering light and movement from behind the walls and outside of the gallery might cue the idea of the grid as a temporal device for seeing, moving beyond any strict formalist rationale. In another kind of transparency, tape rolls are left hanging where they end on the composition so that any chance of the formulaic or slickness would be avoided. Instead there is, as with In/a World, an awkwardness the Chinese call zhuo, valued as the opposite of the skilled artificiality of the professional/court artist (Missingham 2001, 3.2). To this definition one might add a celebrating of thoughtful over clever, and slowness over speed, with the authenticity of a work bound up in such boundaries. Far from alien to western conceptions we can trace similar usage in areas of modernism and its posts. Most of the artists I have previously identified including Stella, Morris, Hesse, Oiticica, Ryman, Marden, Batchelor, Hotere, Driver could readily be identified with zhuo. Throughout my own projects this 'awkwardness' is consciously used as a way to avoid falling into a more easily assimilated decorative mode of abstraction.

There is also a wish to identify with the open nature of the prototype running strongly through the work in Concentrated Abstraction. If a work like Distant Fragrance has a relationship to architecture it is a propositional architecture which attempts to go beyond simple, functionalist space and further into the interconnected physical and imaginary realms of the hyper-dimensional, where the ‘web of correspondences’ of Wu’s writing might be accommodated. Importantly it is achieved with materiality and allusion over the trickery of illusion. The readymade aspects of materials and limited adjustment of them, as with the identification of zhuo, is deployed as a means of maintaining the integrity of the work.
Two breaks in the wall, to the side of *Distant Fragrance*, allow for views and access through to *Trouble Lantern/Slow Dazzle*. The central element in this space cell was a hanging tangle of transparent plastic cord and electrical cable reflecting into a floor mirror, with small mirror surface paintings strategically placed around the walls. As well as a celebration of simple, found industrial materials the hanging piece made multiple allusions. Among these could be counted the drawn line, the gothic body, the extension of abstract painting through works of Pollock, Morris, and Hesse. A further realm opens up when considering wisteria vines sometimes cover garden walls in the intended manner of an ink painting. Possibly the most famous of these vines is that planted by the Ming painter Wen Zhengming in the Garden of the Humble Administrator. Cuttings from this vine have been used in an atrium in I.M. Pei’s Suzhou Museum and it is this existing case of transplant and translation through history and through modern/postmodern thought by Pei which I found a local audience ready to connect with.
Situated interstitially between wall, ceiling and floor, *Trouble Lantern/Slow Dazzle* represented another spatial extension of practice as well as the use of reductive abstract form to reach into realms accessible through knowledge of history and tradition. One way of looking at the gardens is as being sited between the unusual and the traditional, with tradition actually the dominant force (Fang, 51). My earlier discussion of Makeham’s naming practices also accounts for the dimension of tradition as a valid one in accounting for the full complexity of the gardens. Without being determined by the past, the full dimensionality of the garden, and the art experience is unlikely to be present without some accounting for it.

In this cell and others, small paintings and constructions with a focus on materials were placed throughout the gallery to offer static focal points for in-position viewing and/or move the participant through the space, with changes in scale, colour, height, and reflection used to alternately speed and slow the process. With no single focal point the aim was to leave the viewer feeling like they are inside, moving through the exhibition/garden ‘as’ painting.
Concentrated Abstraction/Room for Contemplating Paintings 2012. Mixed media, dimensions variable
Concentrated Abstraction/Room for Contemplating Paintings 2012. Mixed media, dimensions variable
With *Concentrated Abstraction/Room for Contemplating Paintings* there is an intended re-focusing on the act of painting, with a room devoted wholly to wall-based painting works. The naming makes reference to the *Appreciating Paintings Studio* of the *Wangshi Yuan*. Whereas much of the other exhibition layout encourages viewing in-motion, here the small works are hung in tight clusters or single format on individual walls for in-position, contemplative viewing. In slowing down the act of viewing, rewards are offered in the heightened attention to colour, light, materials, and experimental construction displayed in these small works. And if the other space cells were predominantly working to expand reductive painting ever outwards, here the simple return to painting and materiality in ‘concentrated’ form is intended to again evoke a bellows effect, a drawing of breath in preparation for expansion into further dimensions.
Every one of these structures was fashioned by the eye and drawn by the hand of Qu Yuancun himself, and he named each and every one of them himself as well. The land area of the garden is no more than a couple of mu but nonetheless the garden seems to embody the delight of an endless circularity, and although the dwelling stands close to the marketplace it manages yet to convey a sense of the forgetful clouds and the rivers. It is as if this garden contains, therefore, both the ‘expansive vistas’ and the ‘hidden mysteries’ spoken of by the Tang man-of-letters Liu Zongyuan as constituting the two modes of travel. At the same time, although the garden is no longer as it was in the past, by retaining the name ‘Master of the Fishing Nets’, its present Master has attended appropriately to the past of the site. (Qian Daxin 1795. Quoted in Campbell 2008)

There’s a sea of possibility up there.
There’s a wall of possibilities up there.
There are several walls of possibilities up there. (Patti Smith “Land/Horses” 1975)

Concentrated Abstraction provided the opportunity to directly reference, or even represent, known aspects of particular gardens to a knowing audience. To some degree, beyond use of naming and various devices I allowed a kind of literal ‘picturing’ to come into play – particularly through the central video with its image of the Lan Yuan. With 50 Variations I made no such statement. The local audience has little knowledge of, or affinity for Chinese gardens as aesthetic or cultural formation. It is a paradox of my research that even as I seek to elucidate the gardens it has not been the primary purpose of my research projects to directly ‘educate’ the casual viewer on Chinese gardens and so engage them in some kind of East/West narrative. Inevitably these conversations and connections will occur in time, not just via the structures but also in the triggers set up through naming. Instead, in the first instance, I have increasingly tried to apply my research to generate an experiential/immersive model for reductive abstract painting. This is an important point to restate as it is to the world of making, and the art object this project belongs.

With 50 Variations I continue to combine formal devices of the gardens with an expanded painting practice. These devices occur in the overall layout or sequencing of the works, as well as the individual works themselves in all their physical details.
There is an ‘experiential’ relationship between viewer and artwork which, as with *Concentrated Abstraction*, is further extended through a network of allusion to create something ultimately more immersive than a geometricized space/time reading.

If Lu’s use of ‘Realm’ is to be meaningful here it still has to be inclusive of the experience in space and time as a direct confrontation between participant and art object(s), rather than some kind of binary model akin to a formal/content or body/mind split. Realm will thus become the knitting together of these impulses as a kind of multi-dimensional flow generating outwards from the object. Reference could also be made here to a modeling of Chinese thought as radial system extending itself outward from a magnetic centre – capable of also drawing into its field the diversity of other centres constituting its outer circles (Hall & Ames 1998, 176-177). Such modes of knowledge organization can be found in Chinese encyclopedias (*lei shu*) using open ended, radial principles over the formal taxonomies of the western variety (176). Immersion may then occur at any point. It is not a matter of simply entering the space and reading a direct confrontation/relationship with architecture as installation. Consider instead that moment of a first step in the ocean; specific action in time and space, instantaneously connecting to that colossal body of water and all that occurs within it.

This is no escape into what Xiao terms a lyric enclave. Instead the art experience is able, as direct encounter, to set up the possibility of many other encounters, some fixed in the material, others in the networks of allusion I have attempted to outline in the projects and writing. These allusions remain real whether to the power of a song/lyric or to art histories and other art works, architecture and spatial relations, the body, the power of the cinematic and digital screen. If some of this goes against the more defined canons typically informing the ‘reductive’, previous sections of writing have attempted to show these canons more complex than some might paint them.

I have used (and continue to use) the terms ‘open’ and ‘openwork’ at various points throughout this writing. It originates in the architectural—with special reference to the shaped windows and doors, layered screens and ‘embroidered’ windows of Chinese garden architecture. In time it also becomes a way of describing the relief works and other pieces which feature layered views, transparency, or ‘open’ construction. Beyond the physical form it describes an intention whereby the works in their spatial and conceptual configuration are purposely open in such ways that the viewer is left to
construct their own complex of experience and readings. Umberto Eco has previously framed the term in *The Open Work* (1989), seemingly making an argument for an informal art still bounded by some kind of rule: “A work of art can only be open insofar as it remains a work; beyond a certain boundary, it becomes mere noise” (100). To avoid becoming “mere noise” (or for Greenberg the “arbitrary object”) requires some kind of conscious organization of signs by the author, with equal preparedness on the part of the reader to draw out the field of possibilities inherent to these signs and their formal expression in the artwork (102–104). For Eco the reward of such a contract and the pursuit of openness is that we, “conceive, feel, and thus see the world as possibility” (104).

The experience of *50 Variations* begins with a reversal. Working with the common opposition of fullness and emptiness, and with the idea of creating the anticipation sought in Chinese garden entries such as that of the *Yu Yuan* where a wall is used to both block and mark entry of the garden, *Blank Generation/Mirror Wall* was inserted as a physical wall/architectural adjustment in the gallery’s entry zone. Equally it functions as a monolithic white monochrome in space. Already then the work aims to cross ""
garden device with western architecture and painting practice. This continues in the subtle wax varnishing of the reverse side of the wall, which is a reference to the mirror wall techniques of Ji Cheng’s manual, as well as simple transference of my own traditional attention to painterly surface to that of the wall as canvas for light and shadow play. The viewer’s heightened act of transiting this point is then reflected too in these transitional conversations occurring in the object itself. Again the game of naming is used to both describe and generate other networks of meaning available to the form. Blank Generation would be recognizable to many of my audience as the title of the classic Richard Hell and the Voidoid’s NYC punk album of 1978. The radical do-it-yourself energy and attitudes of this musical-cultural period have their own special relationship to the earlier described ‘zhuo’ as the preferred ‘amateur’ aesthetic of the Ming and Qing literati. In discussing the ideals of famous Ming painter-poet Wen Zhengming, Craig Clunas writes (of), “…effortless withdrawal, a disinterested engagement from the mundane. However it is a disengagement that functions to create opportunities for re-engagement, for re-intervention in the mundane sphere” (1996, 106). Here, as with punk or in the refusals of dada, we are reminded that aesthetics and the socio-political are never far apart. At the same time there is a descriptive-come instructional intent in the title with the wall intended to form blanks, to generate a ‘void’ for the participant before proceeding – in line with Chinese practice. A further tangential allusion is to the library of the Wangshi Yuan, by one translation known as the Void Collecting Studio.
Blank Generation/Mirror Wall was part of a wider strategy for the exhibition working consciously with the opposites ‘known’ or ‘familiar’, and ‘unknown’ or ‘strange’. If its role is to block or veil, Blank Generation/Mirror Wall is necessarily also about a reveal. As an artist I have an extended history of exhibiting in this particular gallery space. As much as this knowledge of the space can be helpful, the familiarity can also be a problem for artist and audience both. How might the ordinary be made new? If this ‘wall’ was the first part of the answer the next lay again in a structural device with multiple architectural, conceptual, and painterly functions.

As with Blank Generation, Vertical Hold/Slow Dazzle works first as architectural intervention, but again it is an intervention that is about changing of views as well as movement through the space. On one level the desire to make ‘unfamiliar’ operates again. A set of aluminium channel and transparent acrylic constructed ‘stripes’ were installed through the main gallery, taking up the interstitial, connecting polished concrete floor to aluminium-ribbed ceiling. The stripe as simplest of geometric expressions and reiteration of the supporting canvas appears throughout the history of abstraction, and is prominent throughout my own work – including the painting and relief constructions of 50 Variations. These ‘stripes’ played multiple roles and carry many reference points outside of painterly histories.
The dominating air-conditioning duct, long an intrusion in the gallery space, was playfully connected with a diagonal ‘supporting’ stripe. Other possible connections were available to the viewer via Richard Serra’s *Prop* 1968 or the act of propping aged trees in gardens.

*Vertical Hold/Slow Dazzle* 2013. Aluminium channel, transparent acrylic, stainless steel fixtures, 371 x 2 x 1.2 cm (5 pieces – adjustable).

The remaining vertically fixed pieces were modeled on the zigzag pathways and lang used in gardens to expand the smallest of spaces. The interior volume of the gallery
then becomes about an enriched series of viewing axes for the wall (and floor) works. Each *Vertical Hold* becomes a framing component within the lang, directing and framing views as the participant moves through the space. Wanting to achieve something more than architectural device each piece is intended like a painting to also possess its own value, and its own *jing*. Hence the transparent sections and internal mirror strips which provided open and unexpected views, flashes of light and colour through the solidity of the aluminium element. There was a conscious use of the verticality of the rockwork in gardens too, and the attention to eyeholes in forming and focusing views.

With a *jing* ultimately read as, “a view that appears bright, bounded, emotionally connected, and poetical to the mind” (Zou 2011, 60), the framings within *50 Variations*
take on an increased importance. Emphasizing an interactivity between view and viewer (56), this jing might then be considered an essential component of ‘realm’ in providing a formalization of the connectedness between the specific directed view and other fields making up the wider ‘realm’.

These were not just frames we look through or use to guide and mark a path through the gallery. Instead, in combination with their cast shadows they also formed ‘virtual’ volumes within the gallery akin to the open-sided ting or pavilion of garden architecture. According to Zou, “Buildings play a crucial role in composing a jing” (58). While for Keswick, “In a Chinese garden architecture is more playful than useful…” (2003,131). Drawing on the scholar Biaojia Qi, Zou writes of the pavilion not as a scenic beauty in itself but as active in gathering, selecting, and stimulating jing (58). In such ways the open-sided ting might correspond to a sort of immersive viewing device from which to experience the garden’s many views. And instead of mere ‘stripes in space’ these forms are intended to situate the ‘active’ viewer inside of their own viewfinder or
kaleidoscope – the *Slow Dazzle*. This interactive relationship between viewer and *jing* could be further extended to other participants, with the viewer ‘framed’ as a view themselves for others taking up differing perspectives, within what quickly becomes a multi-directional performative space.

*50 Variations* 2013
The Orange Pavilion, Zhuozheng Yuan, 2014
By its naming, *Vertical Hold* makes reference to function as is common in Chinese garden practice – with the verticals referencing a scaffold. There is, of course, a secondary meaning with ‘vertical hold’ referring to the picture stabilization device particularly important on older television sets. *Slow Dazzle* describes an effect but also makes reference to an album by musician John Cale. (Essentially a greatest hits package this format itself tends to mix up lineal time and even genre while bounded by its format – here the 12-inch vinyl record of its initial issue.) Again naming is used for multiple purposes bringing together the prosaic and more poetic realms.

If *Vertical Hold/Slow Dazzle* was framing views (including those imaginary ones set up through naming), many of these views were of the central work wrapping three walls of the gallery – the eponymous *50 Variations*. The foundation for *50 Variations* can also be traced to a set of six studio paintings completed 12 months prior as a ‘control group’ (and not featured within the exhibition).

The idea that there could be one perfect ‘control group’ is a fatuous one. If we begin with the common ‘square, circle, triangle’, then soon after comes ‘line, colour, tone, support’. This is where my control group ends. It is a hopeless task – as the variations
multiply each time one considers this circumscription of abstract language. The task of the control group was, in fact, to provide something to work away from, setting up a formal field, which then provides endless room for play. The closed system is open. Concentrating on variations, the act of mere simulation is more easily avoided.

Variations occur then in manner of construction, degrees of painterly expression, relief depth, of process, materials, mode of fixture, colour, solidity, transparency, in spacing, and sequencing. Such elements can be read through (and were often generated by) the use of oscillating opposites of Chinese gardens, just as they can also be read through histories of western abstraction including constructivist, non-objective, minimalist, post minimalist and pop lineages discussed elsewhere. Whilst many of these works did not read as traditional painting the focus on colour, light, surface, and the two-dimensional ‘picture plane’ ensured they remained readable ‘as’ painting in the expanded sense I have consistently claimed for reductive abstraction.

Where painting as object and construction was also researched within Formwork and Concentrated Abstraction, not only were these new works more open in their individual ‘variations’, they were configured to ‘enclose’ or ‘embrace’ the viewer with the use of
the three walls. Once again there was no numbering to encourage a lineal reading. The various viewing axes set up by the other works placed in the gallery encouraged multiple entry points, such that viewing becomes a dynamic experiential proposition. In this could be found a furthering of immersive space, and the placing of the viewer as moving participant within the work looking out, connecting to concepts of gardens as three-dimensional paintings.
In the number of works and in their architectural configuration, a key garden proposition was utilized for *50 Variations*, namely ‘the large within the small’. Apart from the spatial definition, another way of thinking through this could be John Coplans writing on serial form in twentieth century art in *Serial Imagery*:

…each work within a Series is of equal value; it is part of a whole; its qualities are significantly more emphatic when seen in context than when seen in isolation.
(Coplans 1968, 34)

Yet there is no attempt to deny the individual artwork its complexity, the pleasure in its materials, or to let it be consumed by architecture, design, or the need to ‘match’ the garden. This is not about a relegation of painting in some kind of either/or proposition. The attention to detail within the constructions of *50 Variations* ensures each is still able to operate as ‘painting’. Again from Coplans:

Each single work in a Series must be complete in itself and therefore may be shown in isolation. (34)
50 Variations 2012-2013
Another work aiming to be complete in itself as painting and object, whilst also fulfilling multiple functions within the wider project, was *Shape Work/Flower Mirror*. Within the field of abstract painting there is an immediate reference to the early black shaped paintings of Frank Stella, here displaced from a traditional relation to the wall and into the expanded space of the gallery as a floor work. Equally it makes reference to, and draws its structure from, the zigzag bridge common to Chinese gardens with its chosen line constricting and expanding to slow, and so enhance the viewer experience (Fung 1996, 92). As with the bridge, carefully floating above the ground/water surface means *Shape Work/Flower Mirror* displays a weightlessness that plays off its apparent solidity. In an interplay of the gardens’ orders, the surface of the structure (black aluminium composite panel and transparent acrylic on plywood) also operates in this context as the dark mirror of the lake capturing both viewer and the surrounding works as a series of ‘in-motion’ and ‘still’ reflected images. The title *Shape Work/Flower Mirror* refers to an ancient garden pond and clearly speaks of its function in capturing beauty. By thinking through this naming and the role of the reflective central water surface in the gardens, this simple structure was able to re-present and thereby further extend the objects of *50 Variations* beyond the wall in the manner of radiating centre. Looking down into the surface of *Shape Work/Flower Mirror* becomes a key jing, and offers strategies for how the interplay of artworks within the exhibition context might achieve heightened senses of immersion.

Frank Stella, *Nunca, Para Nada*, 1967
Shape Work/Flower Mirror 2013. Aluminium composite panel, transparent acrylic, plywood, felt, in 3 parts (total) 330 x 53 cm
Material-list/Engine 2013. Type-C print, timber frame, 60 x 92 cm
Material-list/Engine in naming describes a kind of instructional function. Here we have the exhibition stripped bare again, reduced to a list of materials, a celebration of the concrete, but also alongside its own image as a work placed within the finished exhibition – a photo within a photo. Apart from its function within this particular exhibition it offers something of the idea of the garden as microcosm, or the tray landscape, which makes something nomadic of space, time and place. This view within a view plays with lineal space/time logic in an attempt to be more than a ‘picture’ and something closer to an allusive jing, where there is an attempt “to establish the connection between the present and the past” (Zou, 72).

Heard before it is seen, Listening to the Rain/Wave Pavilion creates the central experience of 50 Variations by creating a flow of sound and energy, making possible an increased immersivity which might match that of the garden experience.

For Diedrich Diederichsen, musical minimalism is about an investigation of sound rather than the syntactical and sequential shape of music, providing a drone or pulse that liberates the listener from event driven sequential time for a pure duration – a flow of experience (2004, 123). Within 50 Variations, sound provides a complementary axis to those formed through the clustering of elements already discussed. In Daoist terms one could argue for its role as a qi-like energy with its ability to flow freely and connect all things. In western thought his flow might also be accounted for through the ideas of Henri Bergson with his celebration of an elan vital and concept of ‘duration’ inclusive of past, present, future (Cottington 1998, 48).
Edition of 5

A video projection of a black and white *Danelectro* guitar floats on a sheet of reflective black aluminium composite panel, forming an horizon line against the white wall of Gallery 2. An orange lead flows calligraphic like from the guitar and is cut at image edge. The image doubles, like the reflection of a bridge over a lake. The image itself is intended as a bridge between sound/music content, painting, and the reflective space of the garden.

These ripples of association in turn also reach back visually and structurally to *Shape Work/Flower Mirror* as a bridge structure in the main gallery. In turn this doubles as lake surface, capturing the multiple reflections of *50 Variations* as the viewer walks around it. This looping of experience, structure, and conceptual referencing, is the key to locating the viewer inside the work instead of simply looking ‘at’ it.

The act of naming here aims at different triggers for different sets of viewers. *Listening to the Rain* and [Surging] *Wave Pavilion* make immediate appeals to Chinese sites, and the work as architecture. More importantly they simply describe what is laid out here. The temporal, acoustic element of rain is captured falling on the roof of the gallery where the film was shot and is showing. The *Wave* of the split title can also allude to
the repeating waves of distortion flowing from the amplified guitar. Equally there is an instructional element implicit in the naming with the act of listening and flow highlighted. In maintaining this game it is not merely the encouragement of different entry points, but also the maintenance of those differences to create a dynamic narrative for the work that is forever in the making. The certainties of the filmic narrative are made painterly (and “poetical to the mind”).

The fascination of the screen is that it is both surface and infinite depth, or for Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe: “Everything that painting is not: an uninterrupted surface born of pure reason” (1996, 15). Reductive painting with its frequent attention to surfaces flat, reflective, or inflected may well play in-between such definitions. Listening to the Rain consciously avoids neat resolution. Actually it is an issue of pixel resolution which gives this piece its painterly moment and movement within stillness. The act of projection sends a steady flicker across the otherwise stable HD image:

…the video image is one of intensification – it makes the world more than it is, more colourful, more defined – which at the same time robs things of their substance. (14)

Neck/Surge/Lake/Machine/Ocean 2013. Acrylic on composite wood with DVD insert and USB, 20.5 x 15 cm each. Edition of 5

In this case, ‘substance’ is returned via the use of wall as screen, the visceral impact of waves of feedback rising and falling in volume, and more specifically the thin brightness of the projected image is ultimately contained as a series of editioned discs within hand constructed cases also functioning as a line of paintings on the side wall. The geometric paintings on the cases are recoverable as forms and colours from the video work. On the corridor wall opposite the screened image is an image of the work’s own making. Solid State is a pictorial record of the equipment/stage setup for the video
shoot. Face mounted to 10ml acrylic with box lighting this ‘analogue’ piece paradoxically reads screen-like in its glow. As an integral part of the work, this photo/object brings everything back to the materials and process of a reductive art. As part of the editioned set it is a record of its own making, the visual equivalent of the drips caught on a canvas profile.

*Solid State* 2013. Type C photograph face mounted to 10 ml transparent acrylic, with aluminium composite panel, 23 x 36 cm. Edition of 5

In packaging all the elements as an edition was the implicit premise that one was able to take away the whole space as both object and experience – a kind of bound trio or something like a total realm. Here again the idea of the tray landscapes as (potentially nomadic) miniaturized gardens within the gardens fed into this thinking. Rather than a ‘copy’ of a mountain landscape it ‘becomes’ the landscape. Applied to the edition, as a way of thinking, this encouraged me to find this method by which an editioned video might exist in a state beyond a technologically driven stream of light.

In the end corridor, a permanent diagonal shadow is cast on the wall. Photographed, mounted in a plexi-glass frame and placed back on the wall, it is shadow and light made concrete – the ‘viewed’ captured and reconstructed within the view, itself continually mediated by the reflections on plexi-glass. As a low-resolution photograph,
Concrete/Harmony (in my head) appears painterly despite its origins. Of the wall it is also a journey through the wall and via reflection back into the gallery proper. Concrete yet also ephemeral, still, yet in motion, this final work, this non-painting ‘painting’ offers its own version of the concrete to the entrance’s painting/wall, Blank Generation.
If the viewer is pulled into a kind of endless circularity by such structures, the sense of enclosure should never feel stifling. Instead the multiplicity of artworks and their devices are intended to offer endless *jing* operating between two poles of the physical and non-physical.

*Concrete/Harmony (in my Head) 2013. Installation view (with Framework/Unintentional Painting and Openwork/Black Garage)*
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Wen Zhengming, *Elevation for Remote Thoughts* 1533
Remote Thoughts.

A garden scene can be viewed either from all sides or by entering it. (Yang 1982, 70)

Here comes the ocean. And the waves. (Lou Reed “Ocean” 1969)

This project began with a bug. The idea that abstraction, and its reductive varieties in particular, might have reached a used-by-date and been hopelessly corrupted took me into some new territories. Stepping into ‘a’ Chinese garden led me to look at and for ‘the’ Chinese garden as some kind of savior. Twisted logic possibly. Ostensibly a site of difference, Dunedin’s Lan Yuan as a ‘Garden of Distant Longing’ is also a place of personal significance. Sited in my home city of Dunedin, and first discovered with my then terminally ill father, regardless of other academic, artistic rationale, it might be argued that the true source of this study begins then, like the art object itself, within the artist’s subjective biography. Yet having spent the last three years moving through the pathways of the Lan Yuan, the gardens of Shanghai and Suzhou, as well as those of the printed page, some small proofs have been gathered.

If the Chinese gardens exemplify the effect of constantly shifting grounds and viewpoints as a way to enrich the viewer experience, a commitment to Western contemporary practice and its histories remains. I took these shifting viewpoints into my idiosyncratic survey of the field of abstraction, seeking out artists, artworks, and historical moments where shifts and fissures allow for stories opening up the field, rather than taking the pre-fixed position of an oppositional politic.

I have highlighted certain abstract practitioners including Ryman, Stella, Marden, and from New Zealand, Hotere and Driver, who offer models of reductive abstract painting which sit uneasily within the strictly modern or postmodern, yet also work within something we might still call ‘painting’. There has been a serious attempt to show the positions around modernist formalism, minimalism, and pop as somewhat more fluid than commonly made; and to place the reader within this conceptual landscape. Rationalising this approach I turn to Hu Dongchu’s discussion of Song dynasty painters’ influence on garden design where a state of touring rather than looking is sought, where painter and viewer feel as if actually in the wild landscape (1991, 27).

* I borrow this phrase from Cao et al (2008) who, as the Shanghainese designers of the Lan Yuan, wished to underscore the “distant longing” felt by Otago’s Chinese settlers (48).
The gradual seeping of such conceptions into the writing of this dissertation has, hopefully, allowed the reader to take their own constructive position – just as it also tests and demonstrates an ongoing interlacing of words, ideas, and making in contemporary abstract art. Indeed I have spent a lot of time in histories Eastern and Western, hoping to reinforce its centrality to the navigation of the ‘wild landscape’ of our contemporary moment.

Research leads to different ways of knowing, building bridges where few might have once existed. To use an earlier quote from Ji Cheng: “In the case of a long and winding covered walkway, when you begin to set up the pillars you should pay attention to the magical effects of changes in viewpoints” (1635, 64-65). Of these changes a number have proven to be particularly useful from the earliest stage.

The use of ‘oscillating polar opposites’ or what is sometimes referred to as Chinese bipolarity might be seen as the first and most essential of the changes I have embraced. This is unsurprising given the gardens’ status as a physical manifestation of these oscillating opposites (Xiao 2001, 81). Allowing for multiple positions on a continuum avoids the strictly oppositional, as it does the complete “anything goes” or pastiche approach of a free-floating position where all becomes of equal value. Here we have a way to recognise difference – something increasingly important in the face of an all-pervasive global culture. The continuum, whether that learnt through the gardens or Western abstraction accepts the existence of structure(s), historical, and material by which we remain bound. It is ‘boundedness’ which allows the game to be played and in turn progressed.

This thinking can be seen in the initial Relief series for Formwork. The first new works of this study, they were constructed in the studio through a play of opposites drawn from garden research, such as weight/weightlessness, emptiness/solidity, flatness/depth, brightness/darkness etc. This play was then extended into and framed by the typically Western minimalist and post-minimalist slippage of painting into object-hood. Complexity was built into outwardly reductive forms, ultimately generating something greater than itself – the central set of oppositions, ‘the large within the small’. A new spatial awareness is developed from working with these relief planes. The architecture of the painting becomes a microcosm for the architecture of the gallery and other sites.
A quest for the large within the small, the aim for something beyond what is immediately before us, might just be at the heart of the art making process as I have constructed it via the garden. I have called on Wen Zhengming's painting *Remote Thoughts* more than once in this project. It is possible it has become an obsession as well as illustration. What is it exactly we are looking at here? *Remote Thoughts* depicts an expanded physical space, which is surely that space of the mind also. The imposing rock cliff could only ever have been a small outcrop over the lake in the *Zhuozheng Yuan* we know it depicts (Stuart 1990a, 171). *Zhuozheng Yuan* exists as a physical site to this day and yet the expanded space in this painting represents something much greater we might best describe as a ‘realm’.

Working outwards from the gallery and the contained object, two directly architecturally engaged projects are seen in *Mod Lang* and *Now & Then/Here & There*. With *Mod Lang* the wall remains primary as painted support for a work of geometric abstraction experimenting with incorporation of the experience of the lang as an unwinding scroll. On one side of a long entrance hall a series of painted black frames operate as those of the lang with their fractured other, the ‘view’ on the opposite wall. The viewer necessarily in motion on a single axis is subtly drawn into the lateral via these frames and ‘landscapes’ while mirrors at either end of the space ‘capture’ the viewer at a multiplicity of points on the continuum. Movement of a ‘participating’ or ‘active’ viewer becomes the key to unlocking the artwork as expanded space.

*Now & Then/Here & There* continued with explorations of the viewing circuit and addition of navigational complexity to otherwise uninterrupted space. A use of expanded materials and technologies (including back-lit lenticular panels) in conjunction with a Chinese influenced attention to temporality, layered screens, and the subterranean interior generates a more complex approach and result for the integrated artwork on a commercial building. The experiential aspect of viewing becomes more important than commissioned artwork as ‘clip-on’ aesthetic.

The *jing* provides another important example of how an encounter with a particular aesthetic concept of Chinese gardens generated new outcomes for practice. With *jing* as “a view that appears bright, bounded, emotionally connected, and poetical to the mind” (Zou 2011, 139) the whole scopic framework is greatly expanded within one simple term.
The structured views and framings of a ‘bounded’ 50 Variations were increasingly about an immersion born of physical movement through multiple ‘framed’ spaces. These spaces might be those set up by the vertical stripes of Vertical Hold/Slow Dazzle, an image of a work’s own making (Solid State), mirror/capture strategies of individual constructed paintings, or the aural feedback loop set up by the video sound work of Listening to the Rain/Wave Pavilion. Equally the frames are those of emotional and poetic connections working as they do through naming, historical, and associative play. Levels of complexity are naturally increased so that entering painted space might be akin to entering lived and living space.

An area I have only touched upon, yet may be implicit within the writing and the works, is that of the utopic dimensions and intentions of this research. Following the idea that the utopian impulse carries two contradictory tendencies, with one directed to a better world and the other as an insight into present limitations, leads us into political realms (Noble 2009, 14). Within the gardens we see an oscillation between the garden as perfected/other world and that of garden as microcosm of the world as it is. The owners of these private gardens played something of a double game in their ‘retreat’ from public life and duty, while also enjoying the status and sociability garden ownership bestowed.

Engagement in the social realm played a large part in the history of twentieth century abstraction. The degree to which the Chinese Garden model might be turned towards a recovery or redefinition of specifically utopian possibilities for abstraction is an area for future research. In this there is also room for a focus on contemporary Chinese abstract practice remaining outside the scope of this current project. I wonder too if the model might also be a valuable one for wider curatorial practice, where there is often a need to physically and conceptually frame and provide pathways through works of obvious difference. Indeed might an understanding of the garden’s devices bind the experience of artist and curator in new ways? But for the most part I look to the studio and the ways in which the devices of the ever-evolving INDEX might continue to assist other practitioners in generating new outcomes for reductive abstraction.

In the projects presented, the terms ‘experience’ and ‘participant’ have taken up increasing usage. None of this denies the centrality of scopic aesthetics for contemporary painting, but it has been the case that research directed through the
gardens has led my own model of reductive abstraction to this increasingly complex position. Given an earlier stated desire to avoid the excesses of decorative or design-driven aesthetics for abstract painting, this heightened attention to the bodily experience has been one result. However, pure physicality on its own is hardly of use if it simply swaps one set of restrictions for another. It is here that Lu's attention to “the Chinese Garden as a mental play” over the limitations of modernist or geometric space-time schemas becomes essential (2011, 515).

With the garden as a site of diverse literary and pictorial schema (through naming, literary allusion, and tradition) we see the identification of ‘realm’ coming into focus as a means to bind these differing orders (514-515). From Wu also comes the recognition of “a web of correspondence between words and things” which in its continuity brings with it “a shared culture at once cumulative and changing” (2012, 78).

Similarly, Makeham writes on the garden as a performance relying on its players working through the physical and the non-physical act of naming (1998, 187-188). ‘Naming’ as a conceptual element, moving as it does between social, historical, and literary allusion becomes a way of reaffirming community (188). A moving body comes in many forms. The body alluded to here is that of the viewer along with other bodies of thought and experience.

If this idea of ‘realm’ is to support another way of thinking through contemporary reductive abstract painting practice its multiplicity surely supports a democratic, open situation in which the viewer is able to switch between orders of experience. It might be added that as in any democracy, such a space also places a responsibility back on that viewer to bring their own awareness, time, and knowledge to the apprehension of that space. Rewards are no longer simply for looking but for engaging. After all, it was the poetic thoughts of the visitor to a Ming garden that would make it complete (Stuart 1990a, 170). In the gallery projects, relationships between works are drawn visually but in the case of 50 Variations and Concentrated Abstraction they are also interwoven with devices including sound, interruptions and adjustments to movement through the space, and sometimes too a sense of play set up by the increased attention to naming strategies—all of which require an engaged ‘THINKING’, ‘FEELING’ viewer.
In each of the projects there is an expansion of media through which attention to painterly attributes of colour, light and form, as well as visible connections to the history of abstraction, is able to read ‘as’ painting. This increased hybridity has remained focused or bounded by a choice of materials and technologies made not for their own sake, but in relation to a field of reductive abstract painting and garden devices. Recognition of the importance of boundaries in generating progressive outcomes is an essential aspect of this overall project.

The ten thousand things of Daoism may represent the idea of a cosmic flow that I found utterly foreign as I began. Yet through practical research I find by the time of 50 Variations it also comes into use in describing the kind of immersive flow that I am seeking for the viewer. Immersivity on its own as entertainment may not have a lot to say as art. If that is all that is required there is the fun park’s hall of mirrors. If, on the other hand, one looks for an immersivity born of complex effect (and affect), a combination of visual, sensorial, architectural, historical, political, poetic fields in which the viewer is encouraged to fully participate (that of realm) – then we have something. If nothing else I have found the Chinese literati garden provides one kind of meta-model for achieving this.

Questions around authenticity and translation have been with me from the start. An understanding of the garden as transmutable (as well as transformative) site has been gained via source reading including Clunas (1996), and more so through direct experience of the Lan Yuan and its originary counterparts in the gardens of Suzhou. None of these sites are as they were in the Ming or Qing. And when it comes to appraisal of contemporary projects seeking to operate within the garden field, then exploration and experimentation over historical imitation, might well provide a more useful definition of ‘authenticity’ (Wang 1998, 66-67). We see this on a grand scale in Pei’s Suzhou Museum. But I also hope that my own projects have suggested something similar, whether an architecturally located work like that of Mod Lang or the gallery experience of 50 Variations, each experiments with garden devices including mirroring and the continual twisting of the lang in new situational contexts to make what Chen would call an “infinite space within a limited area” (2008, 61).

I have attempted to contextualize the gardens and their various devices whenever possible. In this I hope it serves to remind that discussions around visual culture are
not limited to the aesthetic (Crouch 2010, 3). It is quite possible that some of my conclusions might be reached through less circuitous Western sources. Ring Petersen’s ‘installational painting’, Vermeulen and van den Akker’s ‘meta-modernism’, Eco’s ‘open work’ are three of many approaches discussed which intersect with conclusions drawn in my research through the Chinese gardens. Each offers pieces of a puzzle, yet none offers the total universe of thought and action offered by the garden. Quite apart, why should a traditional practice be excluded from a Western artist’s worldview? Especially so when such practices may offer views beyond those of a globalized mass media and corporate culture adept at neutralizing progressive models of an avant-garde, “by using its forms but ignoring its content” (Crouch, 12).

In looking to the Chinese garden and dealing with areas of cross-cultural study I have consciously avoided escape into exotic imagery or appeals to the spiritual, instead recognizing a complex of ideas, histories, and structural devices which at times mirror our own Western models. On this point, regardless of found similarities or differences, it is the garden’s ability to contain such an array of devices within the one construct which allows it to operate as both lens and catalyst for practice.

Aligned to the notion of a ‘touring’ reader; writing and practice have become interwoven. I would hope each is strong enough in its field to stand-alone. In this way the garden research and writing provides a resource for those engaged in abstract painting, whilst the practice components remain readable as operating within essentially Western-based practices.

On this point of the threaded nature of writing and practice, conceptually and physically, INDEX (Volume II) sits as this dissertation’s central construction playing out through the written field of Volume I, and the practice-led Volume III. In providing a relatively prosaic listing of concrete garden devices and concepts together with a disparate collection of photographic images lining up studio practice with formative content and inspirations, INDEX displays the qualities of multi-layered, poly-vocal realm – a garden record through which to read this project and create others. Key oscillating opposites of difference/unity and word/image play out here, further demonstrating the use of such oppositions as generative propositions. There is another dimension to some of the photos of INDEX that I see as flowing through other sections of the project. They represent something entirely unscientific in trying to capture a certain euphoria,
sometimes reverie, discovered in (re)framing my environment through the lens of my camera – this lens itself powered by the lens of the Chinese garden and its jing.

The amplification of ‘feeling’ as a component of practice might be considered a surprising (if not ‘key’) outcome of my research. In part it comes from the engagement with reductive abstraction on the multitude of sensorial levels presented by the garden model. It is also interesting to see recent writings on the formal, such as Richard Schiff’s “Specificity” (2013), signaling something other than an ideologically divided, imagistic/discursive practice versus materials driven painting and sculpture binary. Instead there is an argument for the reintroduction of thought and feeling as something occurring through the manipulation of materials in the studio where artists are able to “learn from the objects and signs they produce” (132-134).

Identifying Lu’s concept of realm and moving beyond architectural and geometric based space/time definitions has proven itself a practical tool for (re)invigorating reductive abstraction as demonstrated in my own projects. The continual expansion and contraction of the oscillations of the large within the small sets up a breathing space which assists maker and viewer to each move between the material, architectural space within which reductive abstract practices sit so easily to include that of sensorial, social, psychological, historical, and ultimately ‘communal’ space. Within this ‘space’ a functioning abstraction as tested through the projects remains resolutely open in its forms, and open to the construction of meaning at every moment. Here in this expanded space, identified as ‘realm’, is a place of immersion which might best offer an alternative to the high-speed, high-turnover aesthetics of an abstraction so successful it has been too frequently absorbed into the decorative and graphic needs of commercial culture.

There is no perfect finished garden just as there will be no finished perfect abstraction. Everything changes. I expect for any artists wishing to enter similar territory the gardens will offer their own surprises: like the waves of distortion from an electric guitar, or an evening taxi ride through a rain and neon-drenched Shanghai.
In 1976 the rock musician and producer Todd Rundgren took the unusual step of recording a side of faithful covers of 1960s psychedelic classics in a replaying of the European classical music tradition. One tradition as model was transferred or translated into another. It may not be coincidental that those songs were psychedelic, with all the inherent connectedness and blending of time, spatial, and stylistic signatures that marks out the form.

On side two, Rundgren recorded five new songs moving through psychedelic, hard rock, pop, glam, and prog-rock tendencies. These new songs neither dismissed, parodied, or unnecessarily borrowed from those of side one, while still managing to bring together these different modes as a cohesive whole. (One might say there is an oscillation between these opposite sides in the manner of continuum rather than binary relationship). If nothing else, the diverse content is bounded by the radial form/format of the LP. The album, appropriately called Faithful, also had the most reductive of sleeve artwork; black text on beige, foregoing the cosmic baroque visuals popularly associated with psychedelia. The typeface had a white outline giving it a feel akin to cut out letterforms. ‘Workmanlike’ would be one description. Or from the Chinese we could take the term zhuo for its appreciation of rustic simplicity over the refinements of the professional. I suspect Rundgren would embrace a journeyman description of his career. Somewhere in the construction of this record there is a playing out of many of the ideas I have been looking at in this extended study. This could be expressed as faith in, and faithfulness to, a model of reductive abstraction as a complex aesthetic language of infinite potential.

The songs on Faithful operate as framed views, bright jing, poetical to the mind. The LP format is a total realm containing material and immaterial aspects within its boundaries. It remains outward looking yet is immersive in its potential. It is a stable form yet capable of operating in new situations. And in its combinations, its sea of possibilities, ecstatic moments flow. These moments are found in Chinese gardens. They are there in reductive abstraction too. Sometimes we just need to be reminded to look, think, feel, and listen. It’s a strange arrangement.
APPENDICES
REFERENCE LIST:


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Siren, Osvald. 1936. *The Chinese on the Art of Painting: Texts by the Painter Critics, from the Han through the Ch’ing Dynasties*. NY: Dover. [Reprint Mineola, 2005]


Song Lyrics:
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

This list is restricted to other artists’ works illustrated, and runs in the order they appear. Available citation information varies with source. All other photos and artworks appearing in the dissertation are by the author (except where indicated otherwise), and are fully captioned in-text.

Volume 1

In Kerby, Kate, 1922. *An Old Chinese Garden: A Three-fold Masterpiece of Poetry, Calligraphy and Painting by Wen Chen Ming*. Chung Hwa Book Company, Shanghai

Acrylic on cloth over wood; acrylic on cord over steel tube
182.9 x 213.4 x 198.1 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago
Through prior gifts of Arthur Keating and Mr. and Mrs. Edward Morris, 1988.
Hauser & Wirth Zürich London.
http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/modernwing/artwork/71396
Retrieved 12/3/2014

Peter Halley, *Joy Pop* 1998,
Acrylic, Day-Glo acrylic, Metallic acrylic & Roll-a-Tex
on canvas, 75 x 74 inches
Retrieved 12/3/2014

Ross Bleckner, *Repetitious Visitation* 1987
Oil on canvas, 287.5 x 213.3 cm
MoMA 520.1987
Gift of Douglas S Cramer
www.moma.org/Collection/object.php?object id =79905
Retrieved 12/3/2014
One from a portfolio of woodcuts
Composition: 61 x 45.8 cm, sheet: 93 x 65.4 cm
Brook and Roger S. Berlind Fund
MoMA 270.1989.4
Retrieved 12/3/14

Acrylic & Roll-A-Tex on canvas, 63 x 108 inches
Palazzo Bembo, Venice, Italy
http://www.lawfuldistortion.com/2013/06/29/between-the-lines
Retrieved 12/3/2014

Oil on aluminium, 74 x 74 inches x 4 ½ inches
Photo Larry Qualls
ARTstor Collection: Contemporary Art (Larry Qualls Archive)
ARTstor ID: Larry__Qualls__10310640589
Retrieved 11/3/14

Ian Davenport, *Untitled* 1988
Oil on canvas, 214 x 213 cm
Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates, London

Wade Guyton 2013, *Installation view* Kunsthalle Zurich
Photo Stefan Altenburger Photography
http://www.capitainpetzel.de/artists/guyton-wade/
Retrieved 17/3/2014
Christopher Wool 2011, *ILLUMInations*, The Central Pavilion, Venice Biennale
Photo Contemporary Art Daily
Retrieved 17/3/2014

Produced 2011 for The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum
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Frank Stella, *Portrait Series* 1963 (Installation at Leo Castelli Gallery 1964)
Retrieved 18/3/2014

Frank Stella, *Queequeg in his Coffin* 1989
Mixed media on magnesium and aluminium, 289 x 471 x 122 cm
Photo: Steve Sloman
Private Collection

Robert Ryman, *Untitled* 1965
Enamelac on canvas, 11 3/16 x 11 3/16 inches
Photographer: Larry Qualls
ARTstor Collection: Contemporary Art (Larry Qualls Archive)
ARTstor ID LARRY_QUALLS_10313740045
Retrieved 22/11/2014

Robert Ryman, *Archive* 1979
Oil on steel, 34.29 x 30.16 cm x 1.27 cm
SFMOMA. Purchase through a gift of Mimi and Peter Hass
http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/22935 - ixzz1jCCdk4G3
Retrieved 25/2/2014
Robert Ryman, *Guild* 1982
Enamelac paint on fiberglass, aluminium and wood, 982 x 918 x 38 mm
Tate.
Presented by Janet Wolfson de Botton 1996
Ref: T07147
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ryman-guild-t07147
Retrieved 25/2/2014

Brice Marden, *Nebraska* 1966
Oil and beeswax on canvas, 147.3 x 182.9 cm
Photo: Brice Marden/ARS, New York
Collection of the artist
Retrieved 14/3/2014

Brice Marden, *Cold Mountain 6 (Bridge)* 1989-91
Oil on linen, 274.32 cm x 365.76 cm
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Purchase through gift of Phyllis Wattis
http://www.sfmoma.org/
ARTstor ID 31378
Retrieved 12/3/2014

Ralph Hotere, *Godwit/Kuaka* 1977
Enamel on board, 240 x 1800 cm
Chartwell Collection; Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tamaki
Gift of Auckland International Airport 1997
ID: C 1997/1/1/1-15
www.auckland artgallery.com/the collection/browse-artwork/8535/godwit-kuaka
Retrieved 18/3/2014

Ralph Hotere, *Godwit/Kuaka* 1977
Retrieved 18/3/2014
Don Driver, *Relief with Pleats* 1969
Mixed media, 137 x 85 cm
http://hamishmckay.co.nz/artists/Don_Driver/2
Retrieved 18/3/2014

Don Driver, *Relief No. 11* 1971-72
Aluminium, laquer, 143 x 29.6 x 28 cm
Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tamaki

Don Driver, *Paddling Pool* 1975
Vinyl, plastic, wood, metal, 187.5 x 120.5 x 280 cm
Photograph: Bryan James
Jim and Mary Barr collection
In Pitts 1999:44

Jasper Johns, *0 through 9* 1961
Oil on canvas, 13.72 x 10.48 cm
Tate
Presented by the Friends of the Tate 1961
Ref T00454
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/johns-0-through-9-t00454
Retrieved 14/3/2014

Ma Yuan, *Scholar by a Waterfall*, late 12th–early 13th century
Album leaf: ink and colour on silk, 25.1 x 26 cm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Ex coll. C.C. Wang Family, Gift of the Dillon Fund 1973
www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1973.120.9
Retrieved 5/6/2014
Map of Zhuozheng Yuan

David Batchelor, *Bow, London 20.08.02*
Photo image
http://www.davidbatchelor.co.uk/works/Monochromes/
Retrieved 18/3/2014

David Batchelor, *I Love King’s Cross and King’s Cross Loves Me* 1997
Found objects, acrylic sheet, paint, dimensions variable
http://www.davidbatchelor.co.uk/works/3D/
Retrieved 18/3/2014

Eva Hesse, *Metronomic Irregularity* 1966
Paint and Sculp-Metal on wood with cotton-covered wire, 30.5 x 45.7 x 2.5 cm
Museum Wiesbaden, Germany
www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/eva_hesse.php?i=1701
Retrieved 14/3/2014

Eva Hesse, *Right After* 1969
Fibreglass, approx. 152.39 x 548.61 x 121.91 cm
Photo P. Richard Eells
Milwaukee Art Museum
Gift of Friends of Art 1970
Retrieved 14/3/2014

Andy Warhol, *Triple Silver Disaster* 1963
Silkscreen ink and enamel on canvas, 63 ½ x 83 ½ inches
The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Summer Collection Fund 1974.1
Wadsworth Atheneum
http://www.pinterest.com/pin/129548925751890383/
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Dan Flavin, *Untitled (for Leo Castelli at his gallery’s 30th anniversary)* 1989.
Fluorescent light and fittings, 121.9 x 12.9 cm
Photo: Philipp Schonborn
Installation at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 1989

James Rosenquist, *F1-11* 1964-65
Oil on canvas with aluminum, twenty-three sections, 304.8 x 2621.3cm
MoMA. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alex L. Hillman and Lillie P. Bliss Bequest
ARTstor Collection: Contemporary Art (Larry Qualls Archive)
ARTstor ID 79805
Retrieved 21/11/13

Installation view
ARTstor Collection: ARTstor Slide Gallery
ARTstor ID ARTSTOR_103_41822001596541
Retrieved 22/11/13

Donald Judd, *To Susan Buckwalter* 1964
Galvanised iron and blue lacquer on aluminium. 76.2 x 358.2 x 76.2 cm
Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts,
Gift of Frank Stella
Retrieved 22/6/2014

Robert Morris, *Untitled (Mirrored Cubes)* 1965
Plate glass, mirror and wood, four units: 24 x 24 x 24 inches
Photo David Heald
Museum of Contemporary Art: 303
Robert Morris, *Untitled (Tangle)* 1967  
Felt, 264 pieces, 1.3 cm thick  
National Gallery of Canada  
ARTstor Collection: ARTstor Slide Gallery  
ARTstor ID: ARTSTOR_103_41822003843222  
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Max Bill, *Expansion in Four Directions* 1961-62  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 186.7 x 186.7 cm  
Bequest of Richard S. Zeisler  
MoMA 204.2008  
http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A559&
page_number=28&template_id=1&sort_order=1  
Retrieved 18/3/2014

Helio Oiticica, *Grande Nucleo (Grand Nucleus)* 1960-66  
Oil and resin on wood fibreboard, overall dimensions: 6.70 x 9.75 m  

**Volume 2**  
Wen Zhengming, *The Boat Returns to Port*, 16th century  

**Volume 3**  
Andy Warhol, *Empire* 1964  
Film  
Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc  
ARTstor Collection: ARTstor Slide Gallery  
Retrieved 21/11/2013
Richard Serra, *Prop* 1968
Lead antimony, 861/4 x 60 x 57 inches
Collection of the artist

Barnett Newman, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* 1950-51
Oil on canvas, 242.2 x 541.7cm
MOMA
Gift of Mr and Mrs Ben Heller
ARTstor Collection: The Museum of Modern Art: Painting and Sculpture
ARTstor ID: 79250
Retrieved 21/11/13

Frank Stella 1967, *Nunca Para Nada*
Metallic powder in polymer emulsion on canvas, 9’2 x 18’4
http://www.radford.edu/rbarris/art428/minimalism and theatricality.html
Retrieved 18/3/2014

In Kerby, 1922
CATALOGUE OF WORKS:

FORMWORK 2011
Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne

Concentrated Abstraction 2011. Oil, mirror glass, composite board, 60 x 46 cm

Material-list 2011. Type-C print, 60 x 46 cm

Formwork/Duck Shooting Corridor 2011. Transparent acrylic, silicon glue, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Formwork/Balancing 2011. Transparent acrylic cloth tape, plywood, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Formwork/Mechanic 2011. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, felt, mirror, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Formwork/Landscape 2011. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, cloth tape, composite board, 23 x 30 cm

Formwork/Screwed 2011. Transparent acrylic, felt, acrylic paint, screw, washer, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Formwork/Hard Line 2011. Acrylic paint, felt, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Formwork/Golden Cups 2011. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, composite board, 30 x 23 cm
Formwork/Shakey 2011. Felt, transparent acrylic, acrylic paint, plywood, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Formwork/Weight 2011. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Drenched Orchids (Soft Machine/Drenched Orchids/Cold Fact) 2011. Acrylic paint, felt, type-C print, mirror back, composite board, (3 pieces) 60 x 46 cm each

Formwork/Concrete 2011. Acrylic paint, plywood, mirror, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Formwork/Stacked 2011. Mirror, acrylic paint, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Unrelated Segments/Stone Classics 2011. Formply, felt, mirror, transparent acrylic, adhesive vinyl, dimensions variable

Formwork/Build 2011. Acrylic paint, mirror, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Formwork/Relief 2011. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

Viewmaster/Here 2011. Wax on plasterboard, 38 x 175 cm
Harmonic Distortion/Digital 2011. Acrylic paint, composite board, 60 x 38 cm

Flower & Rock Network/Still 2008-2011. Type-C print, 175 x 38 cm

Flower & Rock Network/Technique 2008-2011. Type-C print, 175 x 38 cm

Flower & Rock Network/Substance 2008-2011. Type-C print, 175 x 38 cm

Formwork/Cinema 2011. Mirror, acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, composite board

Formwork/Purple Light 2011. Mirror, acrylic paint, composite board, 30 x 23 cm
MOD LANG 2012
Tan Garner Residence, Melbourne.

Mod Lang 2012. Acrylic paint on plaster, dimensions variable

Mod Lang 2012. (Door mirror) silver mirror acrylic, coloured acrylic, 175 x 8 cm

Mod Lang 2012. (Door mirror detail) silver mirror acrylic, coloured acrylic, 175 x 8 cm

Mod Lang 2012. (Window mirror) silver mirror acrylic, coloured adhesive vinyl, 175 x 8 cm

Mod Lang 2012. (Window mirror) silver mirror acrylic, coloured adhesive vinyl, 175 x 8 cm
NOW & THEN/HERE & THERE
Fitzroy Street,
Melbourne

**Now & Then/Here & There**
2011–2013. (Canopy) Digital lenticular print with backlit lightbox, 1720 x 190 cm

**Now & Then/Here & There**
2011–2013. (Relief work) Aluminium composite panel, 350 cm wide, within 221 cm x 2110 cm total area

**Now & Then/Here & There**
2011–2013. (Gates) Powder coated aluminium rod screw mounted to steel gates 239 x 662 cm

**Now & Then/Here & There**
2011–2013. (Exit ramp) Fluorescent painted stripes on concrete, 360 x 80 cm (diminishing to 500 wide in reverse perspective)

**Now & Then/Here & There**
2011–2013. (Exit ramp) Silver mirror acrylic mounted to composite board on concrete, 2400 x 20 cm
CONCENTRATED ABSTRACTION 2012
East China Normal University, Shanghai

Gateway 2012. Acrylic paint, silver mirror acrylic, 2 panels, 175 x 38 cm each

Shanghai Blue/Orange 2012. Twin screen video installation with sound

In /a World 2012. Acrylic paint, wood, screws, 30.5 x 61 cm

Lan Yuan/Dongchuan 2012. Video with sound

Material-list/Shanghai 2012. Digital print, 42 x 59 cm

Psychedelic Pill 2012. Acrylic paint, plywood, 50 x 75 cm

Wire 2012. Oil, plywood, 50 x 75 cm

Mirror Ball 2012. Silver mirror foil, 50 x 75 cm

Black/Calligraphy 2012. Acrylic paint, felt calligraphy mat, 50 x 75 cm
Hell is Chrome 2012. Fabricated chromed steel, approx. 70 x 70 cm

Duck Shooting Corridor/Wangshi 2012. Acrylic paint, silver mirror acrylic, 175 x 38 cm

Trouble Lantern/Slow Dazzle 2012. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, 22 x 9 cm

Without Title 2012. Acrylic paint, silver mirror acrylic, 15 x 7 cm

Trouble Lantern/Slow Dazzle 2012 (detail). Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, 22 x 9 cm

X/Trouble Lantern/Slow Dazzle 2012. Acrylic paint, silver mirror acrylic, 50 x 75 cm

Distant Fragrance 2012. Cloth tape, dimensions variable

Trouble Lantern/Slow Dazzle 2012. Electrical cable, transparent cord, silver mirror acrylic, and acrylic paint on mixed media, dimensions variable

Paper Room/Fuzhou 2012. Coloured corrugated papers, 4 sheets, 59 x 84 cm each

Distant Fragrance 2012. Acrylic paint, silver mirror acrylic, 8 x 24 cm
Without Title 2012. Felt, plywood, 21 x 15 cm

Concentrated Abstraction/Room for Contemplating Paintings 2012. Installation view. Acrylic paint and mixed media

Without Title 2012. Acrylic paint, plywood, 21 x 15 cm

Concentrated Abstraction 2012. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, stretcher bars, screws, approx. 17 x 28 cm

Without Title 2012. Acrylic paint, plywood, 15 x 21 cm

Concentrated Abstraction 2012. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, screws, wood, approx. 14 x 10 cm

Without Title 2012. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, 10 x 4 cm

Concentrated Abstraction 2012. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, screws, wood, approx. 8 x 25 cm

Concentrated Abstraction 2012. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, 16 x 8 cm
Concentrated Abstraction  
2012. Acrylic paint, coloured adhesive, transparent acrylic card holder, 9 x 6 x 6 cm

Concentrated Abstraction  
2012. Acrylic paint, plywood, 21 x 15 cm; felt, 30 x 21 cm

Concentrated Abstraction  
2012. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, 16 x 8 cm

Concentrated Abstraction  
2012. Acrylic paint, canvas, 20 x 30.5 cm

Concentrated Abstraction  
2012. Acrylic paint, canvas, 30.5 cm diameter
50 VARIATIONS 2013
Nellie Castan Gallery,
Melbourne

Reflection Tower/Un 2012. Stretcher bar, silver mirror acrylic, felt, acrylic paint, screws, 115 x 6.5 cm

Openwork/ Void Collecting 2013. Oil, plywood, transparent acrylic, plywood, screws, 15.5 x 29 cm

Blank Generation/ Mirror Wall 2013. Acrylic paint, wax varnish, plywood, pine, screws, 323 x 90 x 9 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Transparent acrylic, acrylic paint, screws, 24 x 21 cm

Vertical Hold/ Slow Dazzle 2013. Aluminium channel, transparent acrylic, stainless steel fixtures, 371 x 2 x 1.2 cm (adjustable)

50 Variations 2012-2013. Acrylic paint, plywood, aluminium baton, 30 x 23 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Acrylic paint, plywood, aluminium composite panel, 16 x 30.5 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Acrylic paint, adhesive vinyl, aluminium, 18 x 18 cm
50 Variations 2012-2013. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, composite board, 30 x 23 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. C-type print, transparent acrylic, screws, 14 x 19 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Acrylic paint, aluminium composite panel, felt, screws, 28 x 24.5 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Enamel, oil, acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, composite board, 23 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, composite board, 19 x 23 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Silver mirror acrylic, acrylic paint, composite board, 22.5 x 29.5 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. C-type print, transparent acrylic, screws, 21 x 23 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Acrylic paint, aluminium composite panel, 18 x 29 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Felt, acrylic paint, aluminium, 27 x 20 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Acrylic paint, gesso panel, 20 x 40 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Type-C print, transparent acrylic, composite board, screws, 18.5 x 34 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, screws, 13 x 25 cm
50 Variations 2012-2013.
Aluminium composite panel, composite board, 30 x 30.5 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Type-C print, transparent acrylic, plywood, screws, 11 x 22 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Acrylic paint, felt, silver mirror acrylic, composite board, 23 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Type-C print, transparent acrylic, 30 x 23 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Aluminium composite panel, acrylic paint, screws, transparent acrylic, 17 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Type-C print, aluminium composite panel, 30 x 23 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Acrylic paint, canvas, aluminium composite panel, screws, 23 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Oil, transparent acrylic, screws, aluminium tube, 18 x 29 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Acrylic, gesso board, incised surface surface, 25 x 20 cm
50 Variations 2012-2013. 
Acrylic paint, aluminium composite panel, 16 x 29 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. 
Acrylic paint, gesso panel, 40 x 20 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. 
Transparent acrylic, incised surface, screws, felt, acrylic paint, composite board, 23 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. 
Aluminium composite panel, adhesive vinyl, felt, composite board, 23 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. 
Acrylic paint, transparent acrylic, scratches, cloth tape, composite board, 23 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. 
Acrylic paint, aluminium composite panel, screws, 17 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. 
Incised mirror back, aluminium composite panel, 30 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. 
Oil, gesso panel, incised surface, galvanized steel brackets, 27 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013. 
Acrylic paint, composite board, transparent acrylic, 20 x 30 cm
50 Variations 2012-2013.
Cloth tape, packing tape, aluminium composite panel, composite board, 23 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Acrylic paint, oil, transparent acrylic, X-tac, screws, composite board, 23 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Felt, aluminium, 18 x 18 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Acrylic paint, felt, screw, composite board, 23 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Type-C print, transparent acrylic, composite board, screws, 20 x 30 cm

50 Variations 2012-2013.
Acrylic paint, linen, composite board, 15 x 30 cm

Station to Station/Great Brightness 2012. Acrylic paint, oil, aluminium composite panel, 175 x 38 cm

The Light Pours Out/Black List 2013. Acrylic paint, felt, aluminium composite panel, 175 x 38 cm

Shape Work/Flower Mirror 2013. Aluminium composite panel, transparent acrylic, plywood, felt, (3 parts) 330 x 53 cm

Acrylic paint, gesso panel, 20 x 25 cm

Acrylic paint, felt, transparent acrylic, 9.5 x 18 cm
Material-list/Engine 2013. Type-C print, frame, 60 x 92 cm

Listening to the Rain/Wave Pavilion 2013. Digital video with sound, 07:58 duration

Neck 2013. Acrylic paint, composite board DVD case. Contains DVDR and USB, 20.5 x 15 cm

Surge 2013. Acrylic paint, composite board case. DVD Contains DVDR and USB, 20.5 x 15 cm

Ocean 2013. Acrylic paint, composite board DVD case. Contains DVDR and USB, 20.5 x 15 cm

Lake 2013. Acrylic paint, composite board DVD case. Contains DVDR and USB, 20.5 x 15 cm

Solid State 2013. Type-C print, transparent acrylic, aluminium composite panel, 23 x 36 cm

Openwork/Black Garage 2013. Acrylic paint, composite board, 21.5 x 33 cm

Machine 2013. Acrylic paint, composite board DVD case. Contains DVDR and USB, 20.5 x 15 cm

Framework/Unintentional Painting 2013. Acrylic paint, framing timber, steel rod, 16 x 38 cm
Concrete/Harmony (In my Head) 2013. Type-C print, transparent acrylic frame, 60 x 40 cm

Nuggets, Pebbles, Stones 2013. Acrylic, canvas board, 25.5 x 20.5 cm

Coming/Going 2013. Acrylic paint, aluminium composite panel, 30 x 23 cm
A STRANGE ARRANGEMENT
MARGARET LAWRENCE GALLERY VCA
MELBOURNE, 31 JULY – 17 AUGUST 2014
Title: A strange arrangement: constructing contemporary reductive abstract painting through the ancient Chinese garden

Date: 2014

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/42162

File Description: A strange arrangement: constructing contemporary reductive abstract painting through the ancient Chinese garden