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Painting the Banal: Dale Hickey and Robert Hunter, 1966–1973

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Abstract

A significant development within art of the 1960s and 1970s was the dispersal of the traditional artistic mediums, and their replacement by a disparate array of installation, performance, documentary and theoretical practices that have come to define the landscape of contemporary art. This thesis examines the historical emergence of this contemporary 'post-medium condition' through the work of two Melbourne-based artists, Dale Hickey (born 1937) and Robert Hunter (1947–2014), from their hard-edge modernist painting of the mid 1960s, to their engagement with minimalism, post-minimalism and conceptual art at the end of that decade and the beginning of the next.

During this period, Hickey and Hunter became key figures within an avant-garde scene increasingly hostile to the traditional forms and institutions of art. Yet in their work, painting, the most traditional form of all, did not disappear under the pressure of its avant-garde critique. Rather, issues related to the medium—including its ongoing viability—remained central to their work. The persistence of painterly concerns was crucial for both artists' work, as was a preoccupation with 'the banal'—manifest in Hickey's depictions of domestic and suburban objects and Hunter's exploration of the bare materials of painting within a restricted formal vocabulary. A principal argument of this thesis is that the emphasis on the banal in both artists' works, rather than blurring the distinction between aesthetic activity and ordinary life, was coupled with an ideal of art as a vehicle for contemplation that has its roots in painting.

Both artists' work is shown to align with the mystical conception of art promoted by Bruce Pollard, who founded and operated Pinacotheca, the gallery with which the pair became associated in 1968. Positioned in dialogue with their dealer's quasi-religious attitude towards aesthetic experience, and amidst the druggy, bohemian ambiance of his gallery, Hickey's and Hunter's traffic with illusion, contemplation and aura is understood not as an anomaly within the prevailing materialist and rationalist narratives of the end of modernism, but rather as integral to the local artistic and cultural context in which they worked.

Declaration:

This is to certify that:

(i) The thesis comprises only my original work toward the PhD.

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

(iii) The thesis is fewer than 100, 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies, and appendices.

David Homewood

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A.G.N.S.W. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

M.o.M.A. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

N.G.A. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

N.G.V. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Q.A.G. Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.

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Introduction

A significant development within art of the 1960s and 1970s was the dispersal of the traditional artistic mediums, and their replacement by a disparate array of installation, performance, documentary and theoretical practices that have come to define the landscape of contemporary art as we know it today. This thesis examines the historical emergence of this contemporary 'post-medium condition' through the work of two Melbourne-based artists, Dale Hickey (born 1937) and Robert Hunter (1947–2014). The focus is upon both artists' shift from hard-edge modernist painting in the mid 1960s, to their engagement with minimalism, post-minimalism and conceptual art at the end of that decade and the beginning of the next. After gaining a reputation for painting within a modernist vernacular characterised by its illusionistic and psychedelic as much as its optical effects, Hickey and Hunter became key figures within an avant-garde scene increasingly hostile to the traditional forms and institutions of art. Yet in their work, painting, the most traditional form of all, did not disappear under the pressure of its critique. As seen in the examples of Hickey and Hunter, issues related to the medium—including its ongoing viability—remained central.

The persistence of painterly concerns was crucial for both artists' work, as was a preoccupation with 'the banal'—manifest in Hickey's depictions of domestic and suburban objects and Hunter's exploration of the bare materials of painting within a restricted formal vocabulary. A principal argument of this thesis is that the emphasis on the banal in both artists' works, rather than blurring the distinction between aesthetic activity and ordinary life, was tied to an ideal of art as a vehicle for contemplation that has its roots in painting. As a result, ordinariness was never an end in itself: rather, for Hickey and Hunter, it was a condition to be overcome. As I argue, for Hickey, the contemplative ideal compelled a program of defamiliarisation through which banal things are transformed into barely recognisable entities; for Hunter, the same ideal grounded a notion of painting as an arena for the negation of the artist's subjectivity, which mirrors, in the process of production, the suspension of selfhood implied by the act of beholding. In this sense, Hickey's and Hunter's work aligned with the mystical conception of art promoted by Bruce Pollard, who founded and operated Pinacotheca, the gallery with which the pair became associated in 1968. Positioned in dialogue with their dealer's quasi-religious attitude towards aesthetic experience, and amidst the druggy, bohemian ambiance of his gallery, Hickey's and Hunter's traffic with illusion, contemplation and aura is understood not as an anomaly within the

prevailing materialist and rationalist narratives of the end of modernism, but rather as integral to the local artistic and cultural context in which they worked.

Existing Scholarship

In making this argument, this thesis responds to several interwoven problems within the historiography of 1960s and 1970s art. In what follows I outline these problems, before explaining how this thesis addresses them. The most immediately apparent of these issues is that within the field of Australian modern and contemporary art, Hickey and Hunter are widely acknowledged as significant artists, but beyond the small number of catalogue essays, exhibition texts, magazine and journal articles, and brief citations in Australian art history books, there remains a dearth of scholarly literature on their work.[1] There is no focused study on either Hickey's or Hunter's work of the 1960s and 1970s. This thesis addresses this gap.

Following influential arguments by Thierry de Duve and Rosalind Krauss, standard accounts of 1960s and 1970s art tend to frame the period as one in which the idea of an artwork belonging to a specific medium, for example, painting or sculpture, was overthrown by the 'readymade' as the dominant paradigm of artistic production.[2] One problem with this account is that it revolves around New York art. In other locations—for example the Melbourne scene in which Hickey and Hunter worked during these years—the primacy of painting was not challenged in the same way or to the same extent. This thesis thus seeks to problematise this orthodoxy about 1960s and 1970s art by showing that avant-garde critiques of the legitimacy of painting were not universal, but instead played out in vernacular contexts.

Related to the problem outlined above is the lack of understanding about the changing status of painting during the rise of what Krauss calls the 'post-medium condition.'[3] This is

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[1] The catalogues on Hickey and Hunter are Margaret Plant, *Dale Hickey: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Ballarat: City of Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, 1988); Paul Zika, *Dale Hickey: Life in a Box* (Melbourne: The Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne, 2008); Jenepher Duncan, *Robert Hunter Paintings 1966–1988* (Clayton: Monash University Gallery, 1989); Jane Devery, *Robert Hunter: 1966–2013* (Melbourne: N.G.V., 2018). I review these and other key texts in Chapter 1.
[2] For an in-depth account of the breakdown of medium-specificity in the 1960s, see Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1996). Krauss discusses what she calls the 'post-medium condition' in *Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000) and *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2011).
[3] Krauss, *Voyage on the North Sea*.

surprising, given the interest displayed by art historians such as Isabelle Graw and David Joselit in contemporary painting produced within that same condition.[4] In contrast to modernist theories that seek to define the essence of the medium, this new scholarship on painting construes it as malleable and contingent. The anti-essentialist conception of the medium proposed by Graw and Joselit is less concerned with the relationship of painting to itself as it is the relationship of painting to other kinds of social, cultural and political activity. This discourse has the potential to unlock a new perspective on the precarious status of the medium in minimalism and conceptual art; but it has not yet been widely applied to 1960s and 1970s art.[5] Nor has it been discussed in the context of Australian art. This thesis addresses this gap by drawing on these theoretical developments to articulate an historical explanation of Hickey's and Hunter's work between 1966 and 1973.

Yet another problem is that, of the few existing accounts of 1960s and 1970s art in Australia, for example, survey histories by Charles Green and Sasha Grishin, there has been little discussion of the medium of painting.[6] Few scholars have attempted to identify and theorise the vernacular traits of hard-edge painting in Melbourne.[7] Connected to this, the fact that minimalism in Australia was almost purely a painterly phenomenon has seldom been observed and has not been adequately theorised.[8] Similarly, the persistence of painting in Australian conceptual art has received scant critical attention. Accordingly, this thesis

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[4] Foundational texts on painting in the post-medium condition include: Isabelle Graw, *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2018). Also see Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth eds., *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016); Helmut Draxler, 'Painting as Apparatus: Twelve Theses,' *Texte zur Kunst* 77 (March 2010), 108–11; David Joselit, 'Painting Beside Itself,' *October* 130 (Fall 2009), 125–134.

[5] Notable exceptions are several chapters in Graw's *The Love of Painting*: 'The Force of the Impersonal Brush—Reflections on Frank Stella's Early Work'; 'Painted Critique of Painting—From Anti-essentialism to the Myth of Self-Activity in the 1960s and 1980s (Immendorf, Polke, Koether, Oehlen, Kippenberger)' and 'The Absent Painter—Six Theses on the Reflection on Value and Painting in the Work of Marcel Broodthaers.' See Graw, *The Love of Painting*, 88–101; 136–157; 206–223.

[6] Charles Green, *Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Australian Art, 1970–1994* (Roseville East, N.S.W.: Craftsman House, 1995); Sasha Grishin, *Australian Art: A History* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 2013). A notable exception is Bernard Smith (with additional chapters by Terry Smith and Christopher Heathcote), *Australian Painting 1788–2000* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[7] Exceptions include Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting 1788–1970* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971); Frances Lindsay, *A Melbourne Mood: Cool Contemporary Art* (Canberra: N.G.A., 1983); Green 1995.

[8] An exception is Sue Cramer, *Less Is More: Minimal and Post-Minimal Art in Australia* (Heidelberg: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2012).

analyses the vernacular traits of the hard-edge painting of Hickey and Hunter, and highlights the way that painterly concerns shaped their subsequent engagement with minimalism and conceptual art.

This thesis also responds to the problem of how to describe the specificity of Australian art outside of a nationalist framework. In the wake of Bernard Smith's *Australian Painting 1788–1960* (1961) and its later editions, further accounts of Australian art in the 1960s and 1970s (by writers such as Ian Burn, Charles Green and Anne Marsh) have been elaborated within the framework of a nationalist art history, even if such authors adopt a critical attitude toward it.[9] This approach exaggerates the isolation of Australian artists in the hope of asserting a nationalist identity. The nationalist framework is commonplace, but very few accounts of Australian art in the 1960s and 1970s are structured around a metropolitan centre.[10] This is not necessarily a shortcoming, for just as nationalist histories exaggerate the importance of an artist's Australian-ness, the metropolitan framework risks overemphasising the immediate social and cultural milieu in which he or she works. That said, in this thesis such an approach has proven to be a useful means to understand the art of Hickey and Hunter in the context of its local milieu. Ultimately, however, neither the nationalist nor the metropolitan frame are adequate for capturing the cosmopolitan character of modern and contemporary art, which is composed of transnational flows of people, object circuits, trade deals and media channels.[11] This thesis will indicate that contemporary artists in the 1960s and 1970s belonged to an international art world in which authority and influence were

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[9] The most recent edition is Smith with Smith and Heathcote, *Australian Painting 1788–2000*. Ian Burn, 'Sidney Nolan: Landscape and Modern Life,' in *Dialogue: Writings in Art History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 67–85; Green, 1995; Anne Marsh, *Body and Self: Performance Art in Australia 1969–1992* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[10] An exception is Lindsay's *A Melbourne Mood*, which includes but is not limited to the 1960s and 1970s. Lindsay defines 'cool' as an overarching 'sensibility' or 'mood' of Melbourne art from the 1950s to the 1980s (2–3).

[11] See Rex Butler and A.D.S. Donaldson, 'On the Possibility of Another Australian Art History,' paper delivered at Art Association of Australia and New Zealand Annual Conference, 25 November 2015, unpublished. Also see Rex Butler, 'A Short Introduction to UnAustralian Art,' *Broadsheet* 32, no. 4 (2003), 17, which argues that the metropolitan rather than the national context is a more appropriate unit of measure for art history. 'Art always comes out of a specific context, but it is very rarely that of a country. Was there ever such a thing as French art, or was it only ever Parisian art? Is there today such a thing as German art, or only the art of Berlin, Düsseldorf, Cologne?' Elsewhere, Butler and Donaldson claim that cities 'explain themselves, are their own cause and effect, independent of but not unrelated to one other.' However, their seeming endorsement of 'the city' should be understood in the context of their polemic against nationalist history, rather than an argument for the superiority of metropolitan histories per se. Rex Butler and A.D.S. Donaldson, 'Trans-Pacific Abstraction,' *Discipline* 4 (2015), 37–48.

propagated as much via face-to-face encounters as through images of artworks and discourses that travelled between distant locations in magazines and books.[12]

The final major problem addressed in this thesis is that of the relationship of Australian art history to that of Europe and America. In the past, Australian art was routinely dismissed as a provincial imitation of European and American art: London, Paris or New York appeared as the centre of authentic art, whereas Australia appeared as the passive receiver of imported movements, trends and styles. Influential critiques of the 'provincialism problem' were elaborated by Ian Burn and Terry Smith in the early 1970s.[13] But the problem has persisted since then, as Rex Butler has argued, in and through post-modernist attempts to reimagine Australia's 'distance' as a privileged condition of self-conscious cultural awareness.[14] This thesis cultivates a different approach. It acknowledges the ideology of provincialism as an historical reality that profoundly shaped the artistic and theoretical imagination of the 1960s and 1970s. Beyond this, it is guided by the historiographical presumption that the discourse of provincialism misunderstands that irrespective of whether it is made in Melbourne, London, Paris or New York, art is always original *and* reproduced, specific *and* dependent. An alternative to the centre-periphery explanation of how artistic influence travels—an alternative that forms a guiding presupposition of this thesis—is to understand art as a global phenomenon, with different locations conceived as nodes in a decentralised network. The globalist framework gives rise to a more complex, dynamic picture of the connectedness of Australian art to that of other regions than what had been thought possible through the provincialist model.

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[12] Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2015*);* Annemarie Chandler and Norie Neumark, eds., *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2005); Friedrich Wolfram Heubach, *Behind The Facts: Interfunktionen 1968–1975*, (Madrid: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2004); Christine Mehring, 'Continental Schrift: The Story of Interfunktionen,' *Artforum* 42, no. 9 (May 2004), 178–83, 233.

[13] Ian Burn, 'Provincialism,' *Art Dialogue* 1 (October 1973), 3–11; Terry Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem,' *Artforum* 13, no. 1 (September 1974), 54–9. Also see Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether, and Ann Stephen, *The Necessity of Australian Art* (Sydney: Power Institute, University of Sydney, 1988), in particular 'The Provincialism Debates,' 104–126.

[14] Rex Butler elaborates his critique of provincialism in *What is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s & 1990s* (Brisbane: I.M.A. Publishing, 2004).

Aims and Scope

This thesis offers a new account of the art of Hickey and Hunter during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period of intense social and artistic exchange between the artists. The initial encounter between the two arose when the seventeen-year old Hunter commenced a Fine Arts diploma at Preston Tech in 1964, where Hickey, ten years his senior, worked as a teacher. The professional relationship ceased when Hunter finished his course at the end of 1965, but this was not the end of their affiliation: they formed a friendship the following year within a social clique that included the painters James Doolin and Robert Jacks. In 1966, the starting point of this thesis, the pair traded figurative expressionism for the hard-edge style that was rapidly taking over in Melbourne.

Hickey and Hunter both presented breakthrough solo exhibitions of hard-edge paintings at Tolarno Galleries, in October 1967 and May 1968, respectively. After mid-1968, however, the dialogue between the principal protagonists of this thesis took place in proximity to Pinacotheca, which, after its opening in 1967, played a pivotal role in the culture of hard-edge painting, minimalism and conceptual art in Melbourne. Expounding a new critical account of Hickey's and Hunter's work from 1966 to 1973 thus opens a new perspective on the local history of these movements. This addresses the problem alluded to earlier concerning the lack of writing about the specificity of hard-edge painting, minimalism and conceptual art in Melbourne in the late 1960s.

My research presumes that Melbourne art is not a neatly contained category; it is intimately entwined with art produced elsewhere, interstate as well as overseas. When it looks outside Australia, the literature on Australian art of the 1960s and 1970s has concentrated on the connections between Australian and American art. This thesis will build on existing knowledge of the art-historical associations between Australia and America, but in an attempt to capture aspects of Hickey's and Hunter's work that have previously gone unnoticed, it explores historical connections between their work and European art, from Giorgio de Chirico to Concrete Art, Giorgio Morandi to Supports/Surfaces. Furthermore, by tracking the movements and communications of Hickey and Hunter during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including their overseas travels in 1971 and 1968, direct connections emerge between Melbourne artists and artists in New York, Los Angeles and London. The

comparative approach permits the vernacular traits of Hickey and Hunter's work to be glimpsed, while, at the same time, attesting to its dialogue with art of other regions.

It is customary to situate the art-historical developments of the 1960s and 1970s in the context of a 'general atmosphere of revolt' marked by student protests, race politics, feminist politics and counter-cultural experiments, and punctuated by events such as the May 1968 riots.[15] However, it is difficult to accommodate the principal protagonists of this thesis within a politicised account of art during the 1960s and 1970s as they were entangled in these upheavals in only a very limited sense. They were not directly involved in any collective political program.[16] If they were involved in any sort of politics, it was the bohemian and (in Hunter's case) drop-out lifestyle, influenced by John Cage, D.T. Suzuki and Timothy Leary—they were laconic stoners rather than committed activists.

These factors informed the mystical version of hard-edge painting developed by Hickey and Hunter in the late 1960s. According to the artists as well as others such as Bruce Pollard, the director of Pinacotheca, art was a domain of extra-rational or non-rational activity and experience. The related idea that painting gives access to transcendent reality carried equal weight within the Pinacotheca milieu. Trevor Vickers, a hard-edge painter associated with Pinacotheca, recalls that in the late 1960s, 'artists talked in almost religious terms in those days about what painting could do.'[17] To the extent that this thesis reveals Hickey's and Hunter's work as influenced by a quasi-religious conception of art, it

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[15] There are numerous social histories of 1960s art. Ian Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath' (1981), in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1999), 392–409; Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2004).

[16] Luc Boltanksi and Eve Chiapello identify bohemianism with what they term 'artistic critique.' The 'artistic critique' is 'rooted in the invention of a bohemian lifestyle, draws above all upon … two sources of indignation … : on the one hand the disenchantment and inauthenticity, and on the other the oppression, which characterise the bourgeois world associated with the rise of capitalism.' In this analysis, the 'artistic critique' 'counter-poses the freedom of artists, their rejection of any contamination of aesthetics by ethics, their refusal of any form of subjection in time and space and, in its extreme forms, of any kind of work.' See Boltanksi and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), trans. Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 38.

[17] Trevor Vickers, cited in Cramer, *Less Is More*, 29. Thomas Crowe has remarked that 'the question of belief' was 'central to … twentieth-century modernism, much of which, in searching after metaphysical harmonies, mythic archetypes, or undiscovered depths of inner experience, approaches a religious vision.' Thomas Crow, 'The Return of Hank Herron,' in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T.: 1986), 11–27, 20.

complicates narratives of art of the 1960s and 1970s by authors who, as Krauss observed, 'find it indescribably embarrassing to mention *art* and *spirit* in the same sentence.'[18]

How does this mysticism manifest itself in the art of Hickey and Hunter? A central aim of this thesis is to establish that the art of Hickey and Hunter was shaped by aesthetic strategies of 'estrangement' and 'desubjectivisation.' As will become clear, the desire to make the familiar strange was one of the key factors of Hickey's work throughout the period in question. The idea of estrangement, or defamiliarisation, is often associated with the Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovksy; however, for Hickey, Hunter and others at Pinacotheca, a more immediate reference was a 1960s counter-culture in which Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception* (1954) had a formative influence.[19] The goal of estrangement, in the sense of a 'heightened state of awareness' that would shake perception from its unconscious habits and daily routines, anchors Hickey's aesthetic project throughout the period addressed in this thesis. By disorienting the spectator, Hickey's defamiliarised depictions of kitsch objects were meant to occasion an experience of the transcendent. Hunter enlisted various other painterly strategies towards the same end. His use of symmetrical geometries derived from the outer shape of the canvas—an example of what Yve-Alain Bois has dubbed 'non-composition'—was an attempt to limit his subjective involvement in the production of his work.[20] Hunter's efforts to minimise his involvement in the compositional process yields a type of painting that is dissociated from the humanistic notion of the artist giving concrete expression to their inner world. In Hunter's contemplative abstractions, the transcendent becomes manifest through the work of self-erasure.

If Hickey's work aligns with an aesthetic of estrangement and Hunter's with desubjectivisation, there are nevertheless notable cross-overs between them: just as Hickey frequently employs grids and serial forms that limit his agency in the production process, Hunter's paintings can be said to defamiliarise the house-painter's materials they were made with. Rather than any essential difference between estrangement and desubjectivisation, this indicates a complementary relation between them, which can be explained through reference

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[18] Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids,' *October* 9 (Summer, 1979), 50–64, 54.
[19] Viktor Shklovksy, 'Art as Technique' (1917), in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge, trans. Lee Lemon and Marion Reis (London: Longmans, 1988), 16–30; Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (1954, 1956) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).
[20] For an outline of the history of non-composition in modern art, see Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Difficult Task of Erasing Oneself: Non-Composition in Twentieth Century Art,' lecture delivered March 7 2007, https://video.ias.edu/The-Difficult-Task-of-Erasing-Oneself, accessed 4 November 2012.

to the shared context in which Hickey and Hunter were operating. Informed by a mystical conception of aesthetic activity, the ideal of painting promoted by Pollard, the director of Pinacotheca, accommodates estrangement as well as desubjectivisation. Contemplation, which both implies a transcendence of the 'here and now' and the possibility of 'losing oneself' in beholding, is mirrored in the artist's attempts to remove their subjectivity from the production process in order to give form to the transcendent. Thus the contemplative ideal fuses estrangement and desubjectivisation together: the one refers back to the other.

In the case of Hickey and Hunter, the contemplative ideal originated in modernist painting, but it also coloured their engagement with minimalism and conceptualism. Although influenced by minimalism's use of non-art materials, and conceptual art's claims about painting's obsolescence, rather than any materialist or analytic tendency, I argue, the pair's continued use of strategies of estrangement and desubjectivisation reflects the persistence of a mystical agenda according to which artistic activity gives form to the unknown and the irrational. This agenda is not the only crossover between Hickey's and Hunter's hard-edge paintings and their minimalist and conceptualist works. The ensuing analysis proves that throughout the period in question, their work expresses an ongoing preoccupation with the technical procedures, material norms, compositional structures, perceptual modes and ideological investments of painting. This is true of their minimalist and conceptualist work, even when it appears to have little to do with the medium. Based on this observation, a central idea advanced in this thesis is that the radical transformations in art in the 1960s and 1970s occurred in, or in relation to painting: there is a dialectical relationship between painting and its avant-garde critiques.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into two parts, the first on Hickey and the second on Hunter, each consisting of three chapters. Chapter 1 outlines critical literature relevant to this thesis. The topics covered include existing scholarship on Hickey and Hunter; 1960s and 1970s art within and outside Australia; estrangement, non-composition, mysticism and contemplation; and theories of painting in the post-medium condition.

Chapter 2 discusses Hickey's hard-edge and minimalist paintings from 1966 to 1969. After explaining how Hickey's paintings intersect with modernist painting and its discourse, it considers the issue of Hickey's camouflaged representationalism. The combination of modernist forms and provincial signifiers is more than a deconstruction of the idea of

international style. The combinatorial strategy was the norm, rather than the exception, within Melbourne modernist painting. In Hickey's case, I argue, it is compelled by an aesthetic of estrangement. To draw this out, numerous sources for Hickey's defamiliarising tendency are discussed, including Shklovksy, metaphysical painting and surrealism. The final part of the chapter discusses Hickey's 1969 paintings through the lens of Pollard's theory of 'contemplative minimalism.'

In Chapter 3, I deal with Hickey's engagement with conceptualism in 1969 and 1970. It investigates his temporary installation at Pinacotheca in November 1969, experimental text pieces and photo-conceptual work, *90 White Walls* (1970). In these works, Hickey embraced the actual object over the depiction, the photograph over the illusion. Produced at the height of anti-painting sentiment in Melbourne, these works remain preoccupied with the medium. Using conceptualism to reflect on painting, the taboo object in the post-medium condition, Hickey extended his project of defamiliarisation.

Chapter 4 tracks the research trip Hunter took to America and Europe in 1971, to study the impact of conceptualism on art schools. The story of Hickey's changing views on painting and conceptual art, and avant-gardism and regionalism, emerges through letters written to Pollard and others. The chapter documents Hickey's hostile reaction to the New York scene of conceptual art, his embrace of the 'funk art' he saw in Los Angeles through James Doolin, and his experiences living in London with Roger Kemp and his family. The chapter culminates in an extended analysis of Hickey's return to the traditional artistic mediums via his still life *Cup Paintings* (1972–73). In these works, I argue, anachronism functions as a strategy of estrangement.

Chapter 5 discusses the hard-edge paintings that Hunter produced between 1966 and 1968. It argues that historians' tendency to emphasise Hunter's relationship to American modernist and minimalist art and their discourses has led to the neglect of his connection to European geometric art. To address this oversight, I reposition Hunter in relation to the art and discourse of influential exponents of that tradition, including Mondrian, van Doesburg, Bill, Albers and Morellet. It finds that Hunter shares with many of these artists a desire to remove subjectivity from painting. Unlike the rationalist art propounded the likes of Bill, however, in Hunter's mystical abstractions, geometry is used to generate transcendent forms that undermine the certainty of knowledge.

Chapter 6 focuses on two untitled paintings Hunter produced in 1970, which I call *Thread Painting* and *Paper Painting*. Locating these works in relation to minimalism and post-minimalism, it argues that that their contemplativeness and preoccupation with medium-

specific concerns distinguishes them within those movements. A precedent for Hunter's work is identified in the work of Agnes Martin. The final section of this chapter examines the role of repetition in Hunter's work, through which, he extended the non-compositional program established in his earlier hard-edge paintings. The final section considers the remaking and authorised remaking of *Thread Painting* and *Paper Painting* in the mid-1970s, which pushed them into heightened proximity with the realm of ordinary objects.

Chapter 7 examines Hunter's first two wall paintings of 1970 and 1971. In line with minimalism and post-minimalism, Hunter's works invite the spectator to focus on their phenomenological relation to the artwork and architecture, but their illusory effects solicit a contemplative detachment that is at odds with those movements. Next, Hunter's works are compared to several minimalist and conceptualist wall works, including the wall drawings of Sol LeWitt. LeWitt's endorsement of desubjectivisation through the repetition of a predetermined formula as an important source for Hunter's systematic approach. Against the common preconception that wall paintings were a radical attack on the institution of art, this chapter observes that Hunter's first wall painting harmonises with the aesthetic priorities of Pollard, director of the gallery where it was shown.

The Chapter 8 brings this thesis to a conclusion by reflecting on the fundamental arguments that run throughout this thesis. It discusses the idea of mystical modernism and its ties to estrangement and desubjectivisation, the persistence of painting in Hickey's and Hunter's work, their position within the local Pinacotheca scene and its connection to art produced elsewhere. It summarises the outcomes and significance of the findings of this thesis as a whole, and signals possible directions of future research.

1. Literature Review

This chapter is an overview of existing literature relevant to my analysis of Hickey's and Hunter's art of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Several monographic studies address this period of their work, as do generalist histories of hard-edge painting, minimalism and conceptual art in Australia. Various other sources are broadly relevant to my study, first and foremost histories of European and American painting, minimalism and conceptual in the 1960s and 1970s. Although these texts do not directly refer to Hickey and Hunter, they are relevant insofar as their work is intimately entwined with developments in American and European art. There are various other texts that are pertinent to this thesis, which address the status of painting in the post-medium condition as well as the topics of defamiliarisation and mysticism, which inform the theoretical framework I bring to bear on Hickey's and Hunter's work.

This chapter is structured in the following way: first, it surveys literature that directly discusses Hickey's and Hunter's art; second, it discusses literature on Australian art of the late 1960s and early 1970s: hard-edge painting, minimalism and conceptual art; third, it considers relevant literature on art produced during the same period in other locations, principally Europe and America; fourth, it surveys literature on global art historiography, in particular global histories of conceptualism; fifth, it discusses texts on the connection of art to defamiliarisation and mysticism; and to conclude, it summarises texts on theories of painting in the post-medium condition.

Literature on Hickey and Hunter

There are three monographic publications on Hickey, all of them exhibition catalogues. The most recent of these, *Dale Hickey: Life in a Box*, which accompanied a retrospective exhibition held at The Ian Potter Museum in 2008, includes a variety of short texts on various aspects of his work.[1] *Dale Hickey: A Retrospective Exhibition*, held at the Ballarat Art Gallery in 1988, was accompanied by a catalogue featuring a monographic essay by Margaret Plant, which remains the most detailed account of its kind.[2] Plant builds a basic biographical

[1] Zika, *Life in a Box*.
[2] Plant, *Dale Hickey*.

and historical framework through which to understand Hickey's work from the late 1950s through to the late 1980s, situating it in relation to the artistic and theoretical paradigms of figurative expressionism, late modernism, minimalism, conceptual art, tonal figurative painting, and the Australian landscape tradition. I expand on Plant's claim that Hickey could only tentatively be called a conceptual artist; conceptual art, from this perspective, appears merely as a temporary interruption to his career as a painter. For Hickey's first museum survey, *Project 15: Dale Hickey* (1976), curator Robert Lindsay authored a shorter account of Hickey's 1960s and 1970s work.[3]

There are several other substantial essays on Hickey's work. Among the most important of these is Gary Catalano's 1980s essay in *Art and Australia*.[4] Catalano theorisation of the depiction of commonplace subjects in Hickey's art in terms of defamiliarisation (although he does not explicitly use this term) forms an early critical precedent for my argument. Christopher McAuliffe's 1994 essay 'Don't Fence Me In: Artists and Suburbia in the 1960s,' is the most detailed interpretation of Hickey's painting as a type of vernacular modernism.[5] McAuliffe argues that Hickey's work strategically undermines categories that divided the field of 1960s art between abstraction and figuration, metropolis and suburb, centre and periphery, and through this categorical indeterminacy carves out what he calls a 'critical regionalist' position.

Robert Gray's *Dale Hickey* (1983), an unpublished monograph, is the only book-length study of Hickey's work. Gray reads Hickey's stylistic erraticism as an attempt to resist the purism of modernist abstraction and the linear conception of art history that accompanied it; on this basis, he claims that Hickey's work 'contributes to the evolution of a post-modernist sensibility' in Australia.[6] With its extensive quotations of Hickey's journal, Gray's manuscript contains source material that gives insight into Hickey's thinking in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Another feature of Gray's text is its contextualisation of Hickey's work in relation to European and American precedents that have not otherwise been considered,

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[3] Robert Lindsay, *Project 15: Dale Hickey* (Sydney: A.G.S.N.W., 1976).
[4] Gary Catalano, 'On Dale Hickey,' *Art and Australia* 17, no. 3 (March 1980), 252–57.
[5] Christopher McAuliffe, 'Don't Fence Me In: Artists and Suburbia in the 1960s,' in *Beasts of Suburbia: Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs*, eds. Ferber, Healy, and McAuliffe (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 94–110. I extend and problematise McAuliffe's account in Chapter 2.
[6] Robert Gray, *Dale Hickey* (1983), 119. Unpublished manuscript, 'The Papers of Robert Gray,' Special Collections, U.N.S.W. Canberra at the Australian Defence Force Academy, MS 16.

including Picasso, Hopper, Noland and Diebenkorn. Yet there are certain problems with Gray's argument. For example, Gray contends that Hickey rebels against the strictures of modernism, but his characterisation of modernism, derived from a few well-known quotes by Greenberg, lacks depth. Furthermore, there is no solid basis for Gray's claim that figurative art is more expressive than abstraction. Indeed, the idea that figuration is superior to abstraction seems utterly contrary to Hickey's enterprise, which unseats the distinction between these categories. A final flaw in the text relevant to this thesis is Gray's dismissal of Hickey's minimalist and conceptual works. Gray fails to acknowledge that in certain respects these works constitute a continuation of his earlier paintings (which Gray endorses), or how they elicit reflection on the relationship of painting to other forms of artistic and cultural production.

Before the retrospective exhibition *Robert Hunter: 1966–2013* (2018), there was a dearth of recent scholarly writing on the artist.[7] The catalogue features an overview of Hunter's career by curator Jane Devery, an essay by Tom Nicholson on Hunter's paintings after 1985 and an essay by Jennifer Winkworth on Hunter's life and work in the 1970s. The essay closest to the subject of this thesis is Ann Stephen's, which discusses Hunter's art of the late 1960s and early 1970s in relation to minimalism and geometric painting.[8] Her discussion of Hunter in relation to Burn and Ramsden is useful for understanding Hunter's relationship to American minimalism, but could have better emphasised the contrast between them: Hunter's contemplative minimalism is manifestly opposed to the materialist and phenomenological minimalism of Burn and Ramsden.[9] Stephen's most productive manoeuvre is to locate Hunter's work in relation to European geometric painting, especially Josef Albers' colour theory that was taught at R.M.I.T. where Hunter studied in 1966 and 1967.[10]

Two earlier exhibitions of Hunter's work were also accompanied by catalogues. Curated by Jenepher Duncan, *Robert Hunter Paintings 1966–1988*, held at Monash University Gallery in 1989, includes a chronology authored by Duncan and an essay by Alan

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[7] Devery, *Robert Hunter: 1966–2013*, 2018.
[8] Ann Stephen, 'Robert Hunter: At the Southern Edge of the Great Iceberg of Minimalism,' in *Robert Hunter: 1966–2013* (Melbourne: N.G.V., 2018), 75–81.
[9] I consider this point in Chapter 6 and 7.
[10] In Chapter 4, I expand on Stephen's proposition by discussing Hunter's proximity to European geometric art.

Dodge 'Robert Hunter and Minimal Art.'[11] Dodge discusses Hunter's work in the context of the art and discourse of New York minimalism. Dodge is right to identify New York minimalism as a primary reference for Hunter's 1960s and 1970s painting, but he does not adequately acknowledge the way that Hunter's work is a complex mediation between Australian, American and European art. *Robert Hunter*, the 1989 exhibition at the Potter Gallery at the University of Melbourne, presented the works Hunter created while artist-in-residence at the University in 1988 and 1989. The catalogue features Charles Green's essay 'Persistent subjectivity; Revaluing Robert Hunter,' an attempt to think about Hunter's work outside the entrenched anti-subjectivism of geometric and minimalist art, an idea further elaborated in this thesis.[12] Green's emphasis on desubjectivisation is reminiscent of a 1979 essay by Catalano published in *Art & Australia* that raises the issue of desubjectivisation, which I critique and expand in my discussion of Hunter's 'non-composition,' through which he sought to relinquish subjectivity in the production process.[13]

The final study deserving mention is Tom Nicholson's 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' an Honours thesis completed under the supervision of Charles Green at the University of Melbourne in 1995.[14] While it might seem unusual to cite an undergraduate thesis in this context, the empirical depth of Nicholson's research into Hunter is unparalleled. It is accompanied by an in-depth chronology and a comprehensive bibliography. The interviews Nicholson carried out with Hunter and other artists including Hickey, which are extensively quoted in his thesis, are an important contribution to knowledge about Hunter and his milieu.

Literature on Australian Hard-Edge Painting, Minimalism and Conceptual Art

This section surveys literature on Australian 1960s and 1970s art, focusing on literature on hard-edge painting, minimalism and conceptual art. Beyond monographic essays, most scholarship on Hickey and Hunter is located within nationalist histories of art. While there is

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[11] Alan Dodge 'Robert Hunter and Minimal Art,' in *Robert Hunter Paintings 1966–1988* (Melbourne: Monash University Gallery, 1989), 15–40. Also see Dodge, 'Robert Hunter: The Transcendental Minimalist?,' in *Less is More: Minimal + Post-Minimal Art in Australia*, ed. Sue Cramer (Melbourne: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 92–93.
[12] Charles Green, 'Persistent Subjectivity; Revaluing Robert Hunter,' *Robert Hunter* (Parkville: Melbourne University Museum of Art, 1989). I elaborate on the idea of desubjectivisation and Hunter's late 1960s painting in Chapter 5.
[13] Gary Catalano, 'Robert Hunter,' *Art and Australia* 17, no. 1 (September 1979), 77–79.
[14] Tom Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter' (Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 1995).

much valuable material on both artists contained in these histories, an overarching aim of my project is to loosen the nationalist framework that continues to determine the reception of Hickey's and Hunter's work.

The first historical account of Hickey's and Hunter's work is the catalogue for *The Field*, the 1968 exhibition at the N.G.V.[15] In his essay Patrick McCaughey claims that the exhibition proved that Australian artists had 'surrendered their birthrights as Australian artists in favour of a so-called "international" anonymity.'[16] However, McCaughey's claim that the exhibition inaugurated international modernism in Australia aligned this so-called 'international style' almost exclusively with American modernism. Furthermore, his critical approach was influenced by the writings of New York Clement Greenberg, and was thus prone to exaggerating the importance of American modernism in defining international style and its discourse.[17]

There are numerous survey histories and exhibition catalogues that discuss Hickey's and Hunter's work in the context of Australian, and sometimes Melbournian, painting of the late 1960s.[18] The most important of these is the updated edition of Bernard Smith's nationalist history *Australian Painting, 1788–1970* (1971), which locates Hickey and Hunter's work in the context of hard-edge, colour field and minimalist painting in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide.[19] A later version, *Australian Painting 1788–1990* (1991) contains three additional chapters by Terry Smith, which addresses the connection between

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[15] See Ian Burn and Nigel Lendon, 'Purity, Style, Amnesia,' in *The Field Now* (Bulleen: Heide, 1984), 19–22; Burn, Lendon, Merewether and Stephen, *The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay About Interpretation* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1988); John Stringer, 'Cultivating The Field,' in *Fieldwork: Australian Art 1968–2002* (Melbourne: N.G.V., 2002), 16–29. Sue Cramer, *The Field Now* (Bulleen: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 1984). Also see David Homewood and Paris Lettau, 'Hall of Mirrors,' in *The Field Revisited* (Melbourne: N.G.V., 2018), 85–100.

[16] Patrick McCaughey, 'Experience and The New Abstraction,' *The Field* (Melbourne: N.G.V., 1968), 88–90, 88. McCaughey also discusses this idea in 'The Significance of The Field,' *Art & Australia* 6, no. 3 (December 1968), 235–242, 235.

[17] In Chapter 2, however, I complicate the standard portrayal of McCaughey as a 'Greenbergian critic.'

[18] For Melbourne art, see Lindsay, *A Melbourne Mood*. For Australian art, see Ann Stephen, Philip Goad and Andrew McNamara, *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia* (Carlton, Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 2008); Grishin, *Australian Art*; Christopher Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution: the Rise of Australian Art 1946–1968* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1995). Gary Catalano, *The Years of Hope: Australian Art and Criticism 1959–1968* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981). Also see David Pestorius, *Geometric Painting in Australia 1941–1997* (Brisbane: University Art Museum, 1998); David Pestorius, *Monochromes* (Brisbane: University Art Museum, 2001).

[19] Smith, *Australian Painting 1788–1970*.

painting and conceptual art.[20] Smith describes the perceived exhaustion of painting around 1970: 'painting was a medium under siege, the least representative art form of the moment. Its history seemed complete, its future bleak.'[21] A unique aspect of the chapter is its inversion of the typical emphasis of 1960s and 1970s art histories on the new forms and movements, such as conceptual art, that emerged during the period; in contrast, Smith focuses on the very thing those forms and movements are said to displace or negate: painting. As such, Smith's account offers insight into the connection between painting and conceptual art, which I explore in Chapter 3.[22]

I now turn to studies of minimal art—more specifically, minimalist painting—in Australia. Before launching into this topic, it is necessary to observe, firstly, that minimalism in Melbourne and Australia was primarily a painterly phenomenon, and secondly, that Australian minimalism was never an organised movement or even a coherent style, but rather a hybrid of hard-edge, pop and other kinds of painting.[23] It is more accurate to say, at least in Hickey's and Hunter's work, that a minimalist sensibility was one current among others in late 1960s art, which inflected hard-edge and pop painting, as well as conceptual art.

Surveys of Australian minimalism are predominantly found in exhibition catalogues. *Minimal* (1973), the first survey of Australian minimalism, consisting solely of paintings, was curated by Pollard at the University of Melbourne's Ewing Gallery, accompanied by a short text. Pollard later curated the more extensive *Minimal Art in Australia: A Contemplative Art* (1987) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Brisbane, for which he penned a slightly longer text.[24] Pollard's account of 'contemplative minimalism' contradicts the standard idea of the movement as anti-aesthetic and anti-painterly: as well as only discussing paintings, he also argues that minimalist paintings give rise to an absorptive, contemplative experience.

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[20] The most recent edition is Smith with Smith and Heathcote, *Australian Painting 1788–2000*.
[21] Ibid., 453. Smith later declares: 'Painting became a dependent, incidental, anachronistic mode of expression.' Also see Terry Smith, *Transformations in Australian Art, Volume 2: The 20th Century–Modernism and Aboriginality* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 2002).
[22] Terry Smith, *Australian Painting*, 470.
[23] Memory Holloway, 'Minimal Art at the National Gallery of Victoria' (1976), in *Anything Goes*, ed. Paul Taylor (Melbourne: Art & Text, 1984), 54–61, 60; Terry Smith, 'Peripheries in Motion: Conceptualism and Conceptual Art in: Australia and New Zealand,' in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s*, eds. Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, (New York, Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 86–98; Cramer, 2012, 29.
[24] Bruce Pollard, 'Introduction,' *Minimal Art in Australia: A Contemplative Art* (Brisbane: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 1. The same book includes Pollard's earlier text 'Minimal' (1973), 21–22.

Pollard's idea of contemplative minimalism is fundamental to the formal and historical interpretation of Hickey's and Hunter's work undertaken in this thesis.[25]

Hickey and Hunter featured in both of Pollard's minimalist exhibitions. They also participated in the museum survey *Minimal Art*, curated by Jennifer Phipps at the N.G.V. in 1976, which like Pollard's shows was biased towards painting. Phipps' exhibition was accompanied only by a short note, but Memory Holloway's extended review of the exhibition is an early effort to historicise minimalism in Australia, which similar to Pollard stresses the contemplative orientation of the movement.[26] Another historical survey of Australian minimalism is Sue Cramer's *Less Is More: Minimal and Post-Minimal Art in Australia* (2012). More descriptive than argumentative, Cramer's essay includes valuable research I build upon in subsequent chapters.[27]

While there are no comprehensive histories of Australian conceptual art, there are several exhibition catalogues of 'post-object art' in the 1970s.[28] Post-object art is an umbrella term for an array of forms, strategies and movements that emerged in the late 1960s and the early 1970s such as conceptual art, installation, performance, process and body art.[29] Melbourne was arguably the centre of post-object practice in Australia, but it also flourished in Sydney and Adelaide. Accounts of Inhibodress in Sydney and the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide are relevant to this thesis because they show Hickey's and Hunter's conceptual art in its regional context.[30]

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[25] In Chapter 2 and 7, I discuss Pollard's definition of contemplative minimalism in relation to Hickey's late 1960s minimalist work and Hunter's 1970–71 wall painting, respectively.
[26] Memory Holloway, 'Minimal Art at the National Gallery of Victoria.'
[27] Sue Cramer, *Less Is More*.
[28] See Terry Smith and Tony McGillick, *The Situation Now: Object or Post-Object Art?* (Sydney: Contemporary Art Society of Australia, 1971); Tim Potter, *Post Object Art, Australia and New Zealand: A Survey* (Adelaide: Experimental Art Foundation, 1976). Also see Jim Allen and Wystan Curnow, *New Art: Some Recent New Zealand Sculpture and Post-Object Art* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1976); Christina Barton, 'Post-object Art in New Zealand 1969–1979' (Masters thesis, University of Auckland, 1987).
[29] The term 'post-object art' was coined by American theorist Jack Burnham. See 'Systems Esthetics,' *Artforum* 7, no. 1 (September 1968), 30–35; 'Real Time Systems,' *Artforum* 8, no. 1 (September 1969), 49–55.
[30] The hub of conceptual art activity in Sydney from 1970–1972 was Inhibodress, the artist-run gallery associated with Tim Johnson, Peter Kennedy and Mike Parr. Sue Cramer's *Inhibodress 1970–1972* (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 1989) is the authoritative text on the subject. In Adelaide, most activity occurred in relation to the Experimental Art Foundation, founded in 1974. See Donald Brook, 'Flight From the Object' (1969), in *Concerning Contemporary Art: The Power Lectures 1968–1973*, ed. Bernard Smith (Sydney: Clarendon Press, 1975), 16–34. Also see Charles Green and Heather Barker, 'Flight from the Object: Donald Brook, Inhibodress and the Emergence of Post-

Several authors have theorised the conceptual art of Hickey, Hunter and other artists associated with Pinacotheca.[31] One of the most substantial contributions is Terry Smith's 1999 essay 'Peripheries in Motion: Conceptual and Conceptualist Art in Australia and New Zealand,' which gives a broad history of conceptual art in the region by discussing a small number of artists (Ian Burn and Billy Apple are central) and their relation to several scenes (Pinacotheca in Melbourne, Inhibodress in Sydney and Elam School of Art in New Zealand).[32] Smith's discussion sheds new light on the relationship between painting and conceptual art, but his narrative is too simple. This thesis reveals that Hickey and Hunter were not simply shocked out of painting through their overseas encounter with conceptual art—their scepticism towards painting emerged much earlier, while they were still in Melbourne.[33]

Charles Green and Ann Stephen have both made important contributions to the study of Melbourne conceptual art. Green's *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (2001), a history of collaboration in art from 1968 to the late 1990s, includes extended discussions of early conceptual art exhibitions at Pinacotheca by Ian Burn, Roger Cutforth and Mel Ramsden as well as Joseph Kosuth, all of whom appear as peripheral figures in this thesis.[34] While collaboration is not a primary topic of this thesis, Green's book is relevant insofar as it critiques the idea of conceptual art as rationalist. 'Paying attention to its deconstructive intention,' Green explains, 'ignores its deliberate mystification and ignores the dissociations deliberately provoked by artistic collaboration and

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Studio Art in Early 1970s Sydney,' *emaj* 4 (2009), accessed 1 May 2013, www.melbourneartjournal.unimelb.edu.au/E-MAJ.

[31] Another relevant study is Caroline Barnes, 'Contested Space: An Investigation of the Structural Foundations and Historical Consequences of Conceptualist Art Practices in Australia, 1968–1988' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Melbourne, 2004.) Barnes is primarily interested in 'institutional critique': the way that since the late 1960s artists 'began to use art practice to systematically contest the interrelated meanings, imperatives and authority in art world structures and processes.' (19) In my view, Barnes' emphasis on the social and political efficacy of art is ill-suited to the politically ambivalent character of Hickey's and Hunter's art.

[32] Smith, 'Peripheries in Motion.' Also see Smith, *Transformations*. The sense that painting lost its currency was not limited to Australia; it was also acutely felt in New Zealand. See Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith, 'Painting in the Seventies,' *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839–1980* (Auckland: William Collins Publishers, 1982), 210–221.

[33] This point becomes clear in my discussion of Hickey's conceptual art and Hunter's wall paintings, in Chapter 3 and 7 respectively.

[34] Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). Green contends that 'collaboration was a crucial element in the transition from modernist to postmodern art.' (x)

bureaucratically modelled impersonality.'[35] Conceptual art is thus understood not simply as a self-reflexive investigation of the concept of art, but also as an exercise in the deliberate obfuscation of artistic identity.

Green's research on conceptual art also extends beyond *The Third Hand*. His dissertation 'Thief in the Attic: Artistic Collaborations and Modified Identities in International Art after 1968' (1998) engages with the history of conceptual art in Melbourne and Sydney.[36] The chapter on Melbourne examines two exhibitions at Pinacotheca: a 1972 exhibition by Simon Klose and Robert Rooney, and a 1973 exhibition by Hickey, Klose and Rooney.[37] Green's discussion of the latter exhibition revolves around the question of painting in conceptual art. Elsewhere, Green has argued that there is significant overlap between minimalist painting and conceptual art exhibited at Pinacotheca.[38]

Ann Stephen has also significantly shaped the art-historical discourse on conceptual art in Melbourne. She curated and wrote an essay for *1969: The Black Box of Conceptual Art* (2013), an exhibition that 'reconstructs the first Conceptual art exhibition in Australia' by Burn, Cutforth and Ramsden.[39] This thesis builds on Stephen's archival research, but I am critical of her repeated claims that the 1969 exhibition was the first of its kind in Australia, which implicitly reinforce the idea that art history unfolds as a linear succession of events within a nationalist narrative.[40] This contradicts Stephen's aim to 'probe one of conceptual

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[35] Green, *The Third Hand*, 56.
[36] Charles Green, 'Thief in the Attic: Artistic Collaborations and Modified Identities in International Art After 1968,' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Melbourne, 1998). In particular, see 'Chapter 3. Fictional Identity and Collaboration: Pinacotheca' (104–136); 'Chapter 4. The Disintegration of Conceptual Art: Sydney Collaborations at the Tin Sheds and Inhibodress' (137–183).
[37] David Homewood, 'RR/SK: Public Exhibition', *Discipline* 2 (Autumn 2012), 97–105.
[38] Green, *Peripheral Vision*. Pertinent to this thesis is Green's observation of the overlap between the 'ironic, reflexive minimalism' of Hickey, Hunter and Rooney and the 'post-object art of the 1970s.' (44) Hickey studied design at Swinburne with Rooney in the mid-1950s, and their work followed a similar trajectory during the 1960s and early 1970s, from commercial illustrations into Antipodeanesque expressionism into hard-edge painting and conceptual art. Literature on Rooney's work from this period is therefore also relevant to Hickey. See Charles Green, 'Robert Rooney,' in *From the Homefront. Robert Rooney: Works 1953–1988* (Clayton: Monash University Gallery, 1990), 4–10. Green's essay on Rooney's efforts to remove the signs of expressionist subjectivity from his work is relevant to my reading of both Hickey's and Hunter's work. *From the Homefront* additionally includes Philip Brophy's essay 'Robert Rooney as Pop' (22–28). Also see Maggie Finch, *Endless Present: Robert Rooney and Conceptual Art* (Melbourne: N.G.V., 2010).
[39] Ann Stephen, *1969: The Black Box of Conceptual Art* (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2013).
[40] Stephen claims that part of the significance of conceptual art was its attempt to 'de-centre' art, yet her identification of the August 1969 exhibition as the 'first' conceptual art show paradoxically reinforces a nationalist history. See Stephen, *1969*, 44–45.

art's "de-centred" sites,' and is out of step with her argument that the significance of the original exhibition partly inheres in its attempted dispersal of the ideological centres of art.[41] By analysing the repetitions, relays and delays constitutive of hard-edge painting, minimalism and conceptual art, my analysis complicates historicist accounts of this kind.

Studies of Minimalism and Conceptual Art in America and Europe

The most influential art-historical surveys of minimalism and conceptual art focus on Europe and America. A small number of metropolitan centres are typically nominated as the privileged sites where 'advanced art' unfolds: most histories are based in New York, with Amsterdam, Dusseldorf, London, Los Angeles and Paris given supporting roles. The theoretical and historical writings of Alexander Alberro, Benjamin Buchloh, Ian Burn, Boris Groys, Peter Osborne, John Roberts and Anne Rorimer inform my understanding of 1960s and 1970s art.[42]

A frequently cited history of New York minimalism is James Meyer's *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (2000), which portrays the movement as a 'dynamic field of specific practices' that unfolded in New York in the 1960s.[43] Also attentive to the personal affinities and disagreements, and institutional and market forces surrounding the art, Meyer's understanding of minimalism as a debate among its central protagonists usefully emphasises the dialogic nature of the movement. This is a novel way to organise an historical account, which gave me an idea for how to structure this thesis on Hickey and Hunter, who were engaged in an artistic dialogue during the late 1960s and early 1970s.[44] While the narrow

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[41] Ibid. 'Through the reconstruction [of the August 1969 exhibition], Stephen explains, 'it might be possible to recover a sense of Conceptual art's utopian plans to democratise and de-centre art…'

[42] See Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2003); Benjamin Buchloh, *Gerhard Richter: Painting After the Subject of History* (Ph.D. thesis., City University of New York, 1994); Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath'; Boris Groys, *Art Power*, (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2008); Peter Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013); John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007); John Roberts, 'Art After Deskilling,' *Historical Materialism* 18 (2010) 77–96; Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001).

[43] James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2001), 4–6. Also see James Meyer, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000).

[44] The structure of this thesis is influenced by other texts structured around models of artistic exchange and collaborative authorship including Yve-Alain Bois, *Matisse and Picasso* (Flammarion: Paris, 2001); Ann Stephen, *Looking at Looking: The Art and Politics of Ian Burn* (Carlton:

chronological and geographical limits of Meyer's definition of minimalism are open to contestation, if read as a regional history and part of a broader narrative, his book is an important resource.

Two other authors who have significantly shaped my understanding of modernist painting, minimalism and conceptual art are Benjamin Buchloh and Charles Harrison. Now over twenty-five years old, Buchloh's and Harrison's essays remain among the most illuminating accounts of 1960s European and American art. At the same time, their research exemplifies the idea of minimalism and conceptual art as a domain of self-reflexive critical activity, which my analysis shows to be only one of the interpretative possibilities offered up by these movements. Their accounts neglect other characteristics of the art under discussion, for example, the mysticism of certain strains of minimalism and conceptual art.

Buchloh's 1990 essay 'Conceptual Art 1969–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions' is critical of several figures and tendencies associated with New York minimalism and conceptual art.[45] Most of all, it is critical of the minimalist and conceptual art of Donald Judd and Joseph Kosuth, which Buchloh argues embodies a false pursuit of aesthetic purity that annuls the relationship of art to its social, cultural and political conditions. Buchloh argues that the geometric figure of the square, a ubiquitous form in 1960s art, is equivalent to the linguistic form of the tautology; widely regarded by artists and critics as pure, neutral and value-free, he claims that the square is nothing if not ideological: he reads its seeming transparency and matter-of-factness as a cypher for the illusory hermeticism and self-sufficiency of the autonomous artwork. The tautological work thus magically seals itself off from the world, hermetically turns inward and away from real-world conditions.

I accept that, in a certain sense, the square, as well as the grid, function analogously to the tautology, sealing itself from its surroundings and attaining a level of self-sufficiency. However, I am also wary of the conclusion Buchloh draws from this: namely, that the

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Miegunyah Press, 2006); Viktor Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious: Communal (Post)Modernism in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2009); Branden Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass.; M.I.T., 2007); Branden Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and The Arts After Cage (A 'Minor' History)* (New York: Zone Books: 2008). An earlier 'minor history' of L.A. cinema is David E. James, The *Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[45] Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962–69: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,' *October* 55 (Winter 1990), 105–43.

tautological artwork can be dismissed because it replicates a logical structure within the artwork. The problem is that Buchloh reads the tautology in the artwork literally; he does not sufficiently acknowledge that through its incorporation into the artwork the tautological structure is transformed. Although Buchloh frequently defers to the writings of the Frankfurt School, his account contravenes Adorno's theory of mimesis, according to which the object is transformed through its incorporation into the artwork, achieving a temporary reconciliation with the subject and offering an alternative to means-ends rationality of modernity.[46] In my view, he neglects to consider the way that the aestheticisation of the tautology irrevocably alters its function and meaning.

Another problem with Buchloh's essay is its failure to acknowledge the 'slacker' and 'delinquent' character of conceptual art, which has been subsequently pointed out by John Roberts. Was conceptual art merely academic, or did it engage academic forms in a deliberately amateur way, irreverently appropriating academic conventions and turning logical formulations? The possibility that conceptual artists engaged in a practice of pseudo-academicism in order to disorient their audience and undermine their ostensibly rationalist agenda is explored in this thesis.[47]

Charles Harrison's reading of modernism, minimalism and conceptual art in *Essays on Art & Language* (1991) is historically and theoretically broad. Here I select one thread of his argument with special relevance to this thesis, which analyses the strategies developed by British artists in the 1960s to combat their perceived provincialism. Harrison argues that to overcome the latter, artists were forced to critically engage with the discourse of American modernism: 'To do this,' he claims, 'was to work self-consciously within a tissue of

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[46] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 54. 'The cliche about the magic of art has something true about it. The survival of mimesis, the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other, defines art as a form of knowledge and to that extent as "rational." For that to which the mimetic comportment responds is the telos of knowledge, which art simultaneously blocks with its own categories. Art completes knowledge with what is excluded from knowledge and thereby once again impairs its character as knowledge, its univocity. Art threatens to be pulled apart because magic, which art secularises, actually refuses this process, while in the midst of secularisation the essence of magic sinks to the level of a mythological vestige, to superstition.'

[47] See *John Roberts*, '*The Amateur's Retort*,' in *Amateurs*, eds. Grace Kook-Anderson and Claire Fitzsimmons (San Francisco: Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2008), 15–24. Also see John Roberts, 'Photography, Iconophobia and the Ruins of Conceptual Art,' in *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain: 1966–1976*, ed. John Roberts (London: Camerawork, 1997), 7–45. I engage with Roberts' argument about conceptual art and malingering in Chapter 2.

misrepresentations.'[48] Harrison goes on to say that 'it seemed important to 'come to terms with the elaborated theory and practice of "reductive" modernism, since this was still dominant.'[49] Harrison's account of provincialism and its critical subversion is helpful for thinking about explicitly vernacular modes of modernism, minimalism and conceptual art. In particular, it provides a way to understand the proximity of self-consciously provincialist streams of modernist painting, for example that of Hickey, who engages aspects of American late modernism but also encodes it with domestic and suburban iconography. Like the British artists described by Harrison, the apparent inauthentic or awkward proximity of Hickey's work to American precedents was a deliberate ploy. This is essentially how McAuliffe frames Hickey's late 1960s work.[50] However, I argue that Hickey's self-conscious navigation of the cultural dynamic of provincialism was only one aspect of his work.

While Harrison's account briefly deals with the provincialism of 1960s British art, neither Harrison nor Buchloh seriously engage with the idea of the global character of the art they are describing. For them, the history of modernism, minimalism and conceptual art chiefly revolves around a limited cluster of artist enclaves or cliques mainly based in New York and Coventry, which appear as the engines of avant-garde innovation. While several other cities are mentioned, for the most part they appear as tangential footnotes.

This leads me to observe a common oversight in Buchloh's and Harrison's, as well as Meyer's accounts: they do not discuss art produced outside the main centres of European and American art, nor do they adequately acknowledge that the historical character of the movements they describe were partly constituted by their cultural and geographical dispersal. This poses the question of how to understand the connection between their histories of modernism, minimalism and conceptual art to the manifestations of those movements in peripheral art scenes such as Pinacotheca.

Studies of 1960s and 1970s Art Beyond Europe and America

My conception of the relationship of Hickey's and Hunter's art to that of other locations is informed by the field of global art history. In his 1987 essay *The End of the History of Art*,

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[48] Charles Harrison, 'A Kind of Context,' in *Essays on Art & Language* (1991) (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2001), 1–29, 17–18.
[49] Ibid., 18.
[50] See McAuliffe, 'Don't Fence Me In.' I problematise this account of Hickey's work in Chapter 2.

Hans Belting argues that despite the homogenising effects of globalisation, there is a strong rationale for art history's continuing preoccupation with local traditions. Even 'in a world of disappearing boundaries,' he explains, 'individual positions are still rooted in and limited by particular cultural traditions.'[51] Belting's adoption of a global perspective is based on the presumption that 'today only provisional or even fragmentary assertions are possible.'[52] In line with this view, art historians subsequently addressing similar problems have embraced the idea of history as partial, fragmentary and local.[53] A wide array of movements and periods have been rethought through global art histories of this kind, including 'avant-garde' and 'neo-avant-garde' movements of the twentieth century, which have been shown to blur into the field of contemporary art.[54]

Curated by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, one of the most ambitious attempts to rethink post-war art history through a globalist art-historical perspective is *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (1999), held at the Queens Museum in New York. The difference between conceptualism and conceptual art is key to *Global Conceptualism*.[55] Whereas conceptual art is generally understood as primarily a New York phenomenon that developed out of a critique of modernism and minimalism, conceptualism is a much broader term that describes a global art-historical phenomenon, according to Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, 'a key development in twentieth century art in which art's

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[51] Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xii. Also see David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003).
[52] Belting, *The End of the History of Art*, xii.
[53] For a discussion and survey of global art-historical frameworks see James Elkins, ed., *Is Art History Global?* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Also see Jill Casid and Aruna D'Souza, eds., *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (Williamstown, Mass.: Clark Art Institute, 2014).

[54] See for example Per Bäckström and Benedikt Hjartarson, 'Introduction: Rethinking the Topography of the International Avant-Garde,' in *Decentring the Avant-Garde,* eds. Bäckström and Hjartarson (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), 7–32; Sanja Bahun-Radunović and Marinos Pourgouris, 'Prefaces and Faces: Towards a Centripetal Theory of Modernism,' in *The Avant-Garde and the Margin: New Territories of Modernism*, eds. Sanja Bahun-Radunović and Marinos Pourgouris (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), xii-xx; Tania Ørum, 'Minimal Requirements of the Post-War Avant-Garde of the 1960s,' in *Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. David Hopkins (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 145–160.
[55] Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), vii. '"Conceptualism" (as a separate term from "conceptual art"),' Camnitzer argues elsewhere, 'challenges not only aesthetics but also the attitude toward the role of art—the ways of producing it and its intended impact.' Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2007), 15.

response to both its own traditions and to its immediate milieu shifted from a consideration of the object to that of the idea.'[56] Although the distinction between conceptualism and conceptual art is not central to this thesis, the theorisation of the global dispersion of artistic influence promoted by *Global Conceptualism* has been crucial. 'The reading of "globalism" that informs this project,' the authors explain,

> is a highly differentiated one, in which localities are linked in crucial ways but not subsumed into a homogenised set of circumstances and responses to them. We mean to denote a multi-centred map with various points of origin in which local events are crucial determinants.[57]

As Stephen Bann explains in his essay in the same publication, a globalist art-historiographic approach

> explicitly rejects the customary practice of plotting out the topology of artistic connections in terms of "centre" and "periphery": Paris or New York in relation to the various satellites that have come within their sphere of influence.[58]

Here Bann describes a version of the 'dependency model' of how artistic originality is produced and transmitted, explaining that *Global Conceptualism* replaces this with 'an alternative framework of multiple "points of origin."'[59] Regarding that idea, Camnitzer has argued that when history is written from cultural centres, the distinguishing characteristics of art of peripheral regions and the local conditions to it responded, is mistaken for specific instances of generic types.[60] When Latin American art is discussed in terms of Euro-American art, he argues, it is stripped of its autonomy, made to seem derivative, anachronistic and inferior.[61] For Camnitzer, all conceptualisms are equally provincial—they

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[56] Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, *Global Conceptualism*, vii.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Stephen Bann, 'Introduction,' *Global Conceptualism*, 1–14, 3.
[59] Bann, 3.
[60] Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 2.
[61] Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 24–26. To subvert this Camnitzer's strategy is '"to decentre art history into local histories and put the centre in its right place as one more provincial province" so that other areas, and particularly Latin America, could "do local analysis to help assume local identities that were unmolested by the hegemonic watchtower."' Camnitzer quoted in Jane

unfold according to 'local clocks' and as such can only be comprehended through studying their relations with conceptualisms of other locations.[62] The globalist framework, Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss and Bann all argue, allows actors, objects and events located on cultural peripheries to be seen as possessing greater independence from cultural centres. The art of the periphery, they argue, sports its own unique characteristics, and as such is as autonomous and dependent as any other art.

Insofar as this thesis investigates the connections and resonances of Hickey's and Hunter's art from a global perspective, it is indebted to *Global Conceptualism* and subsequent research by scholars adopting comparable methodologies.[63] A point of difference between *Global Conceptualism* and this thesis is my claim that the peripheral status of Hickey's and Hunter's cannot be ignored. Hickey and Hunter undoubtedly viewed New York art as a world centre of art (the other side of this is that New Yorkers often understood themselves to be positioned at the centre of artistic progression). Although this fact offends the globalist sensibility, it is difficult to ignore: to do so would be to reject the historicity of the subjects and objects under discussion. Even if it was largely ideological, the geographic-cultural hierarchy of centre and periphery shaped the late 1960s and early 1970s and as such must be acknowledged.[64] This thesis thus maintains an awareness of the historical self-

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Farver, 'Global Conceptualism: Reflections,' *Post: Notes on Modern and Contemporary Art Around the Globe* (29 April 2015), accessed 15 June 2016, http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/580-global-conceptualism-reflections.

[62] Camnitzer quoted in Farver, 'Global Conceptualism: Reflections.'

[63] See Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee and Terry Smith, eds., *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008); Okwui Enwezor, Katy Siegel and Ulrich Wilmes, eds., *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945–1965,* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2016); Magnus af Petersens, ed., *Explosion! Painting as Action* (London: Koenig Books, 2012). Also see Grant Arnold and Karen Henry, eds., *Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada 1965–1980* (Edmonton, A.B.: Art Gallery of Alberta; Halifax: Halifax I.N.K., 2012); Christophe Cherix, *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960–1976* (New York: M.o.M.A., 2009); Sophie Richard, *Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967–77: Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections*, ed. Lynda Morris (London: Ridinghouse, 2009); Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2016).

[64] On this point, my argument aligns with Bahun-Radunović and Pourgouris' claim that the centre-periphery model cannot simply be ignored in discussions of twentieth century avant-garde art. 'The idea of multiple and ever-shifting centers and margins implies a seeming ease of transfer: what is today a margin may become a center tomorrow. This view has, for all its democratizing value, one negative aspect in its actual critical use: it neglects historicity … It is for this set of reasons that the contributors to this anthology do not tire of reiterating that some margins are margins, some centers are centers, and the only productive way to acknowledge the value of their encounter—or, indeed, their clash—is to perceive them as such.' ('Prefaces and Faces,' xv) Also see Sophie Cras, 'Global Conceptualism? Cartographies of Conceptual Art in Pursuit of Decentring,' in *Circulations in the*

consciousness of the agents and objects under discussion, which was shaped by the ideology of centre and periphery, while at the same plotting a revised context for their work in line with the idea of a multi-centred map with singular points of origin.

Defamiliarisation and Mysticism in Art of the 1960s and 1970s

A finding of this thesis is that the work of Hickey and Hunter cannot be assimilated to the standard Euro-American idea of 1960s and 1970s art as self-reflexive and critical. Instead, it is marked by a 'mystical' character, manifest in the idea of the artwork as a vehicle for defamiliarisation and contemplation. Defamiliarisation is commonly associated with Victor Shklovksy and Bertolt Brecht. While there is considerable overlap between the two, Shklovksy's formalist method is more relevant than Brecht's politicised theory of theatre.[65] There are systematic studies relating Shklovksy's idea of defamiliarisation (or *ostranenie*) to photography and film, but none relating it to painting; moreover, the idea is rarely applied to 1960s and 1970s art.[66] As elaborated in his 1917 essay 'Art as Technique,' Shklovksy's idea of defamiliarisation refers to a formal operation fundamental to all artworks: the artist renders familiar objects as unfamiliar and thereby disrupts ordinary, habitualised modes of perception. 'Art exists,' he claimed, 'that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony.' Art exists, then, to disrupt the deadening monotony of habit, delivering an enlivening shock to perception.[67]

Another version of defamiliarisation, proposed by Huxley in *The Doors of Perception* (1954), a book about his experiences on mescaline, also proves relevant to my discussion of Hickey's work. Huxley's account of aesthetic experience converges with Shklovky's, but a key point of difference is his explicitly mystical conception of art, informed by both Western and Eastern sources. The quintessential artistic problem, according to Huxley, is to produce a

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Global History of Art, eds. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (London: Routledge, 2016), 167–182.

[65] Douglas Robinson has argued that Brecht's concept of de-familiarisation was shaped by his 1935 encounter with Shklovsky's friend, the playwright Sergei Tretyakov. See Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

[66] See Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, *Close-Up: Proximity and Defamiliarisation in Art, Film and Photography* (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 2008); Annie van den Oever, ed., *Ostrannenie: On 'Strangeness' and the Moving Image: the History, Reception, and Relevance of a Concept* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

[67] I elaborate further on Shklovksy's idea of defamiliarisation in Chapter 2.

form that communicates a state of heightened perception.[68] Huxley profoundly shaped Hickey's ideas of the artist as mystic and the defamiliarising function of the artwork. In addition, there are significant overlaps between Huxley's idea of art and Bruce Pollard's mystical idea of art as a vehicle for contemplation, which is relevant to my understanding of Hickey's hard-edge and minimalist works and Hunter's wall paintings.[69]

Huxley's version of defamiliarisation demanded further analysis of the historical origins of mysticism, and several texts on mystical and contemplative images were helpful on this front. In his essay 'Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy,' Klaus Krüger argues that in mystical images, 'the visible, material image is an instrument leading from the visible to the invisible … it serves as a mere medium of transmission in an analogical sense, as a gateway to a higher, imaginary actuality [which] … opens onto the inward faculty of the imagination and therefore remains ineffable in pictorial terms.'[70] Krüger's conception of the thematisation of non-representation in contemplative images is useful for distinguishing Hickey's and Hunter's minimalist paintings, which seek to overcome their objecthood, from other minimalist artworks premised on the negation of the transcendental aesthetic experience.

My understanding of mysticism is also informed by Max Weber's definition of the term.[71] Contemplation is central to mysticism, as Weber explains: in the contemplative act (which actually describes a state of inactivity), the mystic offers themselves as a 'vessel' for the divine—they become passive so that god can speak.[72] Weber describes mysticism in terms of 'the contemplative possession of the holy.'[73] For the activity of contemplation to

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[68] Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, 1971. A recent book dealing with psychedelic experience and mysticism is Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (London: Penguin, 2018).

[69] Pollard, *Minimal Art in Australia*; Pollard, 'Minimal.'

[70] Klaus Krüger, 'Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy,' in *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Falkenburg, Melion and Richardson (Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 37–69, 37.

[71] For another commentary on the historical development of mysticism in the early modern period, see Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume One and Volume Two*, ed. Luce Giard, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[72] Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Fischoff et. al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 544–46. On the topic of the figure of the monk, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Santa Clara: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[73] Max Weber, 'Rejections of the World and their Directions,' *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (trans. & eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 323.

succeed in achieving its goal of mystic illumination,' Weber argued, 'the extrusion of all everyday mundane interests is always required.'[74] Asceticism usually takes the form of rational actions performed in the world, with the ascetic transforming themselves into an instrument of the divine; mystical illumination, in contrast, is fundamentally irrational and non-conceptual, and implies the passivity of the spectator: the individual is not a 'tool' but a 'vessel.' The contemplative mystic regards rational action performed within worldly institutions as a dangerous temptation; mysticism customarily takes the form of a 'contemplative flight from the world.'[75]

The arguments of Krüger and Weber provide a useful foundation from which to understand the mysticism of Hickey's and Hunter's work: the contemplative disposition of their art endows it with a mystical character. The 'other worldly mysticism' of Hickey's and Hunter's art inheres in its contemplative disposition, underwritten by ideas of the auratic presence of the artwork; it is also evident in their subscription to the idea of art as a distinct sphere of activity, which extends to the idea of the gallery as a space devoted to art.[76] Weber's analysis, which spans Eastern and Western traditions, is helpful to understanding the hybrid range of influences that formed Pinacotheca art.

My reading of Hickey's and Hunter's mysticism is further coloured by texts discussing the relationship between religion and modern and contemporary art. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (1986), an edited collection discussing post-war and post-modernist art, focuses on early twentieth century abstraction.[77] While the book is often vague on the crossovers between spirituality and art, its emphasis on mysticism, spirituality and religion in art functions as a compelling critique of narrow formalist histories of abstraction. Other texts relevant to this thesis include Marcia Brennan's *Curating Consciousness* (2010), on the mid-twentieth century American curator James Johnson Sweeney's mystical conception of art, a study that emphasises the links between spirituality, mysticism and

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[74] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 544.
[75] Weber, 'Rejections of the World,' 323.
[76] Ibid., 341.
[77] Edward Weisberger, ed., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (Chicago and The Hague: L.A.C.M.A. and Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1986).

modernist aesthetics.[78] Brennan also discusses the particular mode of subjectivism of modernist art, which, she argues, is shaped by religious practices and modes of thought.[79]

In *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (2004), James Elkins surveys various links between art and religion in present day art, concluding that it is nearly impossible to mix the two; nonetheless, he is convinced that further efforts must be made to understand their complex relationship.[80] Also relevant to this thesis is Thomas Crow's book *No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art* (2017), which argues that secular interpretations of modern and contemporary art have inadvertently suppressed the implicit and explicit religious dimensions of the work; the latter, he argues, raises problems that can be productively elaborated within a theological framework.[81] This thesis makes no such overarching claim, although my identification of the quasi-religious character of Hickey's and Hunter's art contributes to addressing the blind spots within dogmatically secular accounts of 1960s and 1970s art.[82]

My analysis of Hickey's and Hunter's art complicates existing accounts of mystical versions of hard-edge painting, minimalism and conceptual art. In the early 1990s Rosalind Krauss argued that patron Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo revised minimalism to suit his own tastes, tailoring a version of the movement that was transcendent instead of materialist and thus overruling the secular orientation of movement.[83] Critically elaborating on Krauss' argument, Anna Chave has discussed the way that the spiritualised view of minimalism held by certain patrons, most prominently Panza as well as the founders of the Dia Art Foundation, provide a counter-image to the still-dominant idea of the movement as a 'secular,

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[78] Marcia Brennan, *Curating Consciousness: Mysticism and the Modern Museum* (Cambridge: M.I.T., 2010), 7.
[79] Ibid., 21–22.
[80] James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 37. Also see James Elkins and David Morgan, eds., *Re-enchantment (The Art Seminar)* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008). An edited collection that addresses the topic of spirituality in modern art is Dawn Perlmutter and Debra Koppman, eds., *Reclaiming the Spiritual in Art: Contemporary Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).
[81] Thomas Crow, *No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2017).
[82] Less relevant is Boris Groys and Peter Weibel, eds., *Medium Religion: Faith. Geopolitics. Art.* (Karlruhe: Z.K.M. and Walter König, 2009), which focuses on the links between art, media and religion. Similarly unhelpful due to its scant discussion of 1960s and 1970s art is Maria Hlavajova, Sven Lütticken and Jill Winder, eds., *The Return of Religion and Other Myths: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam: B.A.K., 2009).
[83] Rosalind Krauss, 'Overcoming the Limits of Matter: On Revising Minimalism,' *American Art of the 1960s*, ed. John Elderfield (New York: Museum of Modern Art and Abrams, 1991), 123–141.

materialist undertaking.'[84] Contra Krauss, Chave claims that Panza and Dia did not invent, but rather tapped into a pre-existing spiritualism of minimalism, especially the West Coast minimalism of James Turrell, Robert Irwin and John McCracken. Chave's account of West Coast minimalism provides an example of a minimalist vernacular parallel to that of Hickey and Hunter.

The art of Hickey and Hunter, and by extension other artists at Pinacotheca, thus demands to be viewed in relation to West Coast minimalism.[85] A less obvious but nonetheless compelling comparison with the work of these Melbourne artists are the domestic abstractions, installations of everyday objects and droll photo-works of Moscow artists such as Mikhail Roginsky, Ilya Kabakov and Collective Actions in the 1960s and 1970s.[86] More than critical deconstructions of traditional forms, like Hickey and Hunter these Muscovite artists' stressed the irrationalism and subjectivism of their work, regularly using the trope of blankness to communicate the concept of the artwork as a vehicle for transcendence.

Theories of Painting in the Post-Medium Condition

This final section of the literature review surveys theories of painting in the post-medium condition in the 1960s and 1970s. It is widely argued by de Duve, Krauss and others, that modernism's mantra of medium-specificity was overrun during this period, supplanted by the readymade and installation as the dominant paradigm of contemporary art.[87] What this means is that during the 1960s and 1970s there was a shift away from the idea of the specific medium towards the idea of 'art in general'—the post-Duchampian paradigm where anything

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[84] Anna C. Chave, 'Revaluing Minimalism: Patronage, Aura, and Place,' *Art Bulletin* 90, no. 3 (September 2008), 466–86, 466.
[85] See Rebecca McGrew and Glenn Phillips, eds., *It Happened At Pomona* (Los Angeles: Pomona College Museum of Art, 2011) and Rebecca Peabody and Lucy Bradnock, eds., *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art, 1945–1980*, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011). Also see Jan Butterfield, *The Art of Light and Space* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993).
[86] See Boris Groys, *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2010); Margarita Tupitsyn, *Moscow Vanguard Art: 1922–1992* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017). Also see David A. Ross, *Between Spring And Summer, Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1990).
[87] De Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*; Krauss, *Voyage on the North Sea*. Also see Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate, 2010).

can qualify as art simply through its placement within an art context.[88] I am broadly persuaded by this account of the transformation of art during this period; however, this thesis also problematises it through the case studies of Hickey and Hunter. It asks: What might their work tell us about the fragile, precarious state of painting at this moment?

To adopt the medium of painting as a prism through which to view 1960s and 1970s art could be criticised as anachronistic, an attempt to elaborate a modernist account of the period. Yet such a criticism is misguided. Of course, it would be difficult to understand Hickey's and Hunter's late work without any reference to Greenberg and contemporaneous developments in modernist art and criticism. In my account, Greenberg is treated as a remote though powerful historical actor: a critic who significantly shaped the artistic and theoretical imagination of modernism as well as movements that defined themselves in opposition to modernism, such as minimalism and conceptual art. That is, he appears more as an historical figure than a theoretical resource.

My understanding of painting differs substantially from Greenberg's modernist conception of the medium. Greenberg's theory is founded on an essentialist identification of painting with flatness, which informs his historical narrative of the modernist arts investigating their specific identities.[89] Insofar as this thesis is focused on questions pertaining to painting, it implies that the category of medium is fundamental to art of the 1960s and 1970s. However, I reject Greenberg's essentialism and instead operate with a more malleable concept of artistic medium that is capable of accounting for the diversity of painting and its radical transformation during the period. In asserting the historical contingency of medium, my understanding of medium partly aligns with Michael Fried and Stanley Cavell (whose work is discussed in subsequent chapters), but my acknowledgement

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[88] See de Duve, 'Monochrome to Blank Canvas,' *Kant After Duchamp*, 199–280.

[89] See Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' (1960), in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85–93. In the same volume see 'After Abstract Expressionism' (1962), 121–133, where Greenberg identifies the essence of painting as 'flatness and the delimitation of flatness.' Significant interventions in the discourse on medium-specificity include Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood' (1967), in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–172; Leo Steinberg, 'Other Criteria,' in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 55–92; T.J. Clark, 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art,' *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (September 1982), 139–156 and Michael Fried, 'How Modernism Works: A Response to T. J. Clark,' *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (September 1982), 217–234. For a recent critique of Greenberg's concept of medium, see Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratisation of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

of the hybridity and intersectionality of painting is at odds with their modernist agenda. In this respect, this thesis aligns with recent research on painting in the post-medium condition, such as that undertaken by Ewa Lajer-Burcharth and Isabelle Graw, who argue that painting must be released 'from the narrowly construed narrative of selfsameness.'[90] The antidote to the modernist narrative, they contend, is to

> interrogate [painting's] relation to other mediums and practices, to examine its intersection with and contamination by other modes of material production at a given moment in time, and to discern the ways in which these connections and contaminations are internalised by painting rather than being its external circumstance.[91]

For Lajer-Burcharth and Graw, the history and theory of painting implies a relationship beyond the neatly circumscribed domain of painting found in the writing of modernist critics, and thus demands scholarship attentive to factors or conditions outside itself—these factors or conditions are not seen as extraneous to painting, but rather are understood to intersect with and constitute it. It is necessary to acknowledge the decisive influence on this thesis of further theorisations of painting by Joselit, Helmut Draxler and others of their ilk.[92] My research is part of a widespread reconsideration of painting, in which the medium appears as a contingent and contested interface, an arena within which subjectivity is formed in and through painting's connection to a broader constellation of forces and conditions. Draxler's 2010 essay 'Painting as Apparatus' compels the reader to consider painting through the concept of the 'dispositif.'[93] Foucault's concept of the dispositif serves as a suitable

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[90] Lajer-Burcharth and Graw, 'Introduction,' *Painting beyond Itself*, 7–9, 9. In an earlier issue of *Texte zur Kunst* devoted to painting, Isabelle Graw and André Rottmann state that their goal is to 'undermine the ostensible integrity of painting as a closed-off area of aesthetic activity.' Graw and Rottmann, 'Preface,' *Texte zur Kunst* 77 (March 2010), 106.
[91] Lajer-Burcharth and Graw, 'Introduction,' 9.
[92] Isabelle Graw, 'The Knowledge of Painting: Notes on Thinking Images and the Person in the Product,' *Texte zur Kunst* 82 (June 2011), 114–124; Joselit, 'Painting Beside Itself,' Draxler, 'Painting as Apparatus.' Also see Achim Hochdörfer, David Joselit and Manuela Ammer, eds., *Painting 2.0: Expression In the Information Age* (Munich: Prestel, 2016); Laura Hoptman, ed., *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (New York: M.o.M.A., 2014); Max Delany, Annika Kristensen and Hannah Mathews, eds., *Painting. More Painting* (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2016).
[93] Draxler, 'Painting as Apparatus,' 77. Draxler refers to Agamben's discussion of the 'dispositif,' developed from Foucault. For the sake of clarity, I have quoted from Foucault.

methodological instrument through which to capture the historical contingency of a painting in all its unwieldiness:

> a heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.[94]

Understood as a dispositif, painting appears as a network of heterogeneous elements without authentic origin or natural order, an ontological substance subject to ongoing change. This conception of the medium informs a central claim advanced in this thesis: that artistic forms of the 1960s and 1970s, whether text score, photographic archive, ephemeral mural or spatial installation, constitute an extension, rather than negation, of painting.[95] The expanded notion of painting, in addition, brings into focus the entwinement of the medium with a vast array of cultural phenomena, from the designs of domestic decoration in suburban Melbourne, to the presence of Zen Buddhism at Pinacotheca, to the proposed revision of the curriculum at Preston Technical College.

To bring this literature review to a close, I shall briefly recap the research frameworks informing this thesis, and the gaps in discourse that it seeks to address. This thesis adds to the existing monographic literature on Hickey's and Hunter's work by exclusively focusing on their 1960s and 1970s work. My research also augments knowledge of Australian art, but seeks to overcome the limitations of the nationalist framework by emphasising the interconnectedness of Hickey's and Hunter's art to that produced in America, Europe and elsewhere. The historiographical model for this approach is informed by globalist studies of conceptualism. The critical position articulated in this thesis adds to the existing discourse on

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[94] Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh' (1977), in *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage, 1980), 194–228.

[95] My analysis of the persistence of painting in conceptual art is also shaped by Thierry de Duve. De Duve argues that despite conceptual artists' hostility to painting, many were trained as painters, and for this reason their conceptual works 'are intelligible and can be appraised only in reference to the abandoned craft and medium of painting.' De Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, 247. For an analysis of de Duve's claims about the relationship of painting to the readymade see David Joselit, *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910–1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1998), 92–96.

1960s and 1970s art in two main ways: my focus on painting generates a new perspective on a period that is customarily identified with the rise of the post-medium condition; and my emphasis on the mystical orientation of Hickey's and Hunter's work challenges the predominantly materialist and rationalist accounts of avant-garde art of the 1960s and 1970s. I now turn to discuss Hickey's work in depth in the first part of this thesis, before turning in the second part to examine that of Hunter.

Part I. Dale Hickey

2. Modernism and its Vernacular Sources

This chapter examines Dale Hickey's paintings between 1966 and 1969. With their monumental scale, reductive composition and garish palette, these works coincide with the emergence in Melbourne of 'international style' painting, a style informed by American modernist painting and its related discourse. Within the local scene of international style painting, the hybridity of Hickey's paintings stands out; not simply modernist, his paintings appear as a mish-mash of styles from modernist to minimalist, op to pop. Central to this stylistic promiscuity is the camouflaged representationalism of Hickey's canvases. While they appear as formalist abstractions, they actually depict a range of ordinary objects: pipes, walls, weatherboards, quilts, fences, tiles and doors.

How should the stylistic hybridity and camouflaged representationalism of Hickey's paintings be understood? This chapter proposes that these features of Hickey's work be understood as part of an aesthetic of defamiliarisation. This aesthetic is associated with the writings of Viktor Shklovksy, who defined it in terms of a 'roughening of perception'; in Hickey's case, however, a more immediate reference was Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception* (1954), a key text in his late 1960s milieu, which emphasises transcendental experience as much as perceptual disorientation. Influenced by this mystical conception of art, Hickey's works were motivated by a desire to transform familiar things—pictorial codes as much as everyday objects—into near-unrecognisable entities that communicate a state of heightened awareness, or detached contemplation, which belong to an irrational mode of experience. This, at least, is how they were understood at the time, and it is this interpretative line that will be recuperated in the present argument.

The chapter begins by introducing the dominant features of Hickey's modernist paintings work through *Pipe Painting* (1966), a significant departure from his earlier figurative expressionist works. Following this, paintings from Hickey's exhibition at Tolarno exhibition in 1967 are considered in relation to Michael Fried's account of the conflict between modernism and minimalism in the 1960s. While the representationalism of Hickey's ostensible abstractions is liable to be read either as a simple misunderstanding or a deliberate critique of modernist discourse, I argue that the depiction of ordinary objects—and what I call the intensified durational temporality of Hickey's paintings—are evidence of an ultra-modernist impulse that compelled him to break from the stylistic parameters that ordinarily define modernist painting.

The subsequent analysis thus diverges from the interpretation of Christopher McAuliffe, who reads Hickey's work as an example of 'critical regionalism,' a type of painting that deconstructs the ideological division between international style and local figurative tradition. This 'post-modernist' reading grasps Hickey's acute awareness of the discursivity of painting, permitting his work to be understood as semiotic manipulations that de-naturalise their incongruous sources. Yet the idea that Hickey's paintings deconstructed the boundary between local and international artistic cultures is contradicted by aspects of his cultural situation that resist this binary. My reading of Hickey, with reference to the critical writing of Michael Fried, shows how the painter's anti-modernist tendencies can equally be read as enforcing and exaggerating, as much as undermining, imported theories of international style.

Further complicating the idea of international style and its role in the formation of Hickey's work is the figure of Patrick McCaughey, who is often cast as Melbourne's resident 'Greenbergian' critic. However, this caricature fails to acknowledge that McCaughey consistently promoted work by Hickey and by artists within his milieu that fell outside the remit of American late modernism: his criticism therefore cannot be reduced simply to the importation of a foreign discourse. Relatedly, the fact that abstractions by Hickey's peers such as Robert Rooney, James Doolin and Ti Parks (all of whom, incidentally, were championed by McCaughey) are routinely embedded with representations of ordinary objects, further weakens the notion that Hickey's work was a subversion of international style. Rather than a transgression, within the Melbourne scene at least, such a strategy was the norm.

Beyond any critical end it served, I argue, Hickey's scrambling of artistic and cultural hierarchies conveys a defamiliarising intention. This was integral to the local character of Hickey's work; but as demonstrated by the work of Doolin and Parks, artists visiting from America and England, it also transcended his regional context. Broadening the historical scope of the analysis, this chapter draws connections between Hickey's work and that of Ellsworth Kelly and 'already-made' painters of the 1960s, as well as that of Giorgio de Chirico, Carlo Carrà, Rene Magritte and Max Ernst, artists for whom the aesthetic goal of estrangement is expressed through the depiction of vernacular objects. The final section of this chapter discusses Hickey's paintings of 1969 through Bruce Pollard's idea of 'contemplative minimalism.' It claims that Hickey's minimalist paintings, which integrate raw physical presence with camouflaged pictorial illusionism, were produced within a context, coloured by mysticism and psychedelia, in which paintings were regarded with a

quasi-religious reverence, and as such are located at the nexus of artistic and cultural traditions of defamiliarisation.

(This Is Not) An Abstraction

In 1966, Hickey's work underwent a seismic shift. Two paintings from that year, *Abstract* (fig. 2.1) and *Untitled*, likely Hickey's latest surviving figurative expressionist works, are small oil on board paintings that depict similarly chaotic, swarming and disorderly structures against a matte black background; furthermore, both are comprised of tangles of twisting tubular forms and cross forms, creature-like faces with cartoonish eyes and eyelashes that are rendered in a palette at once earthy and colourful. The contrast could hardly be greater between Hickey's figurative expressionist works from 1966, with their serpentine, tendril structure, vigorous paint handling, and distorted depiction of unworldly scenes, and a little-known work created later that same year.[1] Although it has been ignored by scholars, this untitled work, which Hickey dubbed the *Pipe Painting*, heralds the emergence of the pictorial strategy that would govern his work until the end of the 1960s.[2]

Pipe Painting (fig. 2.2) announces Hickey's abandonment of oil paint on masonite board, his preferred medium up to that point, for oil and acrylic on a large stretched canvas. The earthy palette is replaced by a bright, iridescent blue, signalling a newfound infatuation with garish colour. In terms of composition, the tangled tendril-like forms of Hickey's figurative expressionist works are substituted for a bold, frontal arrangement of geometric motifs. Two rows of eight vertical forms or 'pipes,' one row above the other, extend to the edges of the unframed canvas in such a way that the composition echoes the outer shape of the support. By bringing virtual pictorial space into proximity with the physical dimensions of the canvas, Hickey's work mimics what Michael Fried called the 'deductive structure' of

[1] Hickey acknowledged *Pipe Painting* as the first of his hard-edge paintings in Hazel de Berg, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 20 November 1969, 11. Located at the National Library of Australia, Canberra. [redacted]

[2] Hickey's paintings between 1966 and 1969 are mostly untitled. To avoid confusion, I have given them surrogate titles such as *Quilt Painting* and *Garage Door Painting*, of the kind sometimes used by the artist himself.

modernist painting.[3] The patterning of serialised pipes, with their uninflected vesica piscis (marquise-shaped) spouts at either end, promote the flatness and frontality of the picture.

The frontality of Hickey's painting, along with its large scale, all-over composition and garish palette, is instantly associated with the hard-edge and colour field painting that swept through Australia in the mid 1960s. Yet *Pipe Painting* is not simply flat, nor is it simply abstract. In a 1969 interview with oral historian Hazel de Berg, Hickey gave an account of the painting's coming into being. His mind wandering during a teaching seminar at Preston Institute of Technology, where he had worked as a teacher since 1964, Hickey recalled drawing three pipes in his exercise book. This drawing, now lost, became the basic design for *Pipe Painting*. In Hickey's account, the sketch was conceived and executed absent-mindedly, 'eventuat[ing] in a situation where [he] was very bored.'[4] Hickey's suggestion that he conceived the painting during a bout of boredom signals the relationship, both in terms of what the works depict and the type of experience he envisioned they would yield, of this particular mode of experience to his hard-edge paintings.

In the same interview, Hickey raises the issue of the verisimilitude of his work. The drawing of pipes was no empirical study; there was no object before him while he worked. As to the origin of the design, Hickey claims that '[he] didn't know where they came from.'[5] Nonetheless, to the extent that the forms within Hickey's painting resemble pipes, the painting is still representational insofar as it appears to be 'of something.'[6] Central to the representationalism of *Pipe Painting* is the fact that, despite its flatness in some respects, the smoothly gradated tonal shading of the pipes generates a tromp l'oeil effect, an illusion of undulating spatial recession and protrusion. *Pipe Painting* was not Hickey's first use of gradated tonal shading, a technique he was taught at Swinburne.[7] In *Head* (1960), an

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[3] Michael Fried, 'Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella' (1965), in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 213–68, 233–34.
[4] de Berg, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 11.
[5] Ibid.
[6] The working definition of 'representation' at play in this sentence is adapted from Richard Wollheim's 'ofness thesis,' according to which a representation must be 'of' something. 'Ofness' demands that every representation has an objective (or object), but this does not mean that the object cannot be imagined. Hickey's painting perfectly illustrates this point: although not a direct empirical observation, it is nonetheless recognised as a representation of pipes. Richard Wollheim, 'Representation: The Philosophical Contribution to Psychology,' *Critical Inquiry* 3, no. 4 (Summer 1977), 709–723.
[7] Dale and Rosemary Hickey, interview with author, 6 November 2015.

Antipodeanesque painting of a man's face included in his debut solo exhibition at Toorak Galleries in 1964, dramatic chiaroscuro is used to accentuate taut, hardened contours and a dehydrated, bone-like complexion. The face more readily resembles a skull with hollow black sockets in place of eyes, half cast in shadow, staring blankly at the viewer. Instead of a human face, in Hickey's hard-edge painting a bank of inanimate objects blindly stare straight ahead, as though facing the spectator.

In its large size, garish colour and all-over composition, its combination of flatness and depth, representation and abstraction, *Pipe Painting* set the mould for the other eleven untitled paintings alongside which it was exhibited at Tolarno Galleries in October 1967 (fig. 2.3). These works feature variously camouflaged depictions of bricks, walls, fences, weatherboards, tiles or quilts. What is immediately striking about these works, though, is their extreme frontality, their directness of address. Patrick McCaughey, the young critic who had started writing for *The Age* in 1966, remarked that they 'keep coming at you with their obsessions, unnerving you with their addiction to the ordinary and the commonplace.'[8] The sense that Hickey's paintings advance towards the viewer is a central consequence of their frontal orientation. Indeed, the latter could be called 'the dominant' of Hickey's paintings, their primary formal element or 'focusing component' which, as Roman Jakobson explained, 'rules, determines and transforms' their 'secondary components.'[9] In this way, the Tolarno paintings (like *Pipe Painting*) give rise to the sense that they and the objects they covertly depict are gazing back at the spectator.

In June 1967, a few months before Hickey debuted his new paintings at Tolarno, Fried's essay 'Art and Objecthood,' was published in the summer issue of *Artforum*. The target of Fried's polemic was the minimalists, or as he called them the 'literalists,' who called for the negation of the distinction between artwork and ordinary object, aesthetic and everyday experience.[10] One of the paradoxes of the literalist espousal of objecthood, Fried claimed, was that it developed from a misinterpretation of modernist painting's desire to 'defeat or suspend its own objecthood.'[11] According to Fried, this was emphatically expressed in Stella's 'Stripe paintings' (1959–60), the distinguishing feature of which, he

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[8] Patrick McCaughey, 'Turning the Mundane into Uneasy Menace,' *The Age*, 4 October 1967, 6.
[9] Roman Jakobson, ''The Dominant' (1935), in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, eds. Matejka and Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971), 82–87, 82.
[10] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' 148–172.
[11] Ibid., 160–61.

theorised in 1966, is that their pictorial structure of concentric hand-painted black stripes echoes the shape of the canvas, which 'represent[s] the most unequivocal … acknowledgement of literal shape in the history of modernism.'[12] By bringing internal design into proximity with the literal shape of the support, Fried argued, Stella claimed 'shape as such' as a form or convention of the medium, transforming it into a vital ingredient of paintings that 'compel conviction' in comparison to great works of the past within that same tradition.[13]

Fried thought that if modernist painting approached 'objecthood,' it was ultimately to assert its separateness from the realm of ordinary objects and experience. The problem with minimalism, from his perspective, is its espousal of objecthood *as such*: minimalist objects, he said, 'cannot be said to acknowledge … they simply are literal.'[14] With the cancellation of its ontological difference from ordinary objects, Fried argued, the minimalist artwork was condemned to remain on the plane of everyday experience, which he equated with 'endlessness … the experience that most deeply excites the literalist sensibility, and that literalist artists seek to objectify in their work.'[15] He argued, moreover, that 'the literalist preoccupation with time—more precisely, with the *duration of the experience*' is actually an inexhaustible deferral of the present: 'of time both passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective.'[16] This temporality of endlessness, he argued, is inherently opposed to modernist painting and sculpture, which aspires to a temporal condition of 'instantaneousness' or 'presentness,' a special kind of experience in which the condition of objecthood is momentarily transcended.[17] The final sentences of Fried's essay stage the conflicting temporalities of modernism and minimalism in theological terms: 'We are all literalists most of our lives. Presentness is grace.'[18]

The mimeticism of Hickey's hard-edge paintings fall outside Fried's strict conception of modernist painting, which excludes representational practices. In spite of this, Fried's account of the conflict between art and objecthood can help us to understand these works,

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[12] Michael Fried, 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons' (1966), in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 77–99, 88.
[13] Ibid., 77–78.
[14] Ibid., 88; Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' 151.
[15] Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' 166.
[16] Ibid., 166–67.
[17] Ibid., 167.
[18] Ibid., 168.

crucial to which is the relationship of painting to the world of ordinary objects and the condition of objecthood as such. Like the modernist painters championed by Fried, the composition of Hickey's paintings—all-over grids as well as centred compositions of serialised motifs positioned against sparse monochromatic and polka-dotted expanses—establish a dialectical relationship between depicted structure and literal shape. A further feature of the Tolarno works that edges them into closer proximity with modernist and minimalist painting is their construction from two or more canvases.[19] By self-reflexively acknowledging their material support, Hickey's paintings activate the dialectic of art and objecthood, which according to Fried was the pressing issue of modernist painting of the 1960s.

Like modernist paintings, Hickey's paintings activate this dialectic by structural means, yet they also activate it in another, distinctly anti-modernist way: through the representation of ordinary objects which could, perhaps, be viewed as metonyms of objecthood as such. By embedding serialised depictions of mundane objects within his paintings, Hickey utilised the deductive structure as a Trojan horse through which objecthood enters the territory of modernist painting. Hickey's paintings thus directly clash with standard conceptions of modernist painting: the tromp l'oeil depictions constitute a direct transgression of Fried's (and before him Greenberg's) identification of modernist painting with 'optical illusionism,' that is, painting that 'addresses itself to eyesight alone,' which liquidates the residues of tactile three-dimensionality to shore up the medium-specificity of painting.[20] Although Hickey's deductive structures harbour the optical illusionism typically associated with modernism, their spatial illusionism places them at odds with Fried's and Greenberg's conceptions of modernist painting. Hickey's paintings do not yield a virtual depth which 'one could imagine oneself walking into,' which is how Greenberg characterised the spatiality of Old Master paintings: the Renaissance paradigm of painting-as-window, a

[19] Francis Colpitt identifies the shaped canvas as one of the defining characteristics of 1960s painting in 'The Shape of Painting in the 1960s,' *Art Journal* 50, no. 1 (Spring, 1991), 52–56.
[20] Fried, 'Three American Painters,' 224. According to Greenberg, 'the heightened sensitivity of the picture plane [in modernist painting] may no longer permit sculptural illusion, or *trompe-l'oeil*, but it does and must permit optical illusion.' Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting,' 90. Fried discusses his and Greenberg's divergent definitions of opticality in 'An Introduction to My Art Criticism,' in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1–74, 19–23.

portal to be looked into or through, is replaced by the paradigm of painting-as-wall—a picture, in other words, on the brink of negation. As Margaret Plant observes,

> Hickey does not encourage an entry into his paintings of the 1960s: rather he rebuffs it, since his paintings are painted walls or equivalents. His action is to cancel deep space as far as possible, to screen it off.[21]

Plant recognises that the shallow depth of Hickey's paintings arises both from his treatment of his subject matter and the subject matter itself. Whether pipes, walls, weatherboards or quilts, Hickey paints his subject matter straight-on, the planar orientation of the depicted surface flush to the picture plane. It is through the surface patterning of these objects—the undulation of the pipes, the holes in the brick wall and the recession and protrusion of the quilt patches—that Hickey 'punched holes in the canvas,' ornamenting his structures with rhythms of spatial depth.[22] Hickey's screened-off pictures are liable to be read as visual puns about the 'dead-end' of modernist painting: they break the modernist taboo on representation only to reinstate it, ironically, on the level of subject matter. At a time when many painters eagerly swallowed the modernist dogma of flatness, thinking they were sipping its boiled-down essence, rather than demystifying painting Hickey revelled in its illusionistic effects.

Apart from Patrick McCaughey, who declared that 'Hickey uses such common, mundane sources for his abstractions as a paling fence, an old quilt or the side of a weatherboard house,' the representationalism of Hickey's canvases was lost on critics. In two reviews for *The Herald*, Alan McCulloch dismissed Hickey as a formulaic op artist, a 'detached academic technician'; writing in *The Bulletin*, Elwyn Lynn evoked the allusiveness of Hickey's canvases but failed to identify the actual objects depicted.[23] The failure of these experienced critics to identify the representational operation of Hickey's canvases cannot simply be attributed to a lack of visual acuity; it also testifies to their camouflaged illusionism. This camouflaged or obscure illusionism is due to various factors: the representation of part of an object rather than the object in its entirety; the serial repetition of

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[21] Plant, *Dale Hickey*, 4.
[22] Gary Catalano, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' in *Building a Picture: Interviews with Australian Artists* (Roseville, N.S.W.: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 53–64, 57.
[23] Alan McCulloch, 'The Urge To Get With It,' *The Herald*, 4 October 1967, 30; Alan McCulloch, *The Australian*, 7 October 1967; Elwyn Lynn, 'Provincial Zest,' *The Bulletin*, 28 October 1967, 71–72, 72.

the depiction; the fact that regardless of its position on the canvas, the serialised object is always lit from the same angle; the juxtapositions of flat tonally contrastive shapes or gradated tonal shading generates optical and retinal effects undermines the suggestion of pictorial interiority; finally, the garish colours of Hickey's paintings bear no natural relation to the objects represented. These elements culminate in the disguised representationalism of Hickey's hard-edge paintings. The idea of Hickey's paintings as 'iconic signs,' defined by C.S. Peirce as a sign that bears a formal resemblance to the represented object, is estranged to the brink of illegibility.[24]

The spatial ambiguity of Hickey's work is further illustrated by three paintings in which he extended his fascination with vernacular architecture as seen in *Junk Yard Office* (1957) and *Fisherman's Shack, Cape Patterson* (1961). *Wall* (1966) (fig. 2.4), *Malvern* (1967) (fig. 2.5) and *Untitled* (henceforth *Malvern II*) (1967) (fig. 2.6) are three large, upright canvases with skeletal compositions of simple, repeated geometric motifs against monochrome backgrounds of bluish grey, teal and khaki, respectively. In *Malvern* and *Malvern II*, the distribution of black and white triangles along identical rows connote weatherboards with 'V'-form notches of the kind that decorated Melbourne suburban houses since the 1930s (fig. 2.7). Robert Lindsay describes how these works are perched between a representation of a three-dimensional object and a flat abstraction, 'between shadows cast by weatherboards which have been cut to resemble ornamental shingles, and an abstract pattern of pyramids on horizontal lines.'[25] Lindsay's observation about the oscillating spatiality of *Wall*, where 'concave brick holes … appear to change into convex studs,' implies that the central tension in the work is between alternating protrusion and recession rather than flatness and depth.

Hickey's use of flat shapes to generate the illusion of alternating flatness, concavity and convexity is a pictorial device that Barbara Rose, in a 1967 essay on the return to illusionism in abstract painting, named 'reversible illusion … a spatial construction that appears at one moment to project outward at the next to cleave inward.'[26] Rose's discussion of the oscillating concavity and convexity of Miriam Schapiro's *Shrine*, *16 Frames* and *16*

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[24] 'I call a sign which stands for something merely because it resembles it an icon.' Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce. Vol. 3.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935,) 362. Also see Michael Shapiro, 'Is an Icon Iconic?,' *Language* 84, no. 4 (December 2008), 815–819.
[25] Robert Lindsay, *Project 15*.
[26] Barbara Rose, 'Abstract Illusionism,' *Artforum* 6, no. 2 (October 1967), 33–37, 37.

Windows (1963, 1965 and 1965, respectively), which she cites as exemplary of this tendency, in which she observes 'imagistic overtones of a quasi-Surrealist architectural fantasy,' offers a previously-unremarked parallel with Hickey's architectural hard-edge paintings. Similar to Schapiro, the combination of monochrome background with reductivist signifiers (or notations) of depth in Hickey's architectural works means that the latter is registered *as signification*, legible through its differential relationship with other signifiers, which culminates in an optical rather than tactile mode of pictorial interiority.[27] The fact that the black lines and shapes denoting shadow in the *Malvern* paintings appear every bit as solid and substantial—actually more solid and substantial—than the white triangles denoting positive space is a further way that Hickey draws attention to the language of spatial depth by forcing into contradiction optical and spatial form.

It should be clear by now that the representationalism of Hickey's work brings it into conflict with Fried's theory of modernist painting. A further disagreement between them stems from the shallow, alternating spatiality of Hickey's architectural paintings, which triggers a flickering effect in the eye of the spectator. This effect is present in Hickey's architectural paintings, yet is most intense in *Quilt Paintings* such as *No. 2* (1967) (fig. 2.8), a two-canvas work exhibited at Tolarno and then in *The Field*, the famous survey exhibition of then-recent tendencies in painting and sculpture held at the N.G.V. in 1968. In *No. 2*, the alternation of tonal patterning within a gridded composition of 'padded' quilt pillows generates the illusion of protrusion and recession, onto which a second formal system, a grid of blue polka dots systematically varied in tone, is overlaid. The 'blue dots on dirty yellow panels,' McCaughey observed, 'mak[es] the eye duck and dodge to escape their insistence.'[28] A companion work—a single-canvas green painting with an almost identical arrangement of blue dots in the N.G.V. collection (fig. 2.9)—created in the wake of the Tolarno show in 1967–68, yields a similar perceptual effect. In both *Quilts*, this effect is reminiscent of op art,

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[27] The spatiality of Hickey's paintings calls to mind certain works from Picasso's analytic Cubist phase, for example *Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro* (1909), which, as Rosalind Krauss argues, in its swivelling between flatness, protrusion and depth, participated in the 'withdrawal of the tactile or carnal from the specifically visual and frontal field' central to the history of modernist painting analysed later by Greenberg and Fried. Rosalind E. Krauss, 'The Motivation of the Sign,' in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, ed. Lynn Zelevansky (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 261–286, quotation from 270. In the same volume also see Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Semiology of Cubism,' 169–208.

[28] McCaughey, 'Turning the Mundane,' 6.

which William C. Seitz, in his text on the latter, identified with a 'perceptual shimmer.'[29] Profiling Hickey as 'a large-scale protagonist of op art,' McCulloch observed 'blue spots throbbing against red fields' in another *Quilt Painting* (fig. 2.10), comprised of four padded quilt squares centred within a ground with a sparse arrangement of blue dots.[30]

It is noteworthy that McCaughey and McCulloch both characterise Hickey's canvases in fundamentally durational terms—the eye ducking and dodging in front of their pulsating patterns. This further undermines Hickey's modernist credentials. As recognised by his earliest critics, the durational temporality of Hickey's works—which inheres in their shuttling back and forth between pictorial ontologies of optical and spatial illusionism, representationalism and non-representationalism places them at odds with Fried's conception of modernist painting. Fried identified such painting with presentness, a momentary suspension of everyday experience; the latter, in contrast, he defined in terms of an endless deferral. Although the frontality of Hickey's paintings initially 'hit' or 'freeze' the viewer analogous to modernist painting, Hickey's paintings do not fully disclose themselves in a singular heightened intensity: their rhythmic patterning of geometry, colour and tone instead results in an experience that unfolds through time, thus harmonising with Fried's idea of literalism—the enemy of modernist painting—which he characterises as '*simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective.'

A closing remark on the relationship of Hickey's paintings to Fried's notion of modernist painting is warranted. Hickey's use of the deductive structure has hitherto been explained as a device of deception, a way for objecthood to infiltrate the rarefied territory of modernist painting. Yet there is another interpretative possibility. Hickey's representations of objects, which I have suggested can be read as cyphers for objecthood as such, can equally be understood as bringing the dialectic of art and objecthood into a relationship forbidden within modernist painting according to Fried. Hickey, perhaps, was so fixated on the problem of objecthood within painting that he deemed it necessary to transgress strict modernist protocol; he did this not simply to critique modernism, but as I am suggesting here, in order to doubly foreground the distance between art and objecthood. From this perspective, Hickey's camouflaged representationalism not only reflects an awareness that modernist

[29] William C. Seitz, *The Responsive Eye* (New York: MoMA, 1965), 8.
[30] McCulloch, 'The Urge To Get With It,' 30.

abstraction can never entirely escape the spectre of representation.[31] Insofar as they doubly animate the problem of art and objecthood—firstly, by structural and secondly by representational means—it is possible to see Hickey's paintings as not so much anti-modernist as ultra-modernist.

A conclusion to draw from this is that although the forms, categories and ambitions Fried perceived in modernist and minimalist painting provide us with a powerful model for understanding Hickey's paintings, ultimately, the one cannot simply be neatly projected onto the other; the terms and presumptions of Fried's argument are scrambled by Hickey's paintings.

Setting the Scene: The New Abstraction

Reading Hickey's paintings through Fried's theory yielded at least three basic insights. Firstly, it established that the structure of the paintings is formally proximate to the modernist paintings discussed by the critic. Secondly, the representation of ordinary objects distances Hickey's work from typical conceptions of modernist painting. Thirdly, insofar as Hickey's paintings foreground the dialectic of art and objecthood structurally as well as representationally, they are animated by quintessentially modernist concerns. Bringing Fried's theory to bear on Hickey's paintings gives a sense both of the latter's convergence with and its divergence from the discourses of modernism and minimalism. It also establishes a position from which to respond to the revisionist accounts of Hickey's relationship to modernism that appeared in the mid-1990s, in which what I have characterised as a dialectic of painting and objecthood was framed in a rather different way.

The most ambitious account of this kind, Christopher McAuliffe's 1994 essay 'Don't Fence Me In: Artists and Suburbia in the 1960s,' situates the formal operation of Hickey's work within its regional cultural context. McAuliffe portrays Hickey's work as a critical response to a cultural location in which 'the question of the interaction of regional and international art was endlessly debated … but always seemed to return to the same rigid boundaries' between abstraction and representation, internationalist and nationalist, centre

[31] Hal Foster, 'Signs Taken for Wonders' (1986), in *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art (Second Edition)*, ed. Howard Risatti (New Jersey: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 153–164, argues that 'abstraction does not undo representation …; rather, abstraction represses or sublates representation, and in this sublation representation is preserved even as it is cancelled.'

and periphery, metropolis and suburb.[32] As characterised by McAuliffe, in this climate the art world was split into polarised camps, notably between the older tradition of nationalist figurative expressionism and the ascendant international style abstraction. 'By developing a hybrid form combining the apparently neutral styles of international modernism with loaded regionalist signifiers,' McAuliffe argues, Hickey 'refused both the hegemonic claims of internationalism and the limited vision of a nationalist regionalism.'[33] Breaking the rules on both sides, Hickey's work embodied a 'critical regionalism,' a contradictory and subversive stance towards both local and foreign sources that undermined the polarising ideologies that defined his cultural situation.[34]

McAuliffe elaborates his argument through *Untitled (Fence Painting)* (1967) (fig. 2.11) , a large two-canvas work that features a schematic geometrical depiction of two rows of black-coloured paling fences, one row behind the other, with an orange band along its upper edge serving as a background of sorts. McAuliffe's reading returns us to the earlier question of the relationship of Hickey's painting to modernist or 'formalist' discourse, in this case to Greenberg. McAuliffe's reading claims that Hickey's work uncannily resembles modernist painting, in particular Stella.[35] Earlier, McAuliffe cites as evidence of Hickey's deceptive modernism a 1969 text by McCaughey, which describes Hickey as 'the most prominent Australian [artist] convert to formalism': 'The painting communicates no message but itself,' McCaughey said of a *Quilt Painting*, 'it transmits no secret message or symbols; it does not seek to comment on the universe or the world around it.'[36] McCaughey got the *Quilt*

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[32] McAuliffe, 'Don't Fence Me In,' 95. On the conflict nationalist figurative expressionism and international style abstraction see Frances Lindsay, *A Melbourne Mood*, 7 and Ian Burn and Nigel Lendon 'Purity, style, amnesia.' Also see Donald Brook, '1968,' *Art Monthly Australia* 195 (November 2006), 30–35, 30.

[33] McAuliffe, 'Don't Fence Me In,' 97.

[34] Ibid., 94–102. 'Critical regionalism' was originally used by architectural theorist Kenneth Frampton to describe architecture that adopted a critical stance towards international style, adopting its universalism and progressivism while countering what he saw as its 'placelessness.' Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance' (1981), in *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 17–34. For recent extension of the debate surrounding critical regionalism see Vincent B. Canizaro, ed., *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007). The term critical regionalism was adapted into the discourse of Australian art history by Ian Burn. See Burn, 'Sidney Nolan: Landscape and Modern Life.'

[35] McAuliffe, 'Don't Fence Me In,' 100–01.

[36] Patrick McCaughey, *Australian Abstract Art* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969), 30. I have switched the order of McCaughey's sentences to emphasise my point.

wrong according to McAuliffe: Hickey's camouflaged representationalism, he argues, culminates 'not [in] an autonomous formalist canvas but one apparently contaminated by the very thing formalism sought to evade: the everyday world of mass production and kitsch.'[37] While *Fence Painting* is more overtly representational than the *Quilt* (it was described by critic G.R. Lansell as 'a large horizontal painting … of, simply, a fence'), it is similar insofar as its formal proximity to Stella invites a modernist reading that it immediately confounds or corrupts.[38] McAuliffe portrays the painting 'as a Stella that ha[s] been deliberately botched by the introduction of illusionism,' as though Hickey 'deliberately panders to the expectation that provincial Australian artists would get it wrong.'[39] This, then, is how Hickey's critical regionalism is achieved: through forcing signifiers of opposing ideologies into contradictory proximity within the borders of the canvas.

No other commentator has described as clearly the discursivity Hickey's painting, its manipulation of conflicting artistic and cultural codes into subversive forms. The novelty of McAuliffe's reading is contingent on his attempt to embed Hickey's paintings in relation to the modernist discourse of his regional context. The question of the relationship of Hickey's work to its immediate artistic and cultural context is worth considering further. Was it, as McAuliffe would have it, Hickey's intention to critique modernism? Did he seek to strategically undermine the conventions of modernist painting? Did Hickey conceive his paintings as subversions of Greenberg's ban on pictorial representation and spatial illusionism?

It is first necessary to establish Hickey's familiarity with Greenberg's writings. There is a consensus that Greenberg enjoyed a brief surge of popularity in Australia from roughly 1965 to 1968; during this period, which coincided with the popularisation in Australia of hard-edge and colour field painting, he was widely regarded as a 'guru.'[40] His classic 1960 essay 'Modernist Painting,' was republished in Gregory Battcock's edited collection *The New Art* (1966), which was widely known within Hickey's milieu. For a brief moment in 1966 and possibly early 1967, Hickey confessed, he was seduced by Greenberg's theory, and believed

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[37] McAuliffe, 'Don't Fence Me In,' 99.
[38] G.R. Lansell, 'Baleful Christo,' *Nation*, 15 November 1969, 15.
[39] Christopher McAuliffe, *Art and Suburbia* (Fisherman's Bend, Victoria: Craftsman House, 1996), 80–82.
[40] Burn and Lendon, 'Purity, Style, Amnesia,' 20.

himself to be making 'Greenbergian paintings.'[41] In the de Berg interview, Hickey explained that he was unaware of the 'spatial ambiguity' of his paintings until he spoke with visiting American painter James Doolin; until then, he said, 'it was something I was totally unaware of, and at the time I was very disturbed because it was something quite unintentional.'[42]

The fact that Hickey misunderstood Greenberg's theory—that he wanted to make work that conformed to his theory but failed to do so—weakens the possibility of understanding his work as a self-conscious critique of modernist painting. Rather than ironically performing the role of the provincial artist, Hickey comes to resemble the figure of the provincial artist clumsily emulating the vanguard style, who is informed of his blunder by the unofficial ambassador of American painting. This is not to denigrate the interest or quality of Hickey's work, but rather to signal the limitations of framing it as a clinical subversion of modernist painting. In light of the above evidence, Hickey's 'Greenbergian paintings' appear as a case of what Harold Bloom would call 'productive misinterpretation.'[43] The fact that Hickey, then a lecturer at Preston Tech, one of Melbourne's leading art colleges, evidently had an extremely cursory knowledge of Greenberg, suggests that he was not alone in his misunderstanding. The accidental subversion casts doubt on the idea, implied by McAuliffe, of Greenberg as a formative influence on Hickey and his peers. Perhaps Greenberg's influence was not as strong as has often been assumed.

Further evidence of Greenberg's remoteness from Melbourne hard-edge painting is found in the writing of McCaughey, often caricatured as a 'Greenbergian critic,' who McAuliffe portrays as being 'taken in' by Hickey's misleading modernism.[44] The reductive identification of McCaughey with Greenberg is complicated if we recall his review of Hickey's 1967 exhibition, which he endorses despite the mimeticism of its contents.[45] In that

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[41] Dale and Rosemary Hickey, interview with author, 10 April 2013. Hickey cited in Sue Cramer, 'This Spiritual Adventure: Postwar Cubism 1950-1979,' in *Cubism & Australian Art*, eds. Cramer and Harding (Carlton: Heide and Miegunyah Press, 2009), 155–218, 186.
[42] De Berg, 'Interview,' 15.
[43] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1975).
[44] See the chapter 'The Antipodeans and the Sixties' (87–103), in Burn, Lendon, Merewether and Stephen, *The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay About Interpretation*. In my view, Burn, Lendon, Merewether and Stephen overstate the influence of Greenberg on McCaughey's 1960s criticism. There is no mention of the ways that McCaughey's support for representational modernist painting, pop art and installation, or his psychologistic readings of artworks, is opposed to Greenberg. Patrick McCaughey resists his classification as a Greenbergian critic in *The Bright Shapes and the True Names: An Australian Memoir* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2003), 90.
[45] For further proof of McCaughey's awareness of Hickey's representationalism, see his 1969 review of an exhibition at Pinacotheca in which he cites Hickey as involved in the 'curious Melbourne

review, McCaughey stresses the modernist frontality and self-sufficiency of Hickey's paintings alongside other seemingly contradictory factors such as their retinal effects, tromp l' oeil and depiction of everyday objects, which, he argued, culminate in an experience of 'menace' or 'unease.'[46] McCaughey's emphasis on his affective response to Hickey's paintings than their medium-specificity is more reminiscent of the psychologistic criticism of Harold Rosenberg than Greenberg.[47] His existentialist-tinged criticism also recalls an influence closer to home: the gritty, authentic subjectivity prized by the Antipodeans. These factors indicate that McCaughey's criticism is more than a derivative version of Greenberg's; it also indicates that Hickey's work was not produced as a critique of his modernist dogma.

One reason why there was no Greenbergian critic in Melbourne was because there was no significant scene of Greenbergian modernist painting. Most of the main protagonists of this type of modernist painting were based elsewhere. Sydney Ball, who had lived in New York in the early 1960s, was based in Adelaide. The main hub of modernist painting in Australia was Sydney's Central Street Gallery, which was founded in April 1966 by painters Tony McGillick, John White and Harold Noritis and also exhibited David Aspden, Michael Johnson, Gunter Christmann, Rollin Schlicht, Vernon Treweeke, Wendy Paramor and Dick Watkins.[48] Characterised by large scale, shaped canvases, symmetrical structure, vibrant colour fields and crisp geometries, Central Street painting was routinely accompanied by Greenbergian rhetoric such as McGillick's statement for a 1967 group exhibition: 'There is generally a preference for flat picture space, and two-dimensionality, a non-tactile, non-gestural technique and a conceptual approach to composition.'[49] Prescriptive formulations

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preoccupation with the banal object and image as a subject.' Patrick McCaughey, 'The Surreal Thing at St. Kilda,' *The Age*, 4 June 1969.

[46] Patrick McCaughey, 'Turning the Mundane,' 6.

[47] The influence of Rosenberg can be detected in McCaughey's critique, in a 1968 lecture attended by Greenberg, of the exclusion of the category of artistic imagination from American modernist discourse: 'Art criticism, even at its best in the hands of astringent formalist American criticism, seems content with the correct analysis of style and not the style creating process of imagination.' McCaughey, 'New Literary and Old Criticism,' in *Criticism in the Arts: Australian Unesco Seminar* (Sydney: Sydney University, 1968), 92. Also see McCaughey, 'Harold Rosenberg: The Vanguard Critic,' *Broadsheet* (February-March 1967), 11.

[48] On this topic see Paul McGillick, 'Introduction,' *Central Street* (Melbourne: Charles Nodrum, 1990) and Heather Barker and Charles Green, 'No Place Like Home: Australian Art History and Contemporary Art at the Start of the 1970s,' *Journal of Art Historiography* 4 (June 2011), 1–16. Also see Terry Smith, 'Colour-form Painting: Sydney 1965–70,' *Other Voices: Critical Journal* 1, no. 1 (June-July 1970), 6–17; Terry Smith, 'First Thoughts on a "Style of the Sixties" in Recent Sydney Painting,' *Uphill* 1 (September 1969), n.p.

[49] Tony McGillick, unpublished exhibition statement. (Sydney: Central Street Gallery, 1967).

such as this, unparalleled in Melbourne, fashioned Central Street as 'the centre of colour field orthodoxy in Australia.'[50]

Coinciding with the emergence of galleries such as Strines in Carlton in 1966 and Tolarno and Pinacotheca in St. Kilda in 1967, the painting that emerged around this time in Melbourne—dubbed 'the new abstraction' by McCaughey—shared many formal attributes with that produced in Sydney. There are no absolute differences between the kind of paintings produced in Melbourne and Sydney during this period: the artistic cultures of both cities was conditioned by mutual exchange. Indeed, Hickey's first exhibition at Pinacotheca in June 1968, which publicly declared a professional affiliation between Hickey and Pollard that had begun earlier when the dealer purchased several of the Tolarno paintings, featured the work of Melbourne artists Hunter, Alun Leach-Jones and Normana Wight alongside Central Street artists Johnson, McGillick and Watkins.[51] That said, compared to their Sydney counterparts, due to its amalgamation of op, pop and minimalism the work of Hickey and other local hard-edge painters such as Jonas Balsaitis, Peter Booth, Mike Brown, Janet Dawson, Doolin, Robert Jacks, Leach-Jones, Ti Parks, Paul Partos, Rooney, Trevor Vickers and Wight looks stylistically heterogeneous to the brink of incoherence.

As outlined above, fundamental to the stylistic hybridity of Hickey's work is its representationalism. In Sydney, this would have been uncommon, yet in Melbourne he was not alone in this; representations of ordinary, domestic and suburban objects recur throughout

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[50] James Gleeson, *Modern Painters 1931–1970* (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1971), 126. The reality of the art exhibited at Central Street, however, was more varied than Gleeson was willing to admit. The work of Oldfield, Paramor and Watkins often feature representations of domestic and suburban imagery, architecture and advertising. Watkins' appropriation of a cake-tin design for a hard-edge painting, *Turn* (1965) has obvious affinities with Hickey's work. Watkins has remarked that his painting was intended as a pun on his contradictory engagement with modernism: 'It was an attempt to have my cake (simplicity) and eat it too (complexity, content) or something. It has a connection obviously with the best American painting (P.P.A. [Post-painterly abstraction]) but not with the critical dogmas that surround that "school."' Dick Watkins, 1967 letter to A.G.N.S.W., accessed 15 March 2014, https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/OA12.1966/. Also see Wayne Tunnicliffe, 'The Easel Did Not Go Pop, It Went Bang!: Australian Pop Art,' in *Pop to Popism*, eds. Wayne Tunnicliffe and Anneke Jaspers (Sydney: A.G.N.S.W., 2014), 137–47.

[51] *The Renting Collection* exhibition was an unusual venture that aimed to contribute to the formation of a more sympathetic environment for the new abstraction through offering artworks for rental: paintings for one dollar per week and original prints for one dollar per month. In his review, McCaughey explains that while it was positively received in some quarters, the paintings proved unpopular in others: 'Anguished cries of too modern have greeted the scheme and a particularly aggressive Dale Hickey painting proved too frightening for a telephonist who had to sit under it every day.' Patrick McCaughey, 'Renting Out Paintings: Adventures with the Avant-garde,' *The Age*, 18 June 1968, 4.

the work of Balsaitis, Booth, Brown, Doolin, Parks, Rooney and others. To the extent that 'submerged referential content' was central to the work of Hickey and his peers, their work—which together constitutes a type of vernacular modernism—far exceeds the concept of medium-specificity to which modernist painting is often conveniently reduced. Hickey's nesting of commonplace subject matter within the language of modernist painting took place within a scene in which rather than a calculated transgressive manoeuvre, it was the norm.

The fact that Hickey belonged to a culture of painting in which ostensibly abstract paintings were typically combined with commonplace imagery complicates McAuliffe's portrayal of him as a 'critical regionalist.' It similarly complicates other claims about Hickey's work that emerged after McAuliffe's article: that it is 'an attempt to vernacularise a supposedly universal modernism,' or that it was meant as 'a discreet attack upon the grandiose metaphysical claims made for late modernist abstraction.'[52] By casting Hickey's work as a parody of the lofty spiritual ambitions and false internationalism of international style, such accounts convey its irreverence towards imported sources. Yet Hickey's incorporation of commonplace representations into modernist structures was not simply about undermining the opposition between 'local' and 'international.'[53] Rather than simply occupying a middle-ground between these categories, Hickey's paintings exemplify a vernacular modernism defined by the incorporation of commonplace imagery, a strategy widely adopted in the Melbourne scene. More broadly, the idea that Hickey's paintings 'vernacularised [international] modernism' fails to comprehend that driving Hickey's amalgamation of disparate styles and sources was a defamiliarisation of the commonplace, conditioned by a quasi-religious attitude towards aesthetic experience.

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[52] Rex Butler, 'Speaking of Geometric Painting,' in *Reflections on Geometric Painting*, ed. Nicholas Tsoutas (Sydney: Artspace, 1999), 3–12, 4; David Pestorius, *Geometric Painting in Australia 1941–1997*, 28–29.

[53] This binary formulation fails to take into account non-American influences on Melbourne hard-edge painting, most notably British pop artists including Derek Boshier, Patrick Caulfield, Mark Lancaster, Terry Setch and Richard Smith. In terms reminiscent of McAuliffe, Charles Harrison argues that British artists sought to overcome their provincialism by engaging with American modernism by 'work[ing] self-consciously within a tissue of misrepresentations.' Charles Harrison, 'A Kind of Context,' 17–8. The example of British pop raises the question, worthy of further investigation, of Hickey's connection to the movement.

The Seer of Common Objects

Hickey's vernacular modernism aligns with a dispersed network of painters outside Melbourne who forged similar pictorial strategies in the 1960s. While in Japan in 1963–64, for example, Dutch artist Daan van Golden created paintings that resemble textile and wrapping paper patterns; in West Germany, Blinky Palermo created grid compositions inspired by pinball table patterns and Sigmar Polke depicted bathroom tiles in a parodic homage to Carl Andre; Russia's Mikhail Roginsky's also painted grid compositions based on tile patterns; and in England, Terry Setch painted faux-stone wallpaper patterns and diner Howard Johnson napkins.

An important antecedent to these undertakings is Ellsworth Kelly's work of the late 1940s and early 1950s.[54] Like Hickey, Kelly was fascinated with the relation between walls and pictures, a tendency that emerged in his Paris drawings of the late 1940s, such as a sketch of a wall of the Paris Metro that looks like a non-representational pattern.[55] Although Hickey was unfamiliar with Kelly's work, his compositional approach is reminiscent of the latter's 1949 and 1950 French paintings and drawings, ostensibly abstract compositions derived from a range of unremarkable things such as windows, road markers, bathroom tiles, shadows, awnings and seaweed. In 'Notes from 1969,' Kelly referred to these objects as 'already-made' compositions:

> Everywhere I looked, everything I saw became something to be made, and it had to be made exactly as it was, with nothing added. It was a new freedom: there was no longer the need to compose.[56]

Yve-Alain Bois understands Kelly's use of already-made motifs in terms of what he calls 'non-composition,' which is a way to eliminate decision-making and subjective agency in the pictorial process. Kelly's technique is non-compositional, Bois explains, due to 'its origin in

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[54] [redacted]

[55] My sentence interpolates a passage of Briony Fer, '"To Hell with Pictures": Ellsworth Kelly's Walls,' in *Parkett* 56 (1999), 33–36, 33.

[56] The quote continues: 'The subject was there already made, and I could take from everything; it all belonged to me … It was all the same, *anything goes*.' Ellsworth Kelly, 'Notes of 1969,' in *Ellsworth Kelly* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1980), 30–34, 30.

randomness,' because the selection of subject matter is determined through the artist's contingent encounter with it in an everyday setting.[57] Kelly's real innovation, though, as Bois sees it, is that 'the only intentional act on the part of the artist resides in the decision to transfer this particular image'—that is, the already-made painter 'does not have to invent, compose, balance, "represent," interpret; all he has to do is isolate and copy.'[58] Kelly's already-mades, then, elide many aspects of what had previously constituted the medium painting, which is reduced to the selection and transferring of a found composition.

Bois arguably exaggerates the extent to which compositionality is excluded from the already-made—the painter, after all, can never altogether escape decisions regarding materials and techniques, scale and colour (an already-made painting is still made).[59] The concept of the already-made nonetheless remains helpful for understanding Hickey's pictorial process. His motifs are based on found patterns, which he 'copied' or 'transferred' with a minimal degree of improvisation, providing him with the basic structure of many of his paintings. This is especially pertinent to Hickey's 'wall pictures,' which look as though a section of wall has been cut from the side of a building then dutifully copyied onto the canvas. The depiction of a section of the wall, rather than the wall in its entirety, is reminiscent of Roy Lichtenstein's *Entablatures* (1971–72 and 1974–76).[60] In his painterly decontextualisation of his found surfaces, Hickey's works resonate with what Harold

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[57] Yve-Alain Bois, *Ellsworth Kelly: The Early Drawings, 1948–1955* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 15.

[58] Yve-Alain Bois, 'Ellsworth Kelly in France: Anti-Composition in Its Many Guises,' in *Ellsworth Kelly: The Years in France, 1948–1954* (Washington: Prestel, 1992), 9–36, 14. For an introduction to Kelly and other artists' use of the 'already made,' see Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art After Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 189–92.

[59] For example, Kelly still made material decisions about the weave of the canvas picture support and the type of paintbrush he would use—decisions thoroughly enmeshed with the concept and practice of composing a picture. (Consider the difficulty, for example, of discussing the concept of composition in relation to Morris Louis or Robert Ryman, to use roughly contemporaneous examples, without reference to these factors.) Equally significant is Bois' failure to adequately acknowledge that Kelly made active decisions about the scale of his work and his insufficient emphasis on Kelly's recolouration of his already-made motifs, both of which are crucial to Kelly's defamiliarisation of his found motifs. A second but connected issue with Bois' account is his problematic definition of the already-made as an 'indexical sign' in C.S. Peirce's sense of the term, which implies a direct, causal relationship of the sign to its referent, like a smoke and fire or footprint and foot. Kelly's paintings already-made paintings only imitate or resemble their subject matter—in Peirce's terms, they have an iconic relationship to the object they depict. They are indexical primarily of the painter's brush or hand.

[60] Yve-Alain Bois, 'Two Birds With One Stone,' in *Roy Lichtenstein: A Retrospective* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2012), 62–71.

Rosenberg defined as a potent effect of pop art: 'the hallucination of mistaking the street for a museum'; 'basically,' Rosenberg said, 'pop art is "found" art.'[61]

It wasn't only the suburban streetscape that attracted Hickey; he also appropriated images from the domestic interior. More generally, as Catalano correctly observed, Hickey's subject matter falls under the categories of 'the banal, the mundane, the commonplace.'[62] His paintings are populated by things that are usually ignored, things that are so familiar that they go unnoticed, which are usually unworthy of aesthetic attention—in contrast to the attention afforded a cultural artefact such as a painting. Things that are seen so often, so routinely, that they are not seen at all—these are precisely the things Hickey was drawn to. It is as though his paintings were pitched against the tendency of people to lose sight of the everyday, an attempt to disprove Wittgenstein's observation that 'One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes.'[63] A 1969 remark by Hickey gives further insight into his preoccupation with a common feature of the suburban streetscape:

> My interest in paling fences (repetitive, basic geometric shapes) arises, among many other factors, from the fact that I see them in my everyday commuting. They are part of the chaos of my everyday experience. They are neither meaningful or meaningless—they persist in the mind despite the detached observation of the commuter.[64]

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[61] Harold Rosenberg, 'The Art World: Marilyn Munroe,' in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 180–85, 181. To improve legibility I have switched the order of Rosenberg's quotation. Along similar lines, Dick Hebdige has commented that 'one of Pop's most distinctive strategies involves moving in microscopically on the familiar to de-familiarise it. The eye is forced to make rapid adjustments of focus as the contours of some object that we feel we should recognise dissolve into patterns of fractal complexity.' The opposite is the case in most Hickey paintings: a simple form is initially apprehended as abstract; recognition of its representationalism only comes later. In both cases, however, the strategy is de-familiarisation. Dick Hebdige, 'Fabulous Confusion! Pop Before Pop?,' in *Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955–62*, ed. Russell Ferguson (Los Angeles: Rizzoli, 1993), 205–241, 237.

[62] Catalano, 'On Dale Hickey,' 252.

[63] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), eds. Hacker and Schulte, trans. Anscombe, Hacker and Schulte (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 56e, 128.

[64] John Larkin, 'A Fence is a Fence is a Fence, or Was it?' *The Age*, 23 October 1969, 2.

What drove his fascination with such a subject? Hickey said he was drawn to their very ordinariness.[65] Since fences are encountered in an unremarkable everyday setting, they are so familiar that they are not usually noticed. But on closer inspection, Hickey's remarks return us to his paradoxical relationship to Fried's account of the struggle between art and objecthood. It is not simply the everydayness of the fence that interested Hickey, but its multifaceted durational character: the palings are themselves repetitive, they are seen on a daily basis, and persist in the mind of the commuter as an 'after image.' Hickey's account of the fence thus conjures a durational temporality, an experience of endless deferral. Considered in relation to his paintings, which bring the issue of ordinary objects and objecthood as such to our attention, elevating or dignifying it, Hickey's remark is read not simply an affirmation of objecthood, but instead as a paradoxical desire to redeem it through its thematisation. It suggests an intention to recover the magnificence or dignity of ordinary things and the condition of objecthood—a pursuit foreign to minimalism.

How to explain Hickey's fascination with the ordinary object and objecthood as such? One of Hickey's important early sources was *pittura metafisica*, the Italian 'metaphysical painting' movement of the early twentieth century. Hickey discovered the work of Carlo Carrà, Giorgio de Chirico and Giorgio Morandi, the three central protagonists of the movement, as a student at Swinburne Technical College in the mid-1950s, and acknowledges that their work made a strong impression on him.[66] Hickey's interest in the artists would have been encouraged by his teacher James Meldrum, a Melbourne painter who believed that 'the inner life of ordinary objects held out the hope of universal meaning.'[67] Looking at Hickey's paintings of suburban and domestic objects alongside Morandi's meditative still lifes or de Chirico's empty scenes, the formal connection between them is not obvious—notwithstanding the way that de Chirico's depiction of arc windows could double as elements within a hard-edge painting. Yet Hickey's penchant for ordinary objects and perspectival ambiguity are also central traits of *pittura metafisica*.

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[65] Hickey would later elaborate on this dimension of his program: 'it's finding the extraordinary in something that's very ordinary.' Catalano, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 58.
[66] Hickey knew the work of these artists through reproduction. In Melbourne in the late 1950s, a primary source of information was James Thrall Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico* (New York: M.o.M.A., 1956).
[67] Ronald Millar review of James Meldrum's exhibition at Pinacotheca in 1986. Cited in James Meldrum, *A Surrealist Metaphysical Stance 1951–1993* (Brisbane: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993).

Hickey's investment in the transcendent power of everyday experience is a further way in which his aesthetic program aligns with the metaphysical painters. From 1913, the metaphysical painters elaborated a theory of art that anticipates aspects of Hickey's hard-edge painting half a century later. As it was not widely available in English, Hickey was probably unfamiliar with the writings of Carrà and de Chirico; nonetheless, this discourse is relevant to the present argument insofar as it infused or permeated artworks that formatively shaped Hickey's artistic development. The discourse of metaphysical painting is thus crucial for understanding Hickey's paintings of the late 1960s.

In a 1913 text, de Chirico argues for the necessity of 'representing all the things of the world as enigmas … [and] understanding the enigma of some things that are usually considered insignificant.' He also claims that the artist must be committed to 'living in the world as if it were in an immense museum of strangeness.'[68] De Chirico would later return to the issue of the necessity of depicting ordinary objects in relation to Morandi's paintings, which he saw as revelling in 'the metaphysics of the most common objects':

> those objects made so familiar to us by habit that, as wise as we may be in the mysteries of appearance, we often observe with the eyes of one who *sees but does not know*.[69]

In his praise for Morandi, an artist who once remarked that 'nothing can be more abstract, more unreal, than what we actually see,' de Chirico evokes a justification for the ordinary

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[68] Giorgio de Chirico, 'The Sense of Foreboding' (1913), *Metaphysica*, ed. Ester Coen, trans. Christopher Evans, (Rome: Electa, 2003). A similar intent permeates the proto-existentialist writings of Arthur Schopenhauer, who claimed that defamiliarisation was inherently connected to the originality of thought: 'To have original, extraordinary thoughts, possibly even immortal ideas, it is sufficient to become so completely estranged from the world and things for a few moments that the most ordinary objects and events appear to be wholly new and unfamiliar, whereby their true nature is disclosed.' Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *Volume* 2 (1851), trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 77. For an illuminating philosophical interpretation of de Chirico's painting see Barbara Heins, *Giorgio de Chirico's Metaphysical Art and Schopenhauer's Metaphysics: An Exploration of the Philosophical Concept in de Chirico's Prose and Paintings* (Canterbury: University of Kent, 1992). Also see Ivor Davies, 'Giorgio de Chirico: The Sources of Metaphysical Painting in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche,' *Art International* 26 (January-March 1983), 53–60.

[69] Cited in Maria Christina Bandera, 'Giorgio Morandi: "the metaphysics of the most common objects," in *De Chirico, Max Ernst, Magritte, Balthus: A Look into the Invisible* (Milan: Silvana, 2012), 77–83, 77.

object similar to the one raised earlier in relation to Hickey's work.[70] Due to its closeness to everyday perception or unreflective experience, such an object is ideally suited to revealing what is uncommon.

The ordinary object is also central to a 1918 essay by Carlo Carrà, which states that 'It is the "ordinary things" that work on our souls in such a beneficial way that we attain the extreme summit of grace.'[71] 'For 'ordinary things' reveal the forms of simplicity that tell us of a superior state of being,' Carrà declares, 'which constitutes the splendid secret of art.'[72] According to Carrà, the transcendent appears as an epiphany within the fabric of everyday experience—the problem for the artist, then, is how to communicate this higher reality, which although it appears in the guise of the banal is, paradoxically, incredibly evasive. 'The spectral vision of reality is reserved for rare and completely rational individuals; phantasmagorical illusions are for artists of little power and discipline.'[73] Carrà claims that the most powerful insights already reside within common things: to perceive them, though, the artist must not stray too far from the world of ordinary appearances; moreover, they must be adequately equipped, possess the right faculties, a higher power. Nobody less than a visionary artist, one capable of transcending mundane perception to perceive the brilliance of the everyday, would be able to perceive the transcendent unworldliness of the ordinary object.

Finally, the figure of the visionary artist is developed in de Chirico's manifesto 'On Metaphysical Art' (1919), which by contending that there are two registers of perception—one belonging to 'men in general' and the other to 'rare individuals,' such as artists—restates the requirement that the transcendent power of the everyday is only perceived by one in possession of special faculties.[74] The visionary artist's perception of the ordinary object is thus fundamentally different to ordinary people. Invisible to normal perception, such an object is the ideal subject matter because it allows the artist to reveal the usually-invisible qualities of the seemingly mundane object that is usually cloaked by the veil of familiarity.

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[70] Edouard Roditi, 'Interview with Giorgio Morandi,' in *Dialogues on Art* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960), 143–55, 146.
[71] Carlo Carrà, 'Concerning Ordinary Things,' in *Metaphysical Art*, ed. Massimo Carrà, trans. Caroline Tisdall (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 47–48, 48.
[72] Ibid. Carrà continues: 'But when the flashes of inspiration of 'ordinary things,' so rarely repeated, illuminate art, they create those essentials that are the most precious for us modern artists.'
[73] Ibid.
[74] Giorgio de Chirico, 'On Metaphysical Art' (1919), in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, trans. Caroline Tisdall (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 283.

The mission of the metaphysical painter, then, is to show the most concrete object in another guise, to restore to reality the sense of mystery and intrigue that it already possessed.

Exploring the connection between metaphysical painting and surrealism will allow me to further flesh out the historical background for Hickey's camouflaged representation of ordinary objects. The metaphysical painters' belief that depicting ordinary objects and common reality gives access to a higher reality was also a governing aesthetic principle of surrealism—the latter another movement with a palpable connection to Hickey's work.[75] Metaphysical painting, de Chirico's in particular, is widely regarded as a primary antecedent for the emergence of surrealism in Paris around 1920. It is unsurprising, then, that an investment in the transcendent power of the object would also shape the work of surrealists Max Ernst and René Magritte, whose early encounters with the work of de Chirico had far-reaching consequences. Ernst's study of the latter's paintings, undertaken with Paul Klee in Munich in 1919, profoundly influenced his subsequent cultivation of monstrous juxtapositions across collages, lithographs and paintings.[76] Magritte cited a 1922 encounter with de Chirico's *The Song of Love* (1914), before which he reportedly wept, as a significant catalyst for his subsequent paintings.[77]

In his 1938 text 'Lifelines,' Magritte cites de Chirico, Duchamp, Ernst and Picasso as precedents for his incorporation of 'objects with all the details they show us in reality' into his paintings. In the same text, Magritte's account of an experience which he claimed informed his desire to paint realistically is reminiscent of a passage from Max Ernst's autobiographic treatise 'Beyond Painting,' the expanded version of which had been republished in 1937. [78] Ernst's text opens with a description of a vision he experienced as a child, half-asleep in his bedroom: 'I see before me a panel, very rudely painted with wide

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[75] Magritte is raised in relation to Hickey's work in Lynn, 'Provincial Zest,' 72 and Patrick McCaughey, 'Experience and the New Abstraction,' 89.
[76] See Werner Spies and Sabine Rewald, eds., *Max Ernst: A Retrospective* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
[77] Magritte would later dismiss pure abstraction as the 'age-old stupidity … when the art of painting was replaced by so-called abstract, non-figurative, or formless art—which consists in depositing the "material" on a surface with varying degrees of fantasy and conviction.' Magritte, *Rhetorique*, no. 9, 1963, cited in Harry Torczyner, *Magritte: Ideas and Images*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Abrams, 1977), 65.
[78] Max Ernst quasi-autobiographic treatise 'Beyond Painting' was first published in 1927, then an expanded version was published in 1936 and again in 1937, one year before Magritte's text. See Anne Umland, Stephanie D'Alessandro and Josef Helfenstein, 'Magritte's Essential Surrealist Years,' in *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary 1926–1938*, ed. Anne Umland (New York: M.o.M.A., 2014), 16–23, 19.

black lines on a red ground, representing false mahogany and calling forth associations of organic forms.' Similar to Ernst's vision of the faux-wood surface, Magritte recalled 'a prolonged contemplative experience' in 1925 'in an unpretentious Brussels brasserie,' where he 'was in a frame of mind such that the mouldings on a door seemed to [him] to be imbued with a mysterious quality of existence and for a long time [he] stayed in contact with their reality.'[79] In his state of transfixion, Magritte had discovered a reason to depict ordinary objects: an 'ordinary mystery'—a mirage, an other-worldly experience—already resided in the most banal sights and objects.[80] The Belgian critic Paul Nougé's 1931 comment captures the paradoxical status of the ordinary object in Magritte's work: 'the world has been altered. There are no longer any ordinary things.'[81]

A central thread linking the work of metaphysical painters Carrà, de Chirico and Morandi as well as the surrealists Ernst and Magritte is their preoccupation with the ordinary object. Surveying this shared preoccupation allows us to appreciate Hickey's late 1960s paintings within a broader historical context, to see it in dialogue with a tradition of modern European painting.

Making Strange

Hickey's fascination with the world of ordinary objects is intimately connected to his European forebears, whose aesthetic goal was not only to depict common reality but to transform it into a form that would disorient perception. After all, the meaning of Magritte's anecdote of the door is not simply its ordinariness but that this ordinariness is not what it seems: its familiarity is rendered unfamiliar. A similar logic is seen in Hickey's paintings in which, characteristically, the object appears almost unrecognisable. Developing McCaughey's psychologistic reading of the Tolarno exhibition, in a 1970 review Lansell observed the unnerving effect of Hickey's defamiliarised objects:

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[79] Rene Magritte, 'La Ligne de vie' (1938), in *Magritte 1898–1967*, eds. Gisèle Ollinger-Zinque and Frederik Leen (Ghent and Brussels: Ludion, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, 1998), 45.
[80] See Umland, D'Alessandro and Helfenstein, 'Magritte's Essential Surrealist Years,' 19.
[81] Paul Nougé 'Avertissement.' Cited in David Sylvester, *René Magritte: Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 2* (New York: Wittenborn, 1993), 8.

> Hickey distorted domesticity and suburbia to the point where the original source of inspiration—for argument's sake let's say the upholstery pattern of a Vynex suite—was virtually unrecognisable, and became sinister and Gothic.'[82]

Transforming ordinary objects into lurid alien forms, Hickey's paintings disorient everyday perception and to this extent they recall Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny, which describes the reappearance of something familiar as an unsettling apparition—'the opposite of what is familiar.'[83] Insofar as Hickey's paintings render familiar objects unfamiliar and thereby disrupt ordinary perception, another theoretical construct they bring to mind is Viktor Shklovksy's concept of *ostranenie*, which literally means 'making strange' and is usually translated as estrangement or defamiliarisation, as formulated in his 1917 essay 'Art as Technique.'

Shklovksy's argument is that everyday life is stultified by habit and routine: things appear dull because perception is routinised, oblivious not only to the vibrancy of things but to the act of perceiving itself. Shklovksy claims that art breaks the deadening monotony of habit, delivers an enlivening shock to perception: 'A work is created "artistically,"' he says, 'so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception.'[84] The function of art inheres, that is, in its transformation of the familiar into something almost unrecognisable:

> The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.[85]

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[82] G.R. Lansell, *Nation*, 4 April 1970, 19. Hickey's early interest in the bleak, atmospheric scenes of Albert Pynkham Ryder, such as *The Race Track (Death on a Pale Horse)* (1895–1910) is one source for the gothic quality Lansell perceived in his work. Hickey was initially familiar with Ryder's work through reproduction; his first in-the-flesh encounter with Ryder's work was his mirror painting *The Culprit Fay* (ca. 1882–86) at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1971.
[83] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 217–256.
[84] Shklovksy, 'Art as Technique,' 20.
[85] Ibid.

Shklovsky's idea of defamiliarisation provides a useful way to understand Hickey's camouflaged depictions of ordinary objects. Hickey's techniques—such as the recolouration of the object, his simplification of the object to schematic geometries, his elimination of extraneous detail and his superimposition of tonal patterns—culminate in a defamiliarising effect, triggering a mode of perception in which previously insignificant things are imbued with sudden significance.[86] Of special interest is Shklovksy's characterisation of aesthetic experience as a 'slowing' and 'prolonging' of perception—a temporality that aligns neither with the instantaneousness of modernist painting or the endlessness of minimalism, but rather in between those states: an extended epiphanous moment, or an enhanced duration. Fundamentally, the pertinence of Shklovksy's theory to the present argument is that it gives insight into the way that the formal operation of Hickey's paintings are entangled with, and in tension with, everyday perception. Defamiliarisation, then, offers a rationale for Hickey's camouflaged illusionism: daily reality, he may have thought, is hidden because it is too familiar; it can only be conjured artificially, and in disguise. Hickey's works defamiliarise the spectator by re-presenting the ordinary object on the brink of unrecognisability.

Shklovsky's idea that the artwork delivers an enlivening shock to ordinary perception helps us to understand the reasons behind Hickey's camouflaged depiction of ordinary objects. Although Hickey did not read Shklovksy, this does not diminish the helpfulness of his theory for understanding his paintings. Yet there is another literary source Hickey was intimately familiar with, which frames the artwork through the language of defamiliarisation. A key text of the 1950s and 1960s counterculture, Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954) is a book about a mescaline trip that is also a meandering inquiry into the nature of experience, religion and art.[87] Hickey read it around 1957; in the de Berg interview, he described it as a continuing 'reference point.'[88] Of interest to the present argument is Hickey's citation of the book as important for his artistic trajectory in the wake of his

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[86] Shklovksy's idea of estrangement is echoed in Hickey's remarks in a letter to Robert Jacks: 'Any great art has to be a subversion otherwise it is not art. If art (painting) is new visual or psychological experience and on the other hand familiarity (of forms) breeds contempt (or brings on atrophy), then art reconstitutes worn-out conditions. One cannot substitute one old thing with another—hence the new … If one poor bloody old form is on its last legs—get rid of it before it's fucked up by familiarity.' Dale Hickey, letter to Robert Jacks, October 1968.
[87] For Huxley's influence on the counterculture, see Robert C. Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll: The Rise of America's 1960s Counterculture* (Lanham, Maryland : Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).
[88] Hickey in de Berg, 'Interview,' 5.

figurative expressionist paintings of the mid-1960s, at a moment of artistic uncertainty that immediately preceded his hard-edge phase.

Hickey's interest in Huxley grew as he experimented with marijuana and L.S.D during the 1960s. To understand Huxley's appeal, it is necessary to grasp his claim about the link between mescaline and art. Mescaline, Huxley claims, dissolves the normal structures that govern perception, language, meaning and understanding. He catalogues an array of mescaline-induced effects including: the neutralisation of hierarchies of value, destabilisation of naturalised behaviours and customs, suspension of the survival instinct and common-sense notions of practicality and functionality, erosion of the ego and the self and to fostering an indifference towards spatiotemporal boundaries.[89] These effects occasion a state of heightened awareness, he thinks: to experience the trip is 'to be shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception,' opening the door, as it were, to what he alternately describes as 'pure being,' 'naked existence,' or 'Mind at Large,'

> an infinite which passes all understanding and yet admits of being directly and in some sort totally apprehended. It is a transcendence belonging to another order than the human, and yet it may be present to us as a felt immanence, an experienced participation.[90]

The experience of mescaline, Huxley argues, affords a God-like appreciation of the world, a state of being otherwise reserved for extraordinary figures such as visionaries, mystics, mediums—or artists.[91] He returns repeatedly to the similarity between mescaline-induced vision and artistic vision. 'What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline,' he claims, 'the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time.'[92] The problem facing the artist is to produce a form that conveys this heightened state. In Huxley's formulation, the artist

> had seen the Istigkeit, the Allness and Infinity of folded cloth and had done their best to render it in paint or stone. Necessarily, of course, without success. For the glory

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[89] These effects are described in various passages of the book. See Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, 17, 29, 24, 44, 20.
[90] Ibid., 63.
[91] Ibid., 14–15.
[92] Ibid., 29.

> and the wonder of pure existence belong to another order, beyond the Power of even the highest art to express.[93]

Huxley articulates a mystical definition of artistic labour, which he portrays as simultaneously motivated and defeated by his desire to give finite form to the infinite. Note Huxley's reference to drapery—a motif that has fascinated artists since ancient times. The reason, he argues, is not because it allows them to display their technical finesse, but rather because 'for the artist as for the mescalin taker draperies are living hieroglyphs that stand in some peculiarly expressive way for the unfathomable mystery of pure being.' The appeal of drapery is its ordinariness, which in Huxley's view—as for the metaphysical painters or surrealists before him—is anything but ordinary.

In the narrative of *Doors*, Huxley's discussion of drapery is prompted by his intensive scrutiny of the pleats of his trousers. 'These are the sort of things one ought to look at,' he exclaims,

> Things without pretensions, satisfied to be merely themselves, sufficient in their Suchness, not acting a part, not trying, insanely, to go it alone, in isolation from the Dharma-Body, in Luciferian defiance of the grace of god.[94]

What Huxley proposes in this passage is that the artist is captivated by ordinary objects because they deflect attention away from themselves. Their inconspicuousness makes them, the artist realises, a perfect vessel for the expression of 'pure being.' Hence Huxley's preference for the fragment over the whole, which is exemplified in his praise for Vermeer as 'that mysterious artist … with the vision that perceives the Dharma-Body as the hedge at the bottom of the garden.'[95] If the mescaline tripper attains 'a knowledge of the intrinsic significance of every existent' then the artist seeks to express it—and what better way than by focusing their attention on the most inconspicuous things littered around their common reality?[96] Like the metaphysical painters and surrealists before him, Huxley alleges, the

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[93] Ibid., 30.
[94] Ibid., 30.
[95] Ibid., 33.
[96] Ibid., 29.

subject matter best suited to the expression of higher perception is what appears—to common people at least—in the guise of the ordinary and the banal.

Huxley's argument that there is an innate affinity between artistic perception and the ordinary object is a prominent element within the constellation of influence that shaped Hickey's paintings of the late 1960s. It is not simply that Hickey was fascinated by ordinary objects (or more precisely by details of such objects). The idea, central to Huxley, that the deepest mysteries of existence do not exist elsewhere, but are instead paradoxically concealed through their familiarity, is a central theme of Hickey's painting. Furthermore, Hickey's use of several of the same (or similar) motifs found in Huxley's book suggests that the influence of *Doors* perhaps extended to Hickey's selection of subject matter and even the means of its depiction. Identifying the overlap between Huxley's examples and Hickey's motifs demonstrates, at the very least, the former's considerable grip over the latter's aesthetic imagination.

The first piece of evidence suggesting the overlap between Huxley's examples and Hickey's motifs is the least direct, limited to the coincidence between Huxley's description of a chair and the illusionism of Hickey's *Pipe Painting*. Huxley's description of the chair legs—'how miraculous their tubularity, how supernatural their polished smoothness!'—could double as an apt portrayal of the cylindrical forms nested in Hickey's painting.[97] There is stronger evidence that Hickey deliberately quoted Huxley's examples for his *Quilt Painting* and his paintings of walls and fences. Regarding the former, Hickey's choice of subject matter of the quilt and the way he depicted it as an ostensibly abstract pattern evokes Huxley's contention that to paint drapery is to depict 'non-representational … unconditioned forms.'[98] Hickey's paintings of walls, on the other hand, call to mind Huxley's praise for a 'stucco wall with a shadow slanting across it, blank but unforgettably beautiful, empty but charged with all the meaning and the mystery of existence.'[99] As with the aforementioned examples, Huxley's description of the wall, which he likens to a painting by Guardi, could be cited as a source of inspiration for Hickey's own work. Indeed, Huxley's account of the mysterious blankness of the shadowed wall, both overflowing and empty of meaning, could

[97] Ibid., 20–21.
[98] Ibid., 21.
[99] Ibid., 51.

also prescribe something close to Hickey's ambitions for his own paintings, or the kind of aesthetic experience he sought to evoke through his work.

A final shared motif, also architectural, is the door, which in Huxley's book stands as a metaphor for the passage from ordinary to visionary perception. This motif does not appear in Hickey's 1966–67 Tolarno paintings nor in his 1968 paintings, but it does appear in *Garage Door Painting* (1969), one of several large, sparse paintings he made that year. In light of the significance of Huxley's text to Hickey's late 1960s work, this painting—among the last he would make before temporarily abandoning the medium—might be read as a homage to Huxley's book.

Painting, Garage Door

In order to draw together the central thematic strands of this chapter, I now shift attention back to Hickey's work, in particular *Garage Door Painting*, one of a group of minimalist paintings Hickey produced in 1969 that saw him 'gradually moving to a blanker and blanker statement.'[100] Discreetly representational, structurally symmetrical and garishly coloured, Hickey's minimalist works do not mark a stylistic break so much as a development within his hard-edge phase. A novelty of these works is their sparser composition and different tonal shading—the dramatic shading of the earlier paintings is replaced by a more diffuse, irregular tonal distribution. These paintings will take us back full circle to the discussion of Fried at the beginning of the chapter, but they will also allow us to grasp the sub-cultural specificity of Hickey's painterly minimalism.

The physicality of the grid structures of *Atlantis* (fig. 2.12) and *Black Painting* (fig. 2.13), made in 1969 and exhibited at the inaugural group exhibition at Pinacotheca Richmond in June 1970, broadly aligns with minimalism, yet other aspects of these works suggest a more tenuous relation to the movement.[101] As with Hickey's earlier hard-edge paintings, the 1969 works double as representations of ordinary objects and thus transgress minimalism's

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[100] Bruce Pollard with Terry Smith, 'The Local Ideas Context: Bruce Pollard,' in *The Situation Now: Object or Post-Object Art?* (Sydney: Contemporary Art Society of Australia, 1971) 5–8, 6.
[101] *Atlantis* was first exhibited in the 1969 Transfield Art Prize at Bonython Gallery. After seeing the work there, James Mollison purchased it for the N.G.A., where it currently resides. In a letter to Pollard, Mollison explained what attracted him to it: 'The tough quality of the work, which had alarmed me when I first saw it, now appealed to me as a positive virtue, and I was further impressed by the major scale of the work.' James Mollison to Bruce Pollard, 29 September 1969, n.p.

anti-illusionism.[102] Although its title solicits an abstract or materialist reading, *Black Painting*—especially when viewed alongside Hickey's other works from the period—is also seen as a brick wall.[103] In contrast, *Atlantis*, with its aqueous colour and titular reference to the mythical underwater city, is more openly allusive; as curator Christine Dixon explains, the work also carries a more local, urban connotation, its title a reference to a product by Atlantis Water Management company, a 'cellular wall drainage system … perfect for underground car parks, basements, retaining walls, bridge abutments, civil structures.'[104] The painting, on this reading, refashions a mundane feature of the streetscape into an ancient mythological monument.

The other trait of Hickey's minimalist paintings which distance them from the unified structures and polished surfaces characteristic of the movement is their subtle painterliness (fig. 2.14). *Black Painting* displays the impressionist technique of 'broken colour,' with uneven, dry strokes of grey and black layered within each taped-off cell of the grid.[105] In some areas, especially at the edges of each cell, the paint is so thinly applied that the directions of each stroke is evident; there are even small patches of exposed canvas. Due to the messy handling, the composition of each cell is different, but the evenly delineated grid outline endows the work with a baseline structural uniformity. There is also variation within the individual grid cells of *Atlantis*, the wispy whites and greys on green conjuring an image of dappled light further heightening the illusionism of the work. Terry Smith seized on this in a 1970 review, claiming that the work is evidence of Hickey's 'continuing exploration of the problems of containing illusion within a grid,' and observing its 'extremely beautiful handling of colour—a silver glow got by scumbling clouds of grey through a pattern of green

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[102] An early polemic against minimalism's anti-illusionism is Rosalind Krauss, 'Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd,' *Artforum* 4, no. 9 (May 1966), 24–6.
[103] Ad Reinhardt, whose work I discuss in relation to Hunter's early hard-edge paintings in Chapter 5, referred his geometric all-over canvases as 'brick-paintings.' Bois, 'Ellsworth Kelly in France,' 11.
[104] Christine Dixon, 'Atlantis Wall,' in *Australian Art in the National Gallery of Australia,* ed. Anne Gray (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2002). https://cs.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=63766, accessed 1 September 2012.
[105] Hickey used a similar technique in another 1969 work, recently donated by collector Jim Cobb, owner of Chroma Paints, to the Orange Regional Museum. This square canvas features a regular geometric pattern—a grid of square cells, each divided into four triangles—with thick patches of brushed on paint, that fade and smear into one another fill each triangle, which end abruptly at the edges of each triangle. The colour scheme and brushed-on the irregular size and shape of paint patches with the loosely applied paint handling generate a blurred camouflage-like design of pale green, tan, beige and cream.

shapes in the grid work.'[106] The suggestive illusionism of *Atlantis* and *Black Painting* was also highlighted by Ann Galbally, who remarked that their 'low-keyed surfaces, reflecting light from no apparent light source, inject mystery into minimalism.'[107] For Galbally, the paintings are not at odds with minimalism, but instead represent a distinctive version of it.

In another 1969 work, similar cloud-like effects create an illusion of semi-opacity (fig. 2.15). Owned by Patrick's brother James McCaughey, this little-known painting features an unusual structure of three abutting rectangles, the middle rectangle shorter than its neighbours, with modulating highlights drifting across the entire pictorial field.[108] The source material that inspired this painting is unclear, yet in the context of Hickey's works of the period, its rectangular structure and airy complexion is evocative of an ornamental window or mirror; the latter association is reinforced by the bevelled edges of its tripartite rectangular structure, which are broadly reminiscent of the decorative finish of such an object. At the same time, with its dappled surface-finish evoking the look of frosted glass, Hickey's work activates the Renaissance paradigm of painting-as-window, holding out the promise of a fictional interiority that the gaze struggles to enter.

Having identified the distinguishing features of Hickey's 1969 paintings, we can now turn our attention to the *Garage Door Painting* (figs. 2.16), [redacted]
Establishing a proximity between the painting of the fine artist and that of the amateur home decorator, Hickey's work self-reflexively poses the question of the difference between them. Suspended between the transparent and the opaque, the reflective and the absorptive and illusion and reality, the work also stages a more specific tension—between conflicting notions of minimalism. The compositional structure of the work establishes its contrastive character: across two abutting canvases are two pairs of diagonally opposed rectangles with

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[106] Terry Smith, 'Pinacotheca Group Exhibition, June, Melbourne,' *Other Voices* 1, no. 2 (August-September 1970), 45–46, 46.
[107] Ann Galbally, 'Avant-garde is in a New HQ,' *The Age*, 10 June 1970, 2.
[108] Part of the reason for the obscurity of this work is that it was not initially exhibited. As McCaughey's wife Ellen Koshland explained, it was purchased by McCaughey in the early 1970s and has hung in his home since then, except for the brief period it was lent to Geelong Art Gallery. Ellen Koshland, email to author, 26 September 2015.
[109] [redacted]

markedly different picture surfaces, one pair a teal colour with an irregular wispy pattern and the other a shiny black monochrome.

Garage Door Painting displays certain traits typical of minimalism. The two-canvas quadripartite composition—Hickey's largest and most reduced to date—aligns with minimalism's assertion of the literal presence of the artwork.[110] Further enhancing the minimalist credentials of Hickey's work is the use of Solpah, an enamel paving paint, for the black rectangles, which harmonises with the 'aggressive,' 'non-art' materials mandated by Donald Judd.[111] The reflectiveness of these sections foregrounds the relationship of the spectator to the picture, making it difficult for them to 'lose themselves' in contemplation; instead, they stare at an indexical image of themselves reflected in real time and space.[112] In this way, Hickey's painting substitutes the traditional idea of painting as a vehicle for contemplation for a phenomenological stress on the relationship between spectator, artwork and architecture.[113]

The Solpah-coated rectangles imbue *Garage Door Painting* with an aggressive physicality and industrial materiality, yet the minimalist credentials of the work are compromised by its turquoise sections, whose scumbled treatment conjures an image of misty, dappled light. The bi-partitioned halves correspond to clashing models of spectatorial engagement: whereas the shiny black offers the viewer an image of themselves, the turquoise sections lure the eye into a contemplative reverie: while the former cancels pictorial

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[110] Donald Judd, for example, stressed the 'literal' or 'physical' aspects of the minimalist artwork. See Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects' (1965), in *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York : New York University Press, 1975), 181–189, 184.

[111] Ibid., 187–88. Hickey also used Solpah on one other occasion, in an untitled vertical 1969 painting, in the collection of Bruce Pollard, which features abutting rectangles of black and aqua. The combination of garish colouration, industrial materiality and painterly roughness has a 'proto-punk' look, which is further enhanced by the evidence of peeled-off masking tape down the middle of the painting. Like much minimalist art, Hickey's use of non-art materials simultaneously cuts in two directions: on the one hand, the incorporation of the non-art material into the artwork endows the industrial material with a newfound status; on the other hand, through its incorporation of the profane material, the artwork—and by extension the category of the artwork—is dragged down to the level of the everyday.

[112] This aligns with Robert Morris' argument that the minimalist work 'takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision.' Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 2' (1966), in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. 1993), 11–21, 15.

[113] Ibid. For a discussion of the varied uses of reflective surfaces in modern and contemporary art, see Ann Stephen, *Mirror Mirror: Then and Now* (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 2010).

interiority, the latter promotes it.[114] *Garage Door Painting* appears deliberately poised between two formal paradigms embodied by the literal reflective black and atmospheric illusionistic green, almost as though the work was an attempt to stage a conflict between them. More specifically, it is as though the ultimate subject of Hickey's work is the clash between minimalism, on the one hand, and on the other a kind of art, characterised by the painterliness and contemplative spectatorship, that minimalism wanted to destroy.

How should this formal clash be understood? In 1977, Memory Holloway, an American art historian who lived in Melbourne during part of the 1970s and 1980s, observed that the texture and illusionism of *Garage Door Painting* 'is not, strictly speaking, minimal, and yet Hickey sees it as the most experimental minimal painting that he did at the time.'[115] While Holloway implies a discrepancy between what minimalism actually is, and what Hickey conceived it to be, the latter was not alone in his characterisation of minimalism. *Garage Door Painting* was included in two early exhibitions of Australian minimalism: Jennifer Phipps' *Minimal Art* (1976) at the N.G.V., and Bruce Pollard's *Minimal Art in Australia: A Contemplative Art* (1987) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Brisbane. Hickey's curatorial inclusion is a clue to the fact that, just as discreet representationalism and spatial illusionism were crucial ingredients of modernist painting in Melbourne, the illusionism and contemplativeness of *Garage Door Painting* were defining traits of minimalism within Hickey's local scene.

The most significant theorisation of this minimalist vernacular is found in texts written by Bruce Pollard to accompany two exhibitions that he organised. Held at the Ewing Gallery at the University of Melbourne in 1973, *Minimal* was the first survey exhibition of minimalist painting in Australia, presenting the work of Hickey alongside Booth, Garry Foulkes, Hunter, Johnson, McGillick, Partos, John Peart and Vickers (an exclusively Melbourne-Sydney ensemble with the exception of Brisbane artist Peart).[116] Its unofficial 1987 sequel, *Minimal Art in Australia*, featured different works by the same artists included in the earlier exhibition, minus Foulkes but with the addition of Watkins. Pollard developed the notion of 'contemplative minimalism' in 1973, and expanded it in 1987; due to the strong

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[114] Holloway, 'Minimal Art,' 59.
[115] Ibid. In addition, Hickey himself has spoken of 'a number of paintings which would have to be called minimal in the strict sense of the term.' James Gleeson, 'Interview with Dale Hickey for the National Gallery of Australia Collection' (Canberra: N.G.A., 1 May 1979), 4.
[116] See Maureen Gilchrist, 'Here's Painting Stripped to its Bare Essentials,' *The Age*, 18 April 1973.

similarities between these texts, for the sake of simplicity I shall shift freely back and forth between them, treating them as a single coherent theoretical account of minimalism.

A central feature of Pollard's conception of minimalism, which contradicts the standard association of minimalism with the eclipse of the traditional forms, is his exclusive focus on paintings.[117] This was not simply due to the personal bias of the curator; rather, it reflects the predominantly painterly orientation of the minimalism practiced by Hickey and his peers at Pinacotheca. Pollard's emphasis on painting links with another feature of the vernacular minimalism he was promoting: the notion of the artwork as a vehicle for contemplation, an absorption in the act of beholding that implies a suspension of ordinary perception. Pollard writes of the minimalist work 'deny[ing] the mind its usual footholds' and forcing the eye to drift across surfaces that one would usually ignore may produce this heightened awareness. The holding, the captivity of the onlooker,' he claimed, 'is the act of theatre produced by the artist.'[118] In the second exhibition text, Pollard describes paintings that 'create their own atmospheric space, and the viewer remains quietly within this defined space.'[119] The 'basically uninflected central area' or 'void' at the centre of a minimalist painting, Pollard argues, resists the spectator's efforts to make sense of the experience. 'This mode of existence is highly valued and desired but has to be suppressed because it is random, unplannable, and unpredictable … It is as though the mind by knowing and by being able to pattern and predict eliminates this type of experience.'[120] This atmospheric blank space is understood to resist the spectator's efforts to 'make sense' of it. On this reading, perception trumps cognition: minimalist painting occasions an ultimately irrational mode of experience.

occasions an ultimately irrational mode of experience.

Minimalist painting, on this reading, occasions an ultimately irrational mode of experience in which perception trumps cognition.

Pollard's identification of minimalism with contemplation, which he describes as 'the act of theatre produced by the artist,' contradicts the anti-contemplativeness often attributed to minimalism, but his terms strangely echo Fried's definition of the movement, where

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[117] In the 1973 exhibition, Hickey was represented by *90 White Walls* (1970), a photo-conceptual work discussed in Chapter 3. My argument there is that, despite its ostensibly photographic form, Hickey's work qualifies as a kind of painting.
[118] Bruce Pollard, 'Notes for Minimalist Exhibition' (1973), in *Minimalism in Australia: A Contemplative Art* (Brisbane: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 21–23, 22.
[119] Bruce Pollard, 'Introduction,' 1.
[120] Pollard, 'Minimal,' 22.

'theatre' refers to the illegitimate non-art space between the autonomous arts and 'theatrical' describes the object's address to the spectator in real time and space. Similar to Fried's concept of 'the theatrical,' Pollard's notion of 'theatre' specifies a relation between artwork and spectator; moreover, it specifies the durational character of this relation. Yet Pollard is not simply championing aesthetic values that were disparaged by Fried—'theatre,' which Pollard equates with soliciting a mode of viewing that suspends the spectator's awareness of their immediate surroundings, implicitly asserts a dormant illusionism at the heart of minimalism. Rather than languishing in real time and space like other ordinary objects, in Pollard's view the minimalist painting opens onto a higher reality. The artwork, he would later comment, is a 'mysterious icon,' an irrational flash of ordinary reality expressed in the form of a paradoxically banal object of veneration.[121]

Perhaps Pollard's use of the term 'theatre' was intended to draw comparisons with the New York critic's theory of minimalism; at any rate, aspects of his two texts appear to have been articulated in conscious opposition to the equation of minimalism with literalism. The 1987 text identifies Ramsden's *Black Painting* (1966–67), exhibited in *The Field* and later stored at Pinacotheca until it was sold to the Art Gallery of Ballarat in 1977, as an example of what contemplative minimalism *is not*. Ramsden's painting is anti-contemplative, Pollard claims, because it is 'shiny black, long and thin, compressed with energy, and fast, travelling beyond itself.'[122] The work is anti-contemplative because its thinness and reflectiveness endows it with a literalness that deflects the viewer away from, rather than captures them within, the void at the centre of the kind of minimalist paintings in which Pollard was interested.

Although the two turquoise sections of *Garage Door Painting* are amenable to Pollard's notion of contemplative minimalism, its Solpah-covered sections generate surface effects similar to Ramsden's *Black Painting* that are directly hostile to contemplative minimalism. Incorporating conflicting forms and ideologies of minimalism, Hickey's painting sits incongruously within Pollard's exhibition. The contrast between its rectangular pairs—that is, between the reflective and the absorptive and the illusionistic and the literal—can be mapped onto the conflict between the competing forms and ideologies of minimalism:

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[121] Bruce Pollard, cited in Jonathon Sweet, *Pinacotheca 1967–1973* (Melbourne: Prendergast Publishers, 1989), 23.
[122] Pollard, 'Introduction,' 1.

literalist minimalism, on the one hand, and contemplative minimalism on the other. It would be tempting to align the former with a hegemonic New York concept of minimalism and the latter with a local definition of minimalism, which would allow Hickey's refusal of both to be read as a critical-regionalist ploy.

Yet such a reading runs into problems not unlike those encountered in the earlier analysis of Hickey's hard-edge paintings. For one, it sidelines the possibility of thinking of literalist minimalism, for example, Trevor Vickers' constructed shaped canvases *Untitled* and Paul Partos' *Vesta II* (both 1968), as an autochthonous Melbourne tradition. It also ignores works similar to Hickey's, such as Peter Booth's 'Block Paintings' (1966–70) and his 'Doorway Paintings' (1971–74), which combine sparse geometries and reflective surfaces with representational elements and painterly handling, thus precluding the possibility of situating Hickey's work within a local lineage of work that combines elements of literalist and contemplative minimalism. Finally, the attempt to position Hickey as a critical regionalist unwittingly authorises the very fiction of an international style (of minimalism) that it wants to show him to be deconstructing. By identifying two versions of minimalism of different origins, one local and another foreign, it sidelines the affinities of Pollard's contemplative minimalism with other parallel manifestations of the movement, such as the Californian minimalism of John McCracken, Robert Irwin and James Turrell, in whose work formal reductivism, phenomenological orientation and drug-addled spiritualism culminates in an anti-literalist belief that art can yield aesthetic, even other-worldly experiences.[123]

To reduce *Garage Door Painting* to a battle between two minimalist vernaculars of disparate cultural origins misconstrues the hybridity and dispersal of minimalism internationally; it also fails to identify the real goal of Hickey's project. For although Hickey's painting may indeed partly function as a self-conscious critique of the aesthetic ideologies and cultural hierarchies that shaped the context in which he was working, in Hickey's work the dissonance generated by the juxtaposition of two incompatible modes of minimalist painting ultimately serves the end of defamiliarisation. As it turns out, the goal of defamiliarisation is also central to Pollard's theory of minimalism, which suggests that it was

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[123] Rosalind Krauss distinguishes between two versions of minimalism: materialist, secular New York minimalism and sacred, religious Californian Minimalism. See Krauss. 'Overcoming The Limits of Matter.' Responding to Krauss, Anna C. Chave has argued that the auratic version of minimalism associated with the West Coast, taken up by patrons and institutions such as Panza and Dia, was fundamental to the character of the movement. Chave, 'Revaluing Minimalism: Patronage, Aura, and Place.'

a viable aesthetic strategy within Hickey's milieu, integral to the regional specificity of the work exhibited in and around Pinacotheca. Pollard's earlier text valourises 'times when objects, people, bodies, cities, are experienced in a heightened way,' when 'the sense of communicating beyond the confines of one's own mental environment is intense. Arriving in a new city,' he writes, 'produces this sense of *strangeness*.'[124] Pollard hoped that the blankness of minimalist painting would induce the same experience of strangeness—perceptual and cognitive disorientation—in the spectator. As to the driving psychological force behind defamiliarisation, Pollard framed it as an attempt 'to bring one into contact with something not part of oneself, to produce an experience of thingness or thereness.' Thus contemplation, losing oneself in the act of viewing, is equated by Pollard with a dispersal of subjectivity, an encounter with otherness. So too does this aesthetic motivation, guided by a mystical and irrational mode of experience, inform Hickey's art.

Conclusion

This chapter has understood Hickey's hard-edge paintings, which incorporate camouflaged representations of ordinary objects, through several interlocking paradigms of defamiliarisation. Due to their representational aspects, these repetitive, symmetrical compositions animate the conflict between art and objecthood, defined by Fried as central to 1960s art, in such a way that does not fall neatly within his prescribed categories of modernism and minimalism, presentness and duration. Hickey's deviation from American modernist conventions, I have argued, was not (or not simply) aimed at deconstructing the boundary between international style and nationalist figuration and thereby cultivating a critical regionalist identity. Rather, it arose out of an aesthetic agenda to transform ordinary objects into contemplative forms, according to which painting was conceived as a portal for the transcendence of ordinary experience.

By comparing Hickey's work to other abstractionists within his milieu, this chapter has further demonstrated that he was part of a scene similarly preoccupied with the depiction of domestic and suburban objects. Following this, it has outlined Hickey's relation to various artistic and theoretical paradigms of estrangement, all European in origin, that comprise the broader historical backdrop for his project. The final source discussed in this chapter,

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[124] Pollard, 'Minimal,' 21. My italics.

Pollard's texts on contemplative minimalism, has indicated that defamiliarisation remained a significant motivation for Hickey and others at Pinacotheca who were engaged in minimalist painting. Contrary to standard identifications of the movement with a literalist or materialist sensibility, it was revealed that Hickey's minimalism was oriented towards a mystical state in which banal reality appears on the threshold of unrecognisability.

Estrangement, a decisive influence on Hickey's hard-edge and minimalist paintings, would remain a crucial factor in his conceptualist works of 1969 and 1970, discussed in the following chapter. In an art scene increasingly hostile to painting, in these works the medium itself reappears as a foreign entity. Although Hickey would relinquish its traditional materials and techniques, painting continued to exert a significant hold over his artistic imagination. Painting could never vanish, it would seem, because for Hickey it implied metamorphosis: it was always already on the way to becoming something else.

3. The Memory of Painting in Conceptual Art

In October 1969, with the opening of his week-long installation *Fences* at Pinacotheca, Hickey distanced himself from the materials and techniques of painting and reinvented himself as a conceptualist. Gone were the large canvases depicting fences, walls and doors; in their place, nailed to the interior walls of three rooms, were actual fences, accompanied by an architectural sketch and a statement by the artist. The installation marked the beginning of a brief conceptualist phase in Hickey's career following his abandonment of painting, a period which also saw him produce works such as a typewritten text definition of a shovel and a photographic archive of white walls. This chapter analyses these and other conceptualist works of 1969 and 1970.

Hickey's conceptualist works reflect a moment when artists were questioning deeply-held assumptions about the role of the artist and the function of art in the midst of social, cultural and political upheavals.[125] In conceptual art circles, one manifestation of this scepticism towards institutions was a 'moratorium' on painting, which Hickey later said he was 'heavily involved with.'[126] Yet painting did not simply disappear in the post-medium condition. Despite relinquishing the craft of painting, Hickey remained variously preoccupied with its forms, materials and techniques. Charles Green has claimed that for Hickey, Hunter and Rooney, conceptual art was a means to 'extend the practice of painting past the point of its apparent exhaustion.'[127] Building on this observation, this chapter contends that although Hickey put down the paintbrush, his work indicates that painting—or the memory of painting—persisted in conceptual art.

That Hickey was either unwilling or unable to renounce his former identity as a painter will be shown through an analysis of his installation, text and photographic works of 1969 and 1970. The first section of this chapter focuses on *Fences*, which I argue thematises

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[125] Important studies of the shifting image of the artist during the 1960s and 1970s include Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*; Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*; Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath'; Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the American Postwar Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not at All*.

[126] Hickey in Gleeson, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 3. Also see Carolyn Barnes, 'Art—A Rule to Be Broken: An Examination of the Development of an Australian Avant-Garde in the Context of Australian Earth, Installation and Site-Specific Art, c. 1968–1973' (Masters thesis, University of Melbourne, 1992), 73: 'The notion that painting was dead undermined Dale Hickey's belief in the work [i.e., paintings] he had been doing … Hickey came to see the process of transferring the real illusionistically to canvas as anachronistic.'

[127] Green, 'Thief in the Attic,' 128.

painting on several fronts: first, the iconography of the paling fence is consistent with the banal objects depicted in Hickey's hard-edge works; second, the spatial relationship of the fences to the gallery walls invites a pictorial reading; third, Hickey's contracting of a fence builder to construct his work violates the ideal of the artist as an artisanal producer and the notion of the 'painter's touch.' Hickey's text pieces also evoke painting; in the second section of this chapter, I discuss how the composition of one text reproduces the serial production of his hard-edge paintings, and how the structure of another such work was derived from the criteria for describing and judging paintings in a prestigious painting prize. The final section of this chapter analyses *90 White Walls* (1970), a series of ninety amateurish snapshots of white walls, accompanied by index cards with captions, housed in a handmade box. A meditation on the precarious status of painting in the age of conceptual art, my argument is that Hickey's last exhibited conceptual work simultaneously heralds both the extinction and the survival of the medium.

A general remark on the connection in Hickey's work between painting and conceptual art are in order. Hickey's work of this period is not simply a self-reflexive inquiry into the category of art in general, which is how conceptual art is customarily understood: it also extends and problematises the specific identity of painting. Yet more fundamental to Hickey's work than either the identity of painting or the category of art is the project of estrangement which, as discussed in Chapter 2, determined his earlier hard-edge and minimalist paintings. Hickey's defamiliarisation of habitualised perception should thus be seen in the context of an aesthetic project that originated in his paintings of the late 1960s. The main difference is that in the conceptual works of 1969 and 1970, Hickey pursued this imperative through transparent and literal means: actual rather than depicted objects, linguistic definitions and tautological propositions, and eccentric archives of evidentiary snapshots.

More Fences

Hickey's conceptual art emerged against the backdrop of a growing discontent with the traditional forms of art in the 1960s. While conceptual art had been privately circulating in Melbourne as early as 1966, when Robert Rooney purchased Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), exhibitions at Pinacotheca by Ian Burn, Roger Cutforth and Mel Ramsden in September 1969 and Kosuth in October 1969 were accompanied by a more intense hostility toward painting. The anti-painting sentiment was propagated by Kosuth, for

example, in his three-part essay 'Art After Philosophy,' published in late 1969, which argued that the arrival of conceptual art spelled the end of painting.[128]

The sudden abandonment of painting by Hickey and fellow artists such as Robert Rooney and Paul Partos was part of this same crisis of the traditional forms. A 1969 statement by Partos is evidence of this attitude: 'When we begin to understand that we don't have to "paint" or "sculpt" to be an artist,' he claimed, 'then I feel we have made a significant contribution.'[129] For Partos, escaping the traditional forms was a necessity. Reminiscing on this period, Rooney observed that he stopped painting not because 'painting was dead' but because 'it was a bit sick.'[130] As recalled by Pollard, 'there was a general feeling of bankruptcy in the very early seventies with doctrinaire hard-edge abstraction.'[131] British émigré critic Donald Brook, a Sydney-based advocate of 'post-object art,' argued that post-object art grew out of a 'deep disenchantment with the art they have inherited—with its forms, its techniques, its attitudes, its surrounding institutions and its meaning.'[132]

Hickey was thus not alone in suddenly thinking that the traditional forms of art, and painting especially, had become redundant. *Fences* (fig. 3.1), a weeklong installation in November 1969, his first solo presentation at Pinacotheca and the final show at the gallery's Fitzroy Street premises before it relocated to a warehouse in Waltham Place in Richmond, saw him shift away from the forms, materials and techniques of painting. The exhibition existed across three rooms of the gallery, in each of which a different type of wooden fence was nailed to the walls. Accompanying the fences was a page with a hand-drawn isometric sketch and a hand-written statement:

> PROJECT: 'FENCES'—PINACOTHECA, ST. KILDA, NOV '69.
> ENTIRE PROJECT INSTALLATION
> CARRIED OUT TO 'ARTISTS' INSTRUCTIONS

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[128] Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy' (Part I: September; Part II: October 1969; Part III: November 1969), in *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990*, ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1991), 13–32.
[129] Paul Partos, 'Artist's Comment,' in *Present Day Art in Australia*, ed. Mervyn Horton (Sydney and London: Ure Smith, 1969), 155.
[130] Robert Rooney, response to author's questionnaire, November 2012.
[131] Bruce Pollard cited in Sweet, *Pinacotheca*, 26.
[132] Donald Brook, 'Post-object Art in Australia and New Zealand,' in *A Decade at the E.A.F.: A History of the Experimental Art Foundation, 1974–1984*, ed. Stephanie Britton (St. Peters, S.A.: Experimental Art Foundation, 1984), 6.

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Due to the ephemeral nature of Hickey's work, which stands as a formative example of installation art in Melbourne, alongside works by Ti Parks, Paul Partos, Guy Start, Mike Brown and Domenico de Clario, eyewitness accounts assume significant historiographical importance.[133] G.R. Lansell's article in *Nation*, which declared that *Fences* 'was one of the most important local exhibitions for the year,' also includes the most detailed description of the installation:

> one room has a capped fence eighteen inches high running round its perimeter, another has a picket fence four feet high, while a third has an ordinary 6 foot paling fence. There are holes in the fences for light switches, plug outlets and such-like as well as gaps for fireplaces. (The Pinacotheca has no windows). Some portions of the fences incidentally have graffiti such as 'Jeff loves Julie' and 'I love Dale Hickey' scrawled on them.[134]

The critic's observation that the holes and gaps in the fences drew his attention to usually overlooked details of the gallery (light switches, plug outlets, fireplaces) suggests a parallel with Hickey's earlier hard-edge paintings, which by depicting banal objects effected a disruption of ordinary perception. There are further continuities between the hard-edge paintings and the installation. During the construction of *Fences*, Hickey explained to an *Age* journalist that his choice of subject matter was guided by the same criterion of familiarity that guided his paintings: fences are things encountered daily, not normally regarded as worthy of

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[133] Early examples of installation art in Melbourne include Ti Parks late 1960s work (Tolarno Galleries and the basement of Pinacotheca, St. Kilda); Paul Partos, *Unspecified Lengths* (1969) (Gallery A), Guy Stuart, *Continuous Wooden Floor* (1970) (Gallery A), Mike Brown, *Planet X* (1971) (Pinacotheca) and Domenico de Clario's work of the early 1970s at Pinacotheca. On the methodological importance of the eyewitness account in histories of installation art see Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2000), xv-xvii. It is important to note that while *Fences* survives in documentary form, consisting of photographs of the installation the original handwritten statement and sketches that accompanied the installation, originally the photographs were not part of the artwork.
[134] G.R. Lansell, 'Baleful Christo,' 15.

special attention.[135] In the same article, Hickey describes the installation as an extension of his hard-edge works:

> In the past, I have been mainly creating illusions, by painting. Now, this here is going into actual objects. About three years ago I did a 12 ft. x 6 ft. painting of a fence.[136]

It is a curious phenomenon,' Hickey continues, 'that the transposition of these [fences] into art works (but not necessarily works of art) results sometimes in engaging experiences.'[137] Hickey's appeal to everyday experience and its artistic transformation is discussed in relation to his hard-edge paintings in Chapter 2. What was new about *Fences*, as conveyed in his reference to 'art works (but not necessarily works of art),' was the indeterminate status of the object as an artwork. Hickey raised the issue but refused to resolve it—the irresolution, it would seem, was crucial to the work. Similarly, he declined to explain his abrupt transition from painted illusion to actual object: 'if you're going to paint it, why not build it?,' he said.

One way to explain the shift from painted illusions to real objects is through defamiliarisation. The installation of fence palings in the gallery, Hickey gambled, would intensify the aesthetic of estrangement he had earlier pursued through hard-edge painting. Pinacotheca would become a theatre of disorientation where familiar objects reappeared as foreign entities. [redacted] The surrealist inflection was also evident in the alignment of *Fences* with minimalism's emphasis on the relationship between viewer, work and architecture. '[Hickey's] wooden fences,' Ann Galbally claimed in her *Age* review, 'set up surprisingly strong spatial tensions, most effectively between the viewer and the area he is bound by.'[139] Galbally's implicit suggestion that the enclosing spatiality of *Fences* conveys a

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[135] John Larkin, 'A Fence is a Fence is a Fence, or Was it?,' 2.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] [redacted] Also see Hickey in Gleeson, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 3.
[139] Ann Galbally, 'Modern Material Makes Old Shapes,' *The Age*, 29 October 1969, 2. Andrew McNamara and Ann Stephen have construed the relationship of *Fences* to Hickey's earlier works in terms of a passage from modernist painting to minimalism: 'the installation transferred Hickey's wry existentialism from colour-field painting to a different space that looked much more like a piece of

psychological content is foreign to the writings of Judd and Morris but consistent with Pollard's definition of minimalism, which stressed not only on the perceptual but also the affective and existential effects of art.[140]

In other ways, too, *Fences* extended the contemplative minimalism of Hickey's earlier paintings. Insofar as each row of fences was collectively seen as a 'figure' against the 'ground' of the white walls, the installation conjured a spatial illusionism akin to *Fence Painting* (1967), with its rows of black palings against an orange background. That is, the 'deep' dialectic of painting and objecthood staged in Hickey's hard-edge paintings was reformulated rather than cancelled.

If *Fences* asserted its objecthood in order to overcome it, Hickey's outsourcing of its production blurred the division of artistic and technical labour in order, finally, to reassert it. In his review, Lansell commented on the issue of delegated manufacture:

> the role of the artist as a product maker, as a craftsman, seems to be declining, with the artist merely making blueprints of the desired effect, then ordering it from a factory. In this case Hickey oversees the fence-builder, reserving the final right of yea or nay.[141]

Hickey's hands-off approach challenged the Romantic stereotype of the artist as a solitary producer.[142] But unlike other minimalists and conceptualists, who wanted to be seen as authentic blue-collar workers, Hickey insisted on the separation of his work as an artist from that of Jim Emmins (fig. 3.2), the contracted fence builder.[143] Whereas the bewildered tradesman was merely following orders—'this has got to be the limit,' he said; 'I thought the boss was bonkers when he asked me to do this job'—Hickey had purposefully adopted the

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minimal art.' McNamara and Stephen, 'The Story of the Sixties … a Pile-up on the Freeway of Advanced Art,' *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Art*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 168–179, 176.

[140] Pollard, 'Introduction'; Pollard, 'Minimal.' Also see Pollard with Smith, 'The Local Ideas Context,' 5.

[141] G.R. Lansell, 'Baleful Christo,' 15.

[142] John Roberts argues that the critique of individual authorship associated with delegated manufacture is indebted to the Duchampian readymade: 'it is the unassisted readymade, under the determinate conditions of advanced capitalism, that brings the link between artistic technique and general social technique in the modern period into inescapable view.' John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling After the Readymade*, 53.

[143] See Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, especially the chapters her discussion of the simulation of blue-collar work in 'Carl Andre's Work Ethic' and 'Robert Morris' Art Strike,' 41–82, 83–126.

roles of designer and manager.[144] More precisely, he 'performed' these identities in his capacity as an artist, while at the same time reasserting his individual authorship through the hand-drawn diagram and hand-written statement accompanying the installation.[145] The distance between artistic and non-artistic labour was further highlighted by Hickey's remark that 'after [the work] is completed, I may choose to reject it.'[146] The production process concluded when the artist signed off on the project, nominating the fences as art. In Hickey's case, this was as much about christening the artwork as it was declaring his identity as an artist—a being with the faculty to make the judgement.

Ultimately, outsourced production was a means for Hickey to exploit the gap between 'the performed' and 'the real.' Parallel to the defamiliarising effect of actual objects in the gallery, outsourcing effected a defamiliarisation of the figure of the artist. No longer a painter or sculptor, the artist forged a fictional identity through the mimesis of other kinds of technical work. Nonetheless, the shadow of painting still hung over Hickey's work. *Fences* was of course not painting in the normal sense: its material and technical production went 'beyond the pale.' Nonetheless, it possesses an undeniable proximity to the medium. It demonstrates that the limit of painting only becomes visible through its transgression, a process that also expands it. Hickey's work might be regarded as an example of what Michael Craig-Martin calls 'post-painting painting': painting that emerged after the so-called death of the medium.[147]

Calling a Spade a Spade

Around the time of *Fences*, Hickey made a brief foray into linguistic conceptual art. His 'Artist's Comment' in *Present Day Art in Australia* (1969), edited by Mervyn Horton, 'a resumé of the Australian art scene during the last five years' that was strongly biased towards hard-edge and colour field painting, is Hickey's first experiment of this kind.[148] Instead of

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[144] John Larkin, 'A Fence is a Fence is a Fence, or Was it?,' 2.
[145] American artists' mimesis of 'non-artistic' identities during the 1960s is discussed in Jones, *The Machine in the Studio.*
[146] John Larkin, 'A Fence is a Fence is a Fence, or Was it?,' 2.
[147] Michael Craig-Martin cited in Reiko Tomii, 'An Unlikely Prelude to Post-Painting Painting: Hikosaka Naoyoshi and Three Modes of Seeing, 1969–1973,' unpublished manuscript, 2019.
[148] Dale Hickey, 'Artist's Comment,' in *Present Day Art in Australia*, ed. Mervyn Horton (Sydney and London: Ure Smith, 1969), 94.

submitting a typical artist statement, Hickey contributed *30 Words, As Requested, About My Work* (1969), a composition that would better be described as an artwork. As indicated by the subtitle 'with thanks and apologies to Carl Andre,' Hickey was not only aware of his indebtedness to New York minimalism, but was actively seeking to position his work in proximity to the movement. The reader is confronted with a grid of capitalised words divided by a central dividing line. Words above the line refer to the objects depicted in his hard-edge paintings, for example one line reads, 'fence pipe pane spot brick'; beneath a dividing line, with the same spacing, as though taking the place of the objects referred to above, is the formula 'one + one + one + one + one' and so on, an additive structure that riffed on Judd's famous definition of minimalism as 'one thing after another.'[149] Hickey had transposed the serial order of his hard-edge paintings into an algorithmic formula that could potentially subsume any object whatsoever.

To the extent that the task of describing his work as a painter, of transposing images into words, was another catalyst for Hickey's abandonment of the medium, painting continues to haunt Hickey's ostensibly non-painterly conceptualist works. What is significant about *30 Words* is that it sees Hickey shift away from minimalism's graphic experimentation with language toward the self-reflexive theoretical linguistic aspirations of conceptual art. However, this does not mean that the connection to painting was extinguished; consider Pollard's subsequent argument, quoted above, that conceptual art maintained an intimate relationship with hard-edge painting by 'reducing the formalistic approach to nonsense.'[150]

Before exploring Pollard's suggestion that Hickey's conceptual pieces were formed through the reduction of painting to an absurdist formula, it is necessary to flesh out the problematic status of painting in the discourse of conceptual art. To do this, I turn to two works Hickey created in 1970 that he would later refer to as 'word games,' which saw him experiment with different ways of 'stating the obvious.'[151]

Typewritten on stapled sheets of foolscap paper, *Calling a Spade a Spade* (1970) (fig. 3.3) is one of Hickey's text pieces that remains unexhibited to this day.[152] Taking the humble spade as its subject matter, Hickey's work is divided into three numbered sections: the first is

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[149] Judd, 'Specific Objects,' 184.
[150] Pollard cited in Sweet, *Pinacotheca*, 26.
[151] Bruce Pollard, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' *Arts Melbourne* 1, no. 1 (1976), 21–30, 21. Original quote: "stating the obvious, word-games."
[152] Hickey claims to have produced numerous other text pieces which he subsequently destroyed.

a general definition of the function and appearance of the shovel ('Tool utilising leverage for digging and cutting…'); the second section is divided into three pages—(2A) hand grip, (2B) handle and (2C) blade—describing the component parts of the spade (for example, '2A Hand Grip: lozenge shape; joined to handle by metal'). In light of his recent departure from the medium, Hickey's choice of the rudimentary instrument of the spade, with its connotations of manual labour and tactile experience, has an undeniable proximity to the paintbrush.[153] The spade, that is, appears as a substitution of the traditional painter's tool. Hickey's treatment of the spade also aligns with the defamiliarising intent of his earlier paintings; the detailed description of the usually-overlooked object disrupting the way it is ordinarily perceived. The work not only extends the aesthetic of defamiliarisation motivating Hickey's earlier hard-edge into the realm of linguistic description. Hickey's fixation on the shovel, a stand-in for a paintbrush, subjects the symbol of the painter's labour to this same defamiliarising operation.

The effect of *Calling a Spade a Spade* can be compared to the fiction of Alain Robbe-Grillet such as *The Voyeur* (1955) and *Jealousy* (1957), in which descriptions of objects replace psychologistic accounts of characters' inner lives.[154] Familiar to Hickey and others around Pinacotheca, in Robbe-Grillet's Roman Nouveau subjectivity is projected onto and infused with the concrete surfaces described in the text.[155] Similarly, in *Calling a Spade a Spade* the familiar signs of subjectivity are replaced by empirical description to yield a related defamiliarising effect. However, rather than Robbe-Grillet or any other literary influence, Hickey's work demands to be viewed in proximity to the nascent discourse of conceptual art. In what follows I investigate the vexed status of painting in conceptualism, and the numerous ways that Hickey's conceptual works are engaged in a continued dialogue with the medium.

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[153] My reading is influenced by Michael Fried's interpretation of various tools, objects and postures as substitutions for the physical act of painting in Courbet's work of the 1840s and 1850s. Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). In particular, see 'Real Allegories, Allegories of Realism: *The Wheat Sifters, The Painter's Studio,* and *The Quarry*, with an Excursus on *The Death of The Stag*,' 148–188.

[154] For Robbe-Grillet's theorisation of the novel, which gives insight into the core strategies and preoccupations of Nouveau Realism, see *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (1963), trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989). The influence of Nouveau Realism on conceptual art is widely recognised. See Rosalind Krauss, 'LeWitt in Progress,' in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1986). Also see Charles Russell, 'Toward a Tautology: The Nouveau Roman and Conceptual Art, *M.L.N.* 91, no. 5 (October 1976).

[155] Hickey cites Robbe-Grillet as an influence on his work. Hickey in Gleeson, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 6–7.

So far I have described the first two sections of Hickey's work, which describe the general function and appearance of a spade and its component parts. The third one-page section of the work contains the following formulation:

Call a …… a ……,

Call things by their names,

Speak plainly or bluntly.

In this concluding section, Hickey surreptitiously shifts from the register of description to that of injunction. Depending on how it is read, the final page either repeats one command three times or issues three similar commands. If the latter, the form and content of each command are fundamentally the same—the meaning of each line is equivalent to the others—they 'say the same thing,' and what they say is reducible to the logic of the first sentence: 'Call a … a …' Hickey insists on the logic of 'a = a,' in other words, a tautology. Hickey's substitution of the ellipses for the name of the object—the spade—signals that the form of the tautology itself is more important than the object: the object is interchangeable, carrying no special symbolic significance; it is merely grist for the mill. The tautological logic recalls the additive logic of *30 Words*, in which names of objects in the top half of the work are reduced to a series of anonymous, exchangeable inputs below.

In the context of conceptual art, Hickey was not the first to hail the importance of the tautology. The latter is readily associated with Joseph Kosuth's work and writing of the 1960s and 1970s, most famously in his *One and Three* series (1967) in which a given object is presented in three forms: a dictionary definition, a photograph, and the object itself. Kosuth's work appears as a didactic demonstration of the interchangeability of the three representational modes: the three separate signs referring to the same conceptual content. The subject matter, didactic mode and tautological structure of Hickey's work calls to mind *One and Three Shovels* (1967)—surely a deliberate reference. Whereas Kosuth deemed the shovel a suitable tool for the task of unearthing art's epistemological foundations; for Hickey, the same motif appealed as a means to locate himself in dialogue with Kosuth's work in order to comically distance himself from the high seriousness of the latter's conceptualism.

The shovel was deemed by Kosuth a suitable tool for his task of unearthing art's epistemological foundations; Hickey's use of the same motif referenced Kosuth's work in order to comically himself from the high seriousness of the latter's project. Hickey's

conceptual art is oriented towards a different aesthetic goal: rather than the expanding knowledge, his work perpetuates an aesthetic of defamiliarisation.

Both Hickey and Kosuth developed an interest in language shaped by the philosophical writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein.[156] Duchamp, whom Kosuth regarded as the founder of conceptual art, and whose work *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (1915) consists of a snow-shovel with a textual inscription, also expressed interest in the Austrian philosopher; he claimed that Wittgenstein had 'worked out a system wherein everything is … a tautology, that is, a repetition of premises.'[157] The other main source for Kosuth's theorisation of the tautology was the English logician A.J. Ayer. In 'Art After Philosophy,' Kosuth defined the artwork as an 'analytic proposition': the artwork, he thought, does not concern any matter of fact; as a tautology, it demonstrates its truth internally, independent of any external referent.[158] He argued, moreover, that all artworks are tautologies, since they convey the artist's intention (or conviction) that the artwork is art: 'A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art.'[159] Thus whether they incorporate text or not, Kosuth argued, all artworks or 'art propositions' are inherently linguistic. By leaving the theorisation of their work to others, Kosuth argued, painters and sculptors effectively disavow the linguistic and conceptual foundations of their practice and thus indicates 'either intellectual irresponsibility or the naivest kind of mysticism.'[160] Against this, the conceptual artist taught themselves to write and think—necessary prerequisites for reimagining the foundations of their discipline and attaining a newfound intellectual and political agency. The function of the critic, Kosuth reasoned, is to 'cultivate the conceptual implications of his art propositions, and argue their explication'; in usurping this function, the conceptual artist would render the

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[156] Kosuth references Wittgenstein in 'Art After Philosophy,' 13–15. Hickey refers to Wittgenstein in relation to his conceptual art in Gleeson, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 6; also see Hickey in Pollard, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 21–22.
[157] Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 107.
[158] 'To say that a proposition is true *a priori* is to say that it is a tautology. And tautologies, though they may serve us in our empirical search for knowledge do not in themselves contain any information about any matter of fact.' A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1936) (London: Penguin, 1971), 83.
[159] Joseph Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy,' 20.
[160] Joseph Kosuth, 'Introductory Note to "Art-Language" by the American Editor' (1970), in *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990*, ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1991), 37–40, 40.

critic superfluous.[161] Kosuth described the conceptual artist as an expert or specialist aware of recent developments in art and theory, committed to 'the investigation of the function, meaning, and use of any and all (art) propositions, and their consideration within the concept of the general term "art."'[162]

An experiment with naming and describing, by the time of *Calling a Spade a Spade*, Hickey had abandoned painting and entered the territory of linguistic experimentation. Yet whereas Kosuth believed that the rules of logic and common sense would provide an adequate basis for rethinking the role of the artist and the concept of art, which would negate the residual romanticism engrained in the category of 'the aesthetic.' Hickey's work throws into relief the nonsensicality of ordinary language—a poetic exercise in turning ordinary language into something foreign, it gives rise to a semantic disorientation similar to that seen in his hard-edge paintings. For Hickey, Wittgenstein's statement about the limits of language at the end of *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus*—'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'—figured less as a logical boundary, as Kosuth would have regarded it, than an illogical space of non-meaning to orient oneself towards.[163]

Similar to Kosuth, Hickey's work is circular in structure: from the title, to the general definition, to the description of component parts, to the concluding injunction; it goes through the motions of 'Calling a Spade a Spade' and ends with a common-sense command: 'Call a Spade a Spade.'[164] An interesting effect of this circuitousness is that it contradicts the colloquial meaning of the titular phrase of Hickey's work, which means 'tell it like it is' or 'get to the point.' The elongated and monotonous form of Hickey's work, in other words, ironically undermines its appeal to plain speech. Rather than demystifying the object in question, the words and phrases within Hickey's work lose their transparency and occasion an aesthetic response that cannot be reduced to a conceptual manoeuvre.

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[161] Ibid.
[162] Kosuth, 'Introductory Note,' 39.
[163] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractus Logicus-Philosophicus* (1921), trans. McGuiness and Pears (London: Routledge, 2001), 3. For a discussion of the mystical elements of Wittgenstein's early work, see Russell Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987); Russell Nieli, 'Mysticism, Morality, and the Wittgenstein Problem,' *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, 9 (2007), 83–141. Also see James R. Atkinson, *The Mystical in Wittgenstein's Early Writings* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[164] Rosalind Krauss has argued that the equation 'a = a' implies an infinite deferral or regress that can be formulated as 'a = a = a = a = a = etc.' Krauss, in 'The Mind/Body Problem: Robert Morris in Series,' *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1994), 2–17.

Playing on the contradiction between stated intention and performative demonstration, literal meaning and colloquial connotation, *Calling a Spade a Spade* culminates in a defamiliarisation—rather than clarification—of its words and phrases. Indeed, it is difficult to read Hickey's work as a serious contribution to the philosophy of language; it more readily evokes the work of a student, a foreigner learning English who has learnt the literal meaning of words, but is unfamiliar with their colloquial meaning. The amateurishness of Hickey's work is further heightened by a spelling error on its second page. The deliberate amateurishness of Hickey's work distinguishes it from the high seriousness of Kosuthian conceptual art. The dry tone and bureaucratic structure of Hickey's work makes it seem like a parody of such art, an attempt to reveal the inadequacy of the categories used for the purposes of 'understanding' and 'explanation.'[165] On this reading, Hickey's work appears as pseudo-academic, a parody of academic understandings of art rather than properly academic.

Hickey's amateurism contrasts with Kosuth's seriousness, but is it correct to identify the conceptual artist with the discourse of the expert? John Roberts has argued that the theoretical aspirations and intellectual pretensions of the conceptual art collective Art & Language, in which Kosuth was involved with in the late 1960s and early 1970s, should not be taken at face value. Their work, Roberts argues, was 'not to be trusted, was not what it seemed'—and this is 'what made conceptual art's theoretical excursions so liberating: that seriousness and ambition might also be a form of delinquency and malingering.'[166] Despite their image of starchy professionalism and intellectual rigour, Roberts recognises in Art & Language a covert amateurishness. Suspended between the professional and the amateur, Roberts claims, the work of Art & Language exists in a no-man's land between theoretical definitions of art and aesthetic mimicry of its institutional manifestation in the academy. In this way, Art & Language exceeded its scholarly posturing—it also participated in a defamiliarising operation. [redacted] In Hickey's own work, however, the defamiliarising operation is more immediately apparent—its simplicity and amateurism far exceeds that of Art & Language.

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[165] Charles Green has claimed that Hickey's text works are 'pedantic and ironic, resembling both conceptual texts and jokes, using conceptual art as the subject of fiction.' Green, 'Thief in the Attic,' 130.

[166] John Roberts, *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain*, 10.

[167] [redacted]

Hickey inverts the portrait of the conceptual artist 'malingering in the domain of the amateur.'[168] It is more fitting in Hickey's case to talk about 'malingering in the domain of the expert.'

Another of Hickey's text pieces, *Any Hanging Work* (1970), thematises painting from a different perspective. The work was a targeted intervention in the Tenth Transfield Prize at Bonython Gallery in Sydney in November 1970, the largest art—predominantly painting—prize in Australia.[169] Produced against the backdrop of the dwindling legitimacy of painting, Hickey's typewritten text piece aligns with conceptual art's critique of medium-based art and its inquiry into the conceptual foundations of art—Green, for example, has observed its resemblance to Burn and Ramsden's *The Grammarian* (1970), which had recently been presented as part of the pair's second and final exhibition at Pinacotheca.[170] Yet whereas Burn and Ramsden's conceptualism was premised on the dismissal of painting (in October 1970, Burn wrote to Sydney dealer Rudy Komon that 'painting' is an 'antiquated, obsolete … out-moded art-form'), Hickey's work, modelled on the entry form to the painting-dominated prize and has painting as its primary subject matter, expresses an ongoing preoccupation with the medium.[171]

Hickey's eight-page work provides the reader with a list of analytical categories that can be applied to 'any hanging work.' The self-reflexive intent of Hickey's work is signalled by its full title: 'Any Hanging Work: being both this work or applicable to any other hanging work.' The academic tone carries onto following pages. The second page reads:

> Examine the hanging work and make a descriptive note of its general character. Indicate what is immediately apparent about the work and its relation to the immediate surroundings. Indicate the hanging method also.

Based on the instructions offered to art prize judges, Hickey's work reads like an educational manual that trains the reader to view artworks via the categories subsequently outlined in Hickey's work. The latter are eclectic, ranging from standard historical and museological

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[168] The amateurism of conceptual art is emphasised in Art & Language, 'We Aimed to Be Amateurs' (1997), in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1999), 442–448.
[169] See Donald Brook, 'Adventure in the Transfield,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 November 1969.
[170] Green, *Thief in the Attic*, 129.
[171] Ian Burn, letter to Rudy Komon, 3 October 1970.

discourse (‘description of form,’ ‘figure/ground relationships,’ ‘materials,’ ‘dimensions,’ ‘texture’) to visual psychology (‘eye movements over visual field,’ ‘rhythm perception factors,’ ‘attraction/attention value’) and to categories less often applied to art adapted from scientific disciplines such as physics (‘energy,’ ‘movement,’ ‘speed,’ ‘air pressure’) and chemistry (‘chemical structure’). The emphasis of Hickey’s work on the formal and material properties of the artwork sidelines other topics (‘relationship of work to’ ‘hanger’s intentions,’ ‘history,’ ‘cultural implications’ and ‘phylographic considerations’ are compressed into a single category). Hickey’s work also includes the category ‘Subjective Responces’ [sic] on an otherwise blank page, making room for the aesthetic response of the spectator to the work.

Its form pointing to content and its content to form, Hickey’s work embodies a self-reflexive critique of its status as an artwork and the normal categories applied to hanging works—paintings in particular. The final page features a set of ‘Hanging Instructions,’ with a diagram of the eight pages of the work attached to the wall and Imperial system measurements of the correct distances between each sheet; below which is a small drawing showing how the pages should be taped to the wall. The form of the work, that is, includes instructions that, if followed correctly, would allow the work itself to become an object of inquiry of the kind the work describes. This sort of extreme self-referentiality, which is a fundamental attribute of conceptual art, is exemplary of this phase of Hickey’s work.

As with *Calling a Spade a Spade*, in *Any Hanging Work* the academic dissection of the artwork into its component parts not only invites a self-critical reading—the work shifts uneasily between the neurotic self-referentiality of conceptual art and an amateurish, ironic undermining of its intellectual pretensions. The reductive character of the exercise, pushed to the point of absurdity, demonstrates that despite the best efforts of the manual user, despite the most rigorous attention to detail, the artwork resists interpretative closure. The empirical dissection of the artwork ultimately reveals the inadequacy of such an approach. The type of analysis evoked in *Any Hanging Word*, then, ultimately brings the reader to an awareness of the insufficiency of its theoretical underpinnings in a manner that recalls a passage from Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*:

> When artworks are viewed under the closest scrutiny, the most objectivated paintings metamorphose into a swarming mass and texts splinter into words. As soon as one

> imagines having a firm grasp on the details of an artwork, it dissolves into the indeterminate and undifferentiated, so mediated is it.[172]

Adorno's argument is pitched against the presumption that the more knowledge one has about the objective facts of an artwork, down to its smallest details, the closer one comes to knowing it. He argues that this is not the case: instead, closer scrutiny of the artwork ultimately reveals its endlessly mediated character; the closer one gets, the more it fades into the distance, like layers of an onion without a core. In the case of Hickey's work, the mediated character of the artwork is revealed through the mimicry of an extensive examination that supposedly strips it back to its skeletal component pieces. It is difficult not to read the work as a mourning for the loss of the auratic presence and subtle illusionism of the monumental paintings on canvas that had occupied Hickey's attention during the second half of the 1960s. Through demonstrating the futility of reducing painting into basic empirical categories, Hickey's work signals his continued engagement with the medium.

Photography as Painting

[redacted] The work comprises a white wooden box housing ninety amateurish photographs accompanied by four index cards. The photographs, each of a different white wall, are pasted onto white cardboard sheets numbered one to ninety; captions for each image (with the street address of each wall, their location within their architectural structure, and the cardinal direction in which the camera faced for each exposure) are listed on four accompanying index cards. A sequential numbering system links the photo-cards and the information on the index cards, giving the work its basic structure. While *90 White Walls* is squarely located within the field of photo-conceptualism,

[172] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 101.
[173] [redacted]

in the following analysis I argue that Hickey used photography to thematise the forms, techniques and issues of painting.

With its ordinary subject matter, its photographic style reminiscent of the amateur snapshot, its text captions and use of cheap stationary materials, *90 White Walls* possesses many of the hallmark traits of photo-conceptualist art of the 1960s and 1970s.[174] The incorporation of the camera into a predetermined system, a type of serial composition, is another defining feature of photo-conceptualism fundamental to *90 White Walls*: after setting in place the basic parameters of the composition, Hickey merely followed the system, his role in the execution of the work reduced to monotonously operating a mechanical device.

One of the neatest remarks about this standard photo-conceptualist method is found in a 1969 statement by the American artist Douglas Huebler: 'I use the camera as a "dumb" copying device that only serves to document whatever phenomena appears before it through the conditions set by a system.'[175] Huebler's reference to '"dumb" copying device' is based on the presumption of the neutral documentary function of the photograph—a belief that has accompanied photography since its invention.[176] Yet the main emphasis of Huebler's statement is that photography functions as a recording device within a predetermined system. In the discourse of conceptual art, predetermined composition was often identified with a cancellation of subjectivity. Sol LeWitt, for example, portrayed the conceptual artist as a 'clerk cataloguing the results of his premise.'[177] 'When an artist uses a conceptual form of art,' he claimed, 'it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.'[178] For LeWitt—and in this respect he is broadly representative of many conceptual artists—the

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[174] See Douglas Fogle, *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960–1982* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2003); Matthew Witkovsky, *Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph 1964–1977* (Chicago; New Haven and London: Art Institute of Chicago; Yale University Press, 2011).
[175] Douglas Huebler in Konrad Fischer and Hans Strewlow, *Prospect 69* (Dusseldorf: Dusseldorf Kunsthalle, 1969), 29. For an in-depth study of the 'dumb photograph' see Melanie Marino, *Dumb Documents: Uses of Photography in American Conceptual Art: 1959–1969* (Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 2002).
[176] Mike Kelley recalls that Huebler, his teacher, claimed that 'his photographs are transparent.' Kelley, 'Shall We Kill Daddy?,' in *Origin and Destination: Alighiero E Boetti and Douglas Huebler*, eds. Marianne Van Leeuw and Anne Pontegnie, (Brussels: Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1997), 134.
[177] Sol LeWitt, 'Serial Project #1, 1966,' in *Aspen Magazine* 5–6 (1967), ed. Brian O'Doherty.
[178] Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' (1967), in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1999), 12–16, 12.

serial system offered itself as a strategy for the avoidance of subjectivity. He made a related point in a 1969 interview with Patty Norvell: 'I think that basically what my art is about is not making choices. It's in making an initial choice of, say, a system, and letting the system do the work.'[179] In a later interview with Gary Catalano, Hickey would similarly speak of the reduction of composition as conceptual artists' attempt to remove their personality from the finished work.[180]

The image of the conceptual artist as a 'clerk cataloguing the results of a premise' is an important point of reference for the serial compositionality of *90 White Walls*, yet it is complicated by other aspects of Hickey's work. Consider, for example, the intermittent series of numbers from '1' to '100' visible in many (but not all) of the photographs, hand-written on tape and stuck to the walls—it is difficult to know what to make of these mysterious 'masking tape numbers.'[181] Whereas correspondence of the other two numerical sequences (on the photo-cards and index cards) serve the practical function of linking the images to accompanying information, the masking tape numbers serve no apparent function. They do not match with the numerical sequences on the photo-cards or the index cards; indeed, they are not even a continuous sequence: there are numerous repetitions and gaps between the numbers. Perhaps Hickey thought that the tape numbers would perform the role of linking the photographs to their captions, but after developing the photographs he realised that the tape numbers were sometimes illegible or out of frame, that some walls were mislabelled, and that certain photographs had not turned out well. (This would indicate that the original title of *90 White Walls* was in fact *100 White Walls*.)

The presence of the masking tape numbers is one way that in Hickey's work, messiness and amateurism prevail over the administrative aesthetic of conceptual art. Other aspects of the work also exude a scrappy character, a general unruliness. In retrospect, the photographic style is more akin to grunge or slacker art of the early 1980s than evoking an 'aesthetic of administration,' which is how Benjamin Buchloh characterises conceptual art. Indeed, many of Hickey's images are so dimly lit that they appear more black than white, the uneven distribution of light across the plaster surface creating the misleading illusion of

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[179] Patsy Norvell, 'Interview with Sol LeWitt, 12 June 1969,' in *Recording Conceptual Art*, eds. Alberro and Norvell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 112–123, 114.
[180] Gary Catalano, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 54.
[181] The only reference to this third numerical sequence is Catalano, 'On Dale Hickey,' 254.

curvature or texture.[182] The technical shoddiness of the work also extends to the sloppily painted handmade box, the title of the work handwritten (rather than typed) on a plaque mounted on top. Taking into account the irregular masking tape numbers, the handmade box and the sloppy snapshots, *90 White Walls* work looks like a shoddy handmade job, lacking the professional polish associated with an administrator or bureaucrat competently fulfilling their duties. Instead, Hickey's work self-consciously apes the work of a particular kind of artist-as-clerk: a worker lacking proper training, or a disgruntled subordinate.

How should the shoddy handmadeness of *90 White Walls* be understood? And what does it indicate about the status of the work as conceptual art, and its relationship to the medium of painting? One way to understand the shoddiness of *90 White Walls* is as a reflection on Kosuth's mantra that form is a container for content: the aesthetic character of an artwork, he thought, is irrelevant beyond its communication of the artist's concept or intention. The dishevelment of Hickey's work appears in this light as an attempt to degrade the material fact of the artwork, to emphasise its status as a 'prop,' a mere vehicle for the transmission of its concept. Yet this dishevelment also demonstrates the impossibility of the artwork transcending its materiality—the rough-hewn materiality, in other words, embodies a refutation of the notion that form merely serves to transmit concept. Insofar as Hickey's work dramatises a beleaguered transcendence of the concept, it harmonises with Matthew Jesse Jackson's argument that conceptual art engaged in a 'traffic with the weak,' an attempt 'to nurture ways of being in the world that sidestep mastery, control, and judgment.'[183] Jackson's identification of a radical promise in the slackness and misconduct of conceptual art, which he claims exceeds its veneer of white-collar professionalism and motivates its mimesis of bureaucratic forms, is a suitable model for making sense of the dishevelment of *90 White Walls*.

The material precariousness of Hickey's work harmonises with Jackson's political reading of conceptual art, but it might also be understood as an expression of the frustrated painter in the age of conceptual art. This is not an entirely new proposition—others have also acknowledged that despite its departure from the technical processes, material structures and formal structures typically associated with painting, *90 White Walls* maintains a strong

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[182] [redacted]

[183] Matthew Jesse Jackson, 'The Quick and the Dead,' *Artforum* (November 2009), 218–20.

connection to the medium. Pollard, for example, remarked that the work merely marked a 'break in technique'—that it should be understood as an extension of his hard-edge paintings; Sydney artist Mike Parr, whose Inhibodress gallery exhibited *90 White Walls* in 1971 and whose text piece *Wall Definition* of the same year includes an unmistakable titular allusion to Hickey's work, has said that it 'raises questions about the limits of painting and self-reflexivity.'[184] My argument is that the tension between the persistence and exhaustion of painting that determined Hickey's installation and text works of 1969 and 1970 is central—indeed comes to the fore in an unprecedented way—in *90 White Walls*.

This dialectic is activated, primarily, through the subject matter of the white plaster wall depicted in each photograph: a plain painted surface, a monochrome common to the domestic interior. The subject of the wall was not a new subject: the motif of the wall recurs throughout Hickey's hard-edge paintings. *90 White Walls* thus perpetuates the iconographic predilections of Hickey's earlier paintings. The spectre of painting haunts *90 White Walls* in various other ways. Just as the repetitive patterns of Hickey's hard-edge paintings reduce the decisions involved in the compositional process, in *90 White Walls* the latter is limited to the photographic nomination of a series of already-made white monochrome surfaces as paintings. The work thus pursues the question of how far this compositional reductivism can be pushed—a question that arose in Hickey's earlier paintings.

Perhaps the wall appears in *90 White Walls* as a cypher for painting at its limit, an existential, aesthetic and historical obstruction that the conceptual artist could not see his way through. Hickey had seemingly reached a dead-end. In this vein, Robert Lindsay has described *90 White Walls* as 'an ultimate statement for an artist who felt that for the moment he had literally painted himself into a corner.'[185] The wall—an icon for the loss of creative imagination, a sign of an artist unable to transcend the everyday. It also figures as an allegory for the blank canvas and the Sisyphean endurance of the painter repeatedly performing the ritual of painting. And since Hickey's photographs show the walls of familiar domestic

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[184] Pollard with Smith, 'The Local Ideas Context,' 7; Sue Cramer, 'Interview with Mike Parr,' *Inhibodress 1970–1972*, 66–72, 67. Earlier, however, Parr disparaged *90 White Walls* due to its preoccupation with painting. 'Smith: 'You were saying that the carry-over of basic concepts in Hickey's and Rooney's work from their paintings to their post-object work was a restriction on that work, a limitation on it … Parr: 'I don't want to make a quality judgement. It's just necessary to create an area from which a viable conceptual work can come, and it can't come from painterly concerns.' Mike Parr with Terry Smith, 'The Local Ideas Context: Mike Parr,' in *The Situation Now: Object or Post-Object Art?* (Sydney: Contemporary Art Society of Australia, 1971) 17–18, 17.
[185] Lindsay, 'Project 15: Dale Hickey.'

spaces rather than actual canvases, it is as though the anxiety of the painter had overflowed into his daily existence. Ramsden's comment that conceptual art was like 'modernism's nervous breakdown' takes on a special resonance in the case of *90 White Walls*.[186]

The most detailed account to date of the relationship of *90 White Walls* to the medium of painting is given by Terry Smith. Smith's reading begins from the observation that the context in which *90 White Walls* emerged was significantly defined by a hostility towards painting—thus it is 'first and foremost a statement about a work of art *not* being a painting.' However, Smith argues that in *90 White Walls* 'Hickey does not … forget painting altogether.'[187] The concerns of his earlier painting haunt *90 White Walls*, albeit in attenuated or negative form. In a situation where 'painting had [seemingly] become impossible,' as Smith contends, Hickey's work not only heralds the destruction of painting, it also indicates its subterranean survival.[188] I concur with Smith's view that *90 White Walls* signals the simultaneous extension and cancellation of the medium. However, his claim that *90 White Walls* 'implies that the bottom line of painting is not a white canvas but the wall itself' is vague. Does he mean that the wall itself (or its properties of flatness or whiteness), are fundamental to painting? Or does he mean that painting's search for essence culminated in its negation?

Smith's comment pre-emptively shuts down the complex play of illusion, allusion and analogy between wall and painting in Hickey's work, a topic that has been explored by other authors in relation to different contexts. In *Life: A User's Manual* (1979), Georges Perec defines the relationship between pictures and walls as one of simultaneous intimacy and hostility, a paradoxical formulation far more in keeping with Hickey's work:

> I put a picture up on a wall. Then I forget there is a wall … I have put the picture on the wall so as to forget there was a wall, but in forgetting the wall, I forget the picture, too. There are pictures because there are walls … Pictures efface walls. But walls kill pictures.[189]

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[186] Mel Ramsden, email to author, 27 November 2011.
[187] Terry Smith, *Australian Painting 1788–2000*, 470.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Georges Perec, *Life, a User's Manual: Fictions* (1978), trans. David Bellos (London: Vintage, 2003).

Perec's reference to walls killing pictures rhymes with the avant-gardist rhetoric of the death of painting that overdetermined the historical context of *90 White Walls*. Yet his account is not so simple—pictures, he claims, also efface walls: a picture is hung in an attempt to 'forget' the blank wall, but this same 'forgetting' causes the picture to be forgotten. Ultimately, the picture and the wall cancel each other out. The idea of the picture and the wall mutually negating each other implies a symmetrical polarity and deep kinship between them that resonates with the manner in which Hickey's work, through its suggestion of an analogy between painting and wall, stages a dialectic between the persistence and exhaustion of painting.

90 White Walls also calls to mind another writer who theorised the relationship between pictures and walls. In his interview with de Berg, Hickey dismissed Australian modernist architect and theorist Robin Boyd as a 'snob' for his critique of 'repetition and mass production.'[190] Hickey's unsympathetic view of the architect is unsurprising given the latter's hostility towards decorative and kitsch objects, whose aesthetic justification exists apart from or in spite of their functionality (as discussed in Chapter 2, his hard-edge paintings are replete with such objects). Differences aside, Hickey's images of unadorned walls harmonise with a passage from Boyd's *The Australian Ugliness* (1960) attacking the gratuitous hanging of paintings on interior walls. According to Boyd, the majority of paintings 'are hung because someone first decided that something was needed there on the blank wall: something to destroy the frightening honesty of the blank wall.'[191] Boyd's subsequent characterisation of the wall as a void—a surface (un)seen as an absence—that triggers an experience of *horror vacui* chimes with the discourse, tinged with mysticism and existentialism, that has grown up around Hickey's work. Pollard, for example, has framed Hickey's work in spatial terms reminiscent of Boyd's portrayal of the experience of a blank wall: 'Hickey walks straight into a void, and tries to cope mentally with this.'[192] Lindsay has portrayed *90 White Walls* as 'an examination of ninety voids, ninety ways of looking at the same proposition.'[193] Hickey, for his part, has claimed that 'the void is … what you see when you stare at a white wall.'[194]

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[190] Hickey in de Berg, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 15.
[191] Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (1960) (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2010), 121.
[192] Pollard with Smith, 'The Local Ideas Context,' 6.
[193] Lindsay, 'Project 15.'
[194] Robert Lindsay, *Dale Hickey: The Void and Other Symbols* (Melbourne: Tolarno Galleries, 1993).

Hickey's depiction of the void as a white wall belongs to a tradition as long as modernism itself, in which blankness appears as a central theme. Blankness is a recurring theme of modern art that goes back at least as far as Stephane Mallarmé, whose fascination with the purity of the virginal white page is repeatedly expressed in his poems.[195] It runs through the work of countless other artists including Kasimir Malevich's *White on White* (1918), Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (1951), John Cage's *4'33"* (1952) and Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* (1965). Blankness, specifically in the guise of the white wall, preoccupied conceptual artists, from Kosuth's *Wall – One and Five* (1965–1967) to Jan Dibbets' *A White Wall: 12 Numbered Photographs with Different Shutter Speeds* (1971). The white wall is also fundamental to William Anastasi's site-specific exhibition *Six Sites* at Dwan Gallery in 1966–67, which featured photographs of the gallery walls silkscreened at a slightly smaller scale onto stretched canvases mounted on the same walls.

Contrasting Hickey's and Anastasi's respective studies of white walls brings into focus several issues that shaped both artists' dialogues with painting. According to artist-critic Brian O'Doherty, Anastasi's show 'had a peculiar after-effect; when the paintings came down, the wall became a kind of ready-made mural and so changed every show in that space thereafter.'[196] What fascinated O'Doherty about *Six Sites* is that it framed the gallery as a meta-artwork that surreptitiously transformed its contents into an artwork. O'Doherty's argument that Anastasi's exhibition exposes the institutional power of the gallery is correct as far as it goes, but in terms of the argument about the connection between conceptual art and painting advanced in the present chapter what stands out about Anastasi's exhibition is how this is achieved—through photography, but also through painting, by proxy. Anastasi's works are photographic, but their materiality—print on canvas—and their composition—monumental scale and large uninflected white fields—imbues the depicted walls with a presence that is reminiscent of modernist and minimalist painting. Swamping the viewer, Anastasi's images of surfaces usually seen as absences solicit a mode of contemplative engagement reminiscent of meditative monotone paintings by Jo Baer or rectangular bar paintings by Alan Uglow, accented with power-points, heating ducts, lights and in one case a door.

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[195] Mallarmé is cited as a precursor to minimalism in Richard Wollheim, 'Minimal Art' (1965), in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), 387–399, 388.
[196] Brian, O' Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 34.

Like Anastasi's *Six Sites*, Hickey's *90 White Walls* depicts a series of walls as voids; it makes present a series of surfaces that are usually ignored. Unlike Anastasi's works, however, which appropriate the formal properties of reductivist painting of that time, *90 White Walls* yields a double absence: instead of giving presence to its walls-as-voids, Hickey's diminutive prints cancel the original physicality of the pictured walls. Rather than immersing the spectator in the void, Hickey's ninety captioned photographs conjure ninety voids as though from a distance. A 1973 remark by Pollard brings the contrast between the immediacy of minimalist painting and Hickey's disembodied photographic representations into focus. 'If one gives up the attempt to set the stage to produce what is an uncapturable experience, and uses signposts instead,' Pollard pondered, 'what sort of shift is involved here?' Pollard correctly observed that *90 White Walls* distanced itself from the 'uncapturable experience' of the walls or paintings; instead, it 'signposts' or signifies their lost presence.[197] To this extent, Hickey's walls should not be thought of as surrogate paintings so much as signifiers or images of them.

As outlined above, *90 White Walls* stands as an original, even desperate solution to the problem of how to reassert the concerns of painting within the domain of conceptual art. Hickey's gesture simultaneously de-privileges the materials and techniques of painting and dignifies its ordinary subject matter through incorporating it into the artwork. Hickey's photographs depict surrogate paintings, but the photographs are unmarked by actual paint. Gerhard Richter stated that his paintings are 'photography by other means'; for Hickey, the inverse is true: photography enabled the continuation of 'painting by other means.'[198] In place of a picture on the wall, Hickey's work is a collection of images of domestic monochromes housed in a portable archive. Indeed, the numerical system correlating photographic to text functions like a miniature archive, a low-budget museological display: labels or captions, complete with the name of the work (or institution) written in pen on a plaque on the top of the box. Hickey's archival structure is one of a multitude of eccentric collections and miniature museums that emerged in art of the 1960s and 1970s.[199] While it

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[197] Pollard, 'Minimal,' 21–23.
[198] Gerhard Richter 'Interview With Rolf Schön' (1972), in *The Daily Practice Of Painting: Writings 1962–1993*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Obrist (London: Thames and Hudson and Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1995), 73.
[199] See Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen, eds., *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art* (Munich; New York: Prestel, 1998); Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art From Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2008).

does not initially appear painterly, through its repeated thematisation of painting, the archival form of *90 White Walls* provokes a realisation that all paintings—even in the most traditional forms—are archives of some kind, repositories, storehouses and orders of information and knowledge.

Hickey's archive of quasi-paintings harmonises with conceptual art's globalist vision of art in which, according to Seth Siegelaub, 'secondary information' (information about artworks) would become 'primary information' (actual artworks)—thus circumventing the pragmatic difficulties posed by fragile, heavy and expensive artefacts.[200] Yet the handmade-ness of *90 White Walls* conflicts with conceptual art's elimination of the 'artist's hand,' which is fundamental to its vision of art-as-information. Hickey's handwritten captions compromise the reproducibility of the work and allow for the re-entry of the autographic mark into conceptual art praxis. Read through the prism of medium, the handmadeness of *90 White Walls* emerges as symptomatic of the loss of the tactility of painting, conveying the frustrated desires of the painter in the age of conceptualism. To this end, Hickey has commented that '[he] thought conceptualist tools—typewriters etc.—enabled [conceptual artists] to avoid *dirty hands*.'[201] Further offending conceptual art's utopian vision of art-as-information is the handmade container, which pushes *90 White Walls* back towards the domain of the original, artisanal artwork. While on the one hand the box protects and allows for the transportation of Hickey's quasi-paintings, it also, despite the work's numerous allusions to painting, invites a sculptural reading. In light of Hickey's continued dialogue with painting, however, the sculptural properties of the box paradoxically appear as a compensation for the loss of the materiality, presence and tactility associated with painting.

There is an important final piece of information about the box that confirms beyond all doubt Hickey's desire to underscore *90 White Walls*' proximity to painting. The wooden box is coated with one or two layers of white paint; further evidence that Hickey wished to underscore the painterliness of *90 White Walls* is the strip of stapled canvas that functions as a crude makeshift hinge between the box and its lid. Hickey's paint and canvas crudely promote the work's relationship to the traditional materials of painting. The handmadeness of the work figures as a residue of the tactile memory of painting. While the paint serves a

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[200] The compact work travelled to Sydney for two exhibitions of conceptual art in 1971, *Four Artists Using Photography* at Inhibodress and at the Contemporary Art Society's *The Situation Now*.
[201] Dale Hickey, in conversation with author, December 2018.

protective function that reiterates Hickey's thematisation of whiteness, the use of the canvas strip as a hinge—a highly unusual material for the job—reinforces the relationship between his miniature archive of images of surrogate paintings and the medium of painting. The white paint and the canvas strip underscore the work's precarious, indeed hinge-like status, both inside and outside, the medium. Hickey's construction and decoration of the box, seemingly a peripheral component of the work, declares that painting is the true subject of *90 White Walls*.

Conclusion

During the height of the anti-painting sentiment in Melbourne, Hickey still had the medium on his mind. Indeed, painting was *the* reference-point for his conceptual works, the taboo object that they repeatedly invoke. By highlighting the dialogue of Hickey's conceptual works with painting, this chapter has opened a new perspective on their distinctive qualities of amateurishness, scrappiness and handmadeness: the hand-pencilled diagrams of *Fences* compensate for the relinquishment of handmade production, *Calling a Spade a Spade* invokes an implement liable to be read as a surrogate paintbrush, and the amateurish photographs and ad hoc craft aspects of *90 White Walls* stand in for the physical application of paint to canvas. In each case, Hickey's works variously compensated for the loss of tactility and materiality historically associated with the medium of painting.

This chapter has also revealed that estrangement, a major influence on Hickey's hard-edge and minimalist paintings, remained central to Hickey's conceptual art. While the earlier paintings defamiliarise the banal object by means of camouflaged presentation, Hickey's conceptual works present it as always-already illusory. His works suggest that an ordinary surface like a blank wall, a place to hang a painting that would transport the spectator away from their immediate architectural confines, could be seen as a domestic monochrome, an overlooked masterpiece of the everyday. Reappearing as a picture, a foreign entity in the world of conceptual art, the wall symbolises a double moment, the beginning of the medium as well as its literal end.

In spite of the ubiquity of painting in Hickey's conceptualist works, the medium only ever appears as a spectral, precarious substance that is present in the absence of its standard materials and techniques. Yet Hickey soon changed tack once again: his next works—a series of still life paintings of cups—would dramatically embrace the forms, materials, techniques of this seemingly antiquated mode of artistic production. The following chapter examines

these still lifes, and the events leading up to their production, in order to further understand the defamiliarising effects of the medium within, and beyond, conceptual art.

4. From Conceptual Art to Still Life Painting

While the deskilled production and academic format of Hickey's conceptual works deviates from conventional definitions of painting, as discussed in the previous chapter, these works express an ongoing preoccupation with the medium. *90 White Walls*, Hickey's final conceptual work, evokes the end of modernist painting and the exhaustion of the painter before the canvas. Disillusioned with modernism, Hickey had soon found himself paralysed by the self-referentiality of conceptual art. Rather than relieving his painterly frustrations, the liberating effects of conceptualism had proven momentary. Hickey's presentation of the *Cup Paintings* (1972–73) in July 1973, his first exhibition of new work since September 1970, signalled the end of this period of profound artistic uncertainty. These small paintings declared Hickey's return to the forms, materials and skills of painting: the realist style, the still life genre, the mimetic description of commonplace objects and the artist's touch.

This chapter examines what motivated Hickey's transition from conceptual art into still life painting. It opens with an account of Hickey's year-long research trip through America and Europe in 1971, accompanied by wife Rosemary and children Silas and Robyn. Undertaken while on sabbatical leave from Preston Technical College and partly funded by the Australian Council of the Arts, the objective of the trip was to analyse how art schools overseas had dealt with the rise of conceptual art. The academic report that Hickey submitted after returning to Melbourne, outlining an educational model that accommodates traditional medium-based practices as well as conceptualism, was as much informed by official research as it was his exposure to the diverse artistic cultures he encountered overseas. During this trip Hickey's attitude towards painting and conceptual art shifted. While Hickey was increasingly suspicious of the militant avant-gardism of the conceptualists he met in New York, the regionalist sensibility of James Doolin and his associates in Los Angeles impressed him. The funk art he saw there confirmed his suspicion of avant-gardism and fostered a renewed appreciation of traditional modes of artistic production and an irreverence towards shifts in avant-garde fashion, which continued to grow during his subsequent stay with Roger Kemp and his family in London.

This chapter culminates in an extended discussion of the *Cup Paintings*, which debuted at Pinacotheca, alongside works by Robert Rooney and Simon Klose, in an exhibition originally conceived as a conceptual art project. In this context, Hickey's adoption of the anachronistic form of still life painting was regarded by one critic as 'a call to order among the babel of art theorists,' a retreat from the avant-gardist experimentalism of

conceptual art.[1] Yet despite their defiance of the stylistic strictures of conceptual art, the *Cup Paintings* were not simply a return to order: they also extended conceptualism. For example, they extended its non-compositional, serial mode. In addition, Hickey's appropriation of the common teaching exercise of painting a white cup on a white background implies the presence of the readymade—the classic form of conceptual art—within the seemingly anachronistic mode of the still life. The *Cup Paintings* thus rehabilitate a traditionalist painterly agenda while also remaining closely connected to conceptual art. A form of avant-garde provocation in the guise of a return to order, Hickey's works possess a curious dual identity: both of their time and outside of it. The anachronism of the *Cup Paintings*, I argue, constitutes an extension of Hickey's project of defamiliarisation.

Under the Auspices of a Conceptual Art Study Tour

'Since 1968,' Hickey claimed in 1973, 'I have made no distinction between working as an artist and working as a teacher—they are one and the same.'[2] While there were numerous crossovers between Hickey's work as a lecturer at Preston Tech and his work as a vernacular modernist painter, the suggestion that he did not distinguish between the roles is surely exaggerated—the solitary production of paintings for aesthetic consumption in a gallery is vastly different to the pedagogical instruction and administrative duties involved in teaching. Yet the situation had significantly shifted by the end of the decade. The emergence of conceptual art irrevocably narrowed the gap between practicing art and teaching it; as artists increasingly concerned themselves with art theory, even writing theoretical essays as artworks, the institution of art and the art school were increasingly forced into unprecedented proximity.

This transformation did not happen overnight; nor was it void of conflict. At the end of the 1960s, the curriculum at Preston Tech still echoed a classical division of the artistic mediums inherited from the Beaux-Arts system; yet as a technical college Preston was more vocationally oriented than, for example, the National Gallery School in Melbourne, promoting a 'hands on' approach. These two factors—firstly, the organisation of the school

[1] G.R. Lansell, 'Grants to the Academics,' *Nation*, 27 July – 2 August 1973.
[2] Dale Hickey in Daniel Thomas and Francis McCarthy, *Recent Australian Art* (Sydney: A.G.N.S.W., 1973), 41.

around separate artforms, and secondly, the artisanal bias of the curriculum, did not bode well for students exploring the emergent forms of conceptual practice. As Hickey described the situation, the young conceptualists prioritised 'an involvement with art ideas' over 'objects d'art,' but they became disheartened when their notebooks and photographs were rejected by their lecturers.[3]

As both a lecturer and a conceptual artist, Hickey had a unique perspective on the disconnect between the lofty ambitions of the budding conceptualists and the expectations of the art school. Against what he perceived as a 'background of a developing confusion in aims and methodology' between the two camps, Hickey 'appl[ied] for study leave to investigate the pedagogical implications arising from "conceptual" directions in art,' with the intention of undertaking primary research at numerous art schools in the United States and Great Britain in 1971.[4] 'Conceptual Art—Implications for Art Education in the Tertiary Sector,' the report that Hickey published in 1972 (the source for the quotations above) is a significant document, one of the earliest attempts to understand and acknowledge the ways that conceptual art posed 'a challenge to established art educational methodology.'[5] I explore the findings of Hickey's report later in this chapter, as well as the impact of the trip on Hickey's artistic practice. First, however, it is necessary to recount Hickey's experiences overseas.

New York, Los Angeles, London

[redacted]

[3] Dale Hickey, *Conceptual Art—Implications for Art Education in the Tertiary Sector* (Preston: Preston Institute of Technology, May 1972).
[4] Ibid., 1.
[5] Ibid. Another example is Donald Brook, 'What is Wrong with Art Training in Technical Colleges?,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 January 1968, which is discussed in Ann Sanders, *The Mildura Sculpture Triennials 1961–1978: An Interpretative History* (Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 2009), 33–34. The question of art education was important to many conceptual artists. See Joseph Kosuth, 'A Short Note: Art, Education and Linguistic Change' (1970), in *Art After Philosophy and After*, 43–45.
[6] [redacted] Hickey recalls Stringer showing him the catalogue of Philip Guston's October 1970 exhibition at Marlborough Gallery. Given Hickey's impending embrace of anti-modernist realist painting, his appreciation of the abstract

The meeting set the tone for Hickey's experience of the conceptual scene in New York. In a March 1971 letter to Pollard, he gives a sarcastic account of Ramsden's attempt to confiscate a photograph of himself wearing swimming trunks that had been shot by a friend, which for Hickey indicated the English artist's desire to cultivate a certain type of public image:

> conceptualists don't swim, just sit around and probe the depths of ascetic intellection. Moreover, they don't grow beards, tend to carry rather official looking brief cases (black of course), talk incessantly of professionalism in the arts.[10]

Evidently, Hickey interpreted Ramsden's acute awareness of his conceptualist 'look' as a mark of inauthenticity. In his view, Ramsden—as well as Burn—were 'ego-tripping (to use N.Y. jargon).'[11] Although the pair had criticised Kosuth 'for hustling,' Hickey reported to

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expressionist sudden incorporation of crude, cartoonish depictions of everyday scenes invaded by hooded figures in canvases that were at the time dismissed as anachronistic—is unsurprising. For a survey of the mostly derogatory critical responses to Guston's exhibition see the chapter 'Sick of Purity' in David Kaufmann, *Telling Stories: Philip Guston's Later Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 5–27.

[7] The literary remains of the Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis consists of three one-page transcripts of group discussions called 'Proceedings'. The main account of the Society is Stephen, *Looking at Looking: The Art and Politics of Ian Burn*, 128; Stephen, *1969*, 60–61.

[8] [redacted] In a 1970 essay, Burn distinguished authentic conceptual art from art that merely mimicked its stylistic features. See Ian Burn, 'Conceptual Art as Art,' *Art and Australia* 8, no. 2 (September 1970), 167–70.

[9] Dale Hickey, letter to Bruce Pollard, mid-1971.

[10] Dale Hickey, letter to Bruce Pollard, 22 March 1971.

[11] Ibid.

Pollard, he still hoped to meet the kingpin of conceptual art; in any case, he added, when it came to hustling, Burn and Ramsden 'seem rather experts themselves.'[12] Hickey was also 'appalled,' he claimed, by the pair's acute awareness of their art-historical status, 'their consciousness of themselves in relation to art history,' even alleging that Ramsden back-dated some of his works.[13]

Hickey was not alone in his discontent with conceptual art at that time. 'The international Conceptual movement is groggy and moribund,' Robert Pincus-Witten declared in 1971. 'Conceptualism, as a means of sustaining a group of artists' work in concern, is over.'[14] But Hickey's criticisms were only partly aimed at conceptual art: his letters also demonstrate a general frustration with the New York art milieu in particular. In one letter Hickey confessed to Pollard: 'I find the whole scene here rather disgusting.'[15] A passage in an earlier letter provides further evidence of Hickey's immediate suspicion of the cultural location that was then widely regarded as the world centre of the avant-garde:

> Art is fucked up here and I think more promising in Australia, but I have yet to say this in New York where every [expletive] is raving so uncoolly about the great city and its fucking culture that I just want to get back to Melb and hear some real uninteresting bullshit for a change.[16]

Hickey's rant to Pollard criticises the common idea of New York as a cultural centre in relation to which Melbourne could be seen at best as a cultural backwater. The reality of the

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Hickey, letter to Pollard, mid-1971. On the issue of backdating in conceptual art see Terry Smith, 'One and Three Ideas: Conceptualism Before, During, and After Conceptual Art' (2011), in *One and Five Ideas On Conceptual Art and Conceptualism*, ed. Robert Bailey (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 117–144; David Pestorius, 'Ian Burn's Questions,' *Journal of Art Historiography* 9 (December 2013), accessed 25 May 2015, http://www.davidpestorius.com/publications.html. Also see the exchange between Benjamin Buchloh, Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub: Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969'; Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub, 'Reply to Benjamin Buchloh on Conceptual Art,' *October* 57 (Summer 1991), 152–57; Benjamin Buchloh, 'Buchloh Replies to Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub,' *October* 57 (Summer 1991), 158–61.
[14] Robert Pincus-Witten, 'Anglo-American Standard Reference Works: Acute Conceptualism,' *Artforum* 10, no. 2 (October 1971), 82—85, 83. Alexander Alberro tracks the increasing tension within the New York faction of Art & Language in the early to mid-1970s in 'One Year under the Mast,' *Artforum* 41, no. 10 (June 2003), 162–64, 206.
[15] Hickey, letter to Pollard, mid-1971.
[16] Hickey, letter to Pollard, 22 March 1971.

situation, Hickey contends, was that New York was a stale scene overwhelmed by its sense of self-importance; in one sense, New York was more provincial than Melbourne: 'it doesn't take much imagination,' he suggests, 'to see New York as a development out of what we know about our Melb culture—vicariously at least I think, as artists, we have been here [to New York] a great deal.'[17] Hickey's inversion of the typical notion of the relationship between cultural centre and periphery primed him for the cultural regionalist sensibility he would subsequently encounter in Los Angeles.

Arriving in L.A. in mid-1971, the Hickeys stayed with James Doolin and his family in Topanga Canyon for three weeks. Hickey's depression suddenly gave way to rambling energy and enthusiasm for the car culture, overt sexuality and garish luminosity of the city. One of the reasons Hickey found the place so invigorating was what he saw as its unapologetic embrace of a regionalist identity:

> For awhile I have been in Los Angeles. I have had really astoundingly shocking sensuously exciting experiences and finally believe absolutely that regionalism is necessary and good and that LA and NY and Melb are totally irrevocably irreconcilable and that international style is no style at all but death style shit style.[18]

Whereas New York was strongly aware of its status as an art centre, arrogantly assuming that it would set the rules for new trends and movements that occurred elsewhere, Hickey encountered L.A. artists refusing the dictates of 'international style' and uninterested in the latest developments in avant-garde art from elsewhere. Yet this was not because they had generated their own style or discourse; on the contrary, it would be difficult to describe 'LA style,' Hickey thought, because 'there is no central style'—its defining feature, he thought, was precisely its heterogeneity.[19]

Hickey's impression of the L.A. scene was shaped by his association with Doolin and the network of artists around him. After a two-year stint in Australia, in 1967 Doolin had moved there and enrolled in the Masters program at U.C.L.A.; after completing the course, he was appointed as an Instructor at the University. Leslie Doolin recalls that when her husband

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Dale Hickey, letter to Bruce Pollard, 28 June 1971.
[19] Ibid.

commenced teaching, the school faculty did not approve of his hard-edge painting; even before this, though, while studying under Richard Diebenkorn, Doolin was refamiliarising himself with more traditional modes of genre painting and figurative composition; a certain painterliness had also crept into his work. Interestingly, Doolin's second series of *Artificial Landscapes,* his second series of hard-edge paintings that were exhibited at Sydney's Central Street Gallery in 1970, were produced during the same time he was producing still life, landscape and portrait paintings.[20] By the time of Hickey's visit in 1971, Doolin was producing small-scale oil paintings of everyday subjects: suburban and natural scenes from his local environment such as *Viewridge Drive, Topanga* (circa 1970), *Topanga Canyon Blvd and Fernwood Pacific Drive* (circa 1970) and *Venice Canal w/ Reflection* (1971); depictions of his dogs and a pot-plant at his house; he also painted his family and friends, including individual portraits of Hickey, Hunter and Jacks completed between 1969 and 1971.

Doolin was not the only artist Hickey met in L.A. who was enthusiastically exploring figurative representations of everyday subject matter in a deliberately loose, casual fashion that developed out of a curious fusion of Diebenkorn's traditionalism and the ad hoc character of 'funk art.' After Doolin introduced him to Jay Bonifield, Rick Davis and Curtis Hoekzema, a circle of young artists associated with U.C.L.A., Hickey wrote excitedly to Pollard about

> a few hardcore artists who believe in direct perception and are doing a revolutionary back to sensuality, intimacy, enjoy yourself, thrill a minute, adventurous rapport with the mundane facts of life which are extra ordinary and absurd at the same time.[21]

What impressed Hickey about these artists was not only their focus on the everyday—in this respect, the sensibility of the L.A. artists coincided with his own longstanding conviction in the significance of banal things woven into the fabric of ordinary reality—but also their refusal of any overarching aesthetic doctrine. Hickey later recalled that this irreverent spirit was exemplified in the work of Rick Davis, which coupled vernacular L.A. subjects with an

[20] Paul Doolin paraphrasing Leslie Doolin, email to author, 21 March 2017.
[21] Hickey letter to Pollard, June 28 1971.

unrivalled eclecticism.[22] For Hickey, the idea of making art without committing to an aesthetic doctrine was intensely appealing; in a sense, the freedom to 'do whatever' was the opposite of the conceptual art discourse of Burn and Ramsden he had encountered in New York, which required the artist to articulate a theory-laden justification for their work.

Hickey's stay in L.A. was short but it had far-reaching implications for his practice; he later claimed that his experience in L.A. contributed to his return to painting.[23] After the exhaustion expressed in *90 White Walls* and the stultification of New York conceptualism, Hickey was now in a different headspace. 'Jesus I will be glad to get back [to Melbourne]', Hickey wrote to Pollard, 'so as I can do some work again.'[24] Yet the Hickeys did not return home immediately after L.A. Briefly returning to New York, an ebullient Hickey was thinking about the future direction of his work. He wrote to Pollard: 'I do question whether you, or anyone for that matter, will have the staying power to stick with me on what I expect will be further aberrations on my return.'[25] Hickey's exposure to 'thrill-a-minute art' confirmed his growing conviction that the ideologies of international style and the avant-garde were a debilitating force in contemporary art. Hickey complained about two young Australian critics' eagerness to conform to the latest art New York trends. Anticipating Patrick McCaughey's disapproval, Hickey asked Pollard to question him about Edward Hopper and Henri Rousseau, 'tonal painters in opposition to colour painters of their own time. Their "easy" paintings,' Hickey claimed, 'seem to be lasting in every way to me.'[26] Hickey also dismissed Terry Smith's comparison of *90 White Walls* to the work of Robert Morris, presumably *Card File* (1962), which he thought was a 'spurious relationship [with]

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[22] See Dale Hickey in Robert Rooney, 'A Thrill-a-Minute Revelation,' *The Australian*, 9 March 1983. A 1983 fire at a storage facility destroyed much of Rick Davis' work and documentation up to that point. Rick Davis, response to author's questionnaire, 29 February 2012.
[23] See Robert Rooney, 'A Thrill-a-Minute Revelation.' Elsewhere Hickey has refuted the suggestion that his overseas trip influenced his return to figurative painting. The following passage of Pollard's 1976 interview with Hickey is a case in point. 'BP: Were there any experiences overseas that led to painting in a realistic manner? DH: I don't think so. BP: But Jim Doolin was doing still-lives. DH: I think that's unconnected, it's only much later that I started looking at still-life as still-life. Those cups really came out of a much more intellectual thing.' Pollard, 'Interview With Dale Hickey,' 21. My argument shows beyond that Hickey's experiences overseas profoundly impacted his decision to return to painting.
[24] Hickey, letter to Pollard, 28 June 1971.
[25] Dale Hickey, letter to Bruce Pollard, 27 September 1971.
[26] Ibid.

no basis whatever.'[27] 'Who cares about the kind of 'innovation' meant by Smith and McCaughey,' Hickey continued his assault on the young tastemakers:

> That kind of interest is a chasing after phantoms to an extent of bypassing more humble, but no less meaningful offerings on the way (Hopper, Ruscha, Rousseau, Bill Anderson (?) [*sic*], Robert Rooney, Morandi etc.). Also I think it is essential to look only at those artists who last out short term notoriety. Stella Olitsky [*sic*] Noland etc. are finished (I believe) but people like Roger Kemp (whether we like him or not) are outlasting them. (I had the embarrassing experience of witnessing Patrick telling Roger how to improve his pictures.)[28]

Hickey claimed that the perpetual thirst for novelty, a crucial aspect of modernist and avant-garde art, resulted in a situation where significant artists working outside the stylistic norms of their day were being neglected by critics and historians. For Hickey, the exclusion from modernist and avant-gardist art-historical narratives of the Californian slacker-conceptualist Ruscha, the Parisian primitivist Rousseau, the meditative Morandi, as well as the self-consciously provincial eccentrics Anderson and Rooney only underscored the limitations of prevailing modernist and avant-garde taste. It is unsurprising that Hopper's realist depictions of pregnant, empty spaces also appealed to Hickey. Hopper's *Rooms by the Sea* (1951) and *Sun in an Empty Room* (1963) manifest a preoccupation with insignificant details of the everyday of the kind that Huxley associated with a mystical mode of perception; moreover, Hopper's remarks about painting vernacular architecture are reminiscent of Hickey's: 'Maybe I am not very human—what I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house,' Hopper claimed.[29] 'There is a sort of elation,' he said elsewhere, 'about sunlight on the upper part of a house.'[30]

Hickey's dismissal of Stella, Olitski and Noland, the modernists featured in Michael Fried's 1965 essay 'Three American Painters' whose work had exerted a significant influence

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Edward Hopper, interview with Lloyd Goodrich, 20 April 1946. Cited in Sheena Wagstaff, 'The Elation of Sunlight,' in *Edward Hopper*, ed. Sheena Wagstaff (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 12–31, 12.
[30] Edward Hopper, interview with Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1962), 140.

on international style painting in Melbourne and Sydney, implies that the critical consensus about the significance of these artists was misplaced. Hickey implied that conforming to the dictates of critical taste and theoretical discourse led to a dead-end; rather than building aesthetic projects of lasting significance, Hickey claimed, these legendary modernists had merely been flavour of the week. It is interesting that McCaughey, oblivious to his critical battering in Hickey's letters, later recounted visiting Olitski's solo exhibition at Lawrence Rubin Gallery in mid-1971 with Hickey and Jacks. According to McCaughey, Hickey 'could get no further than showing disdain and amazement at the gold frames'; the reason for this, the critic stated, was that Hickey was in the midst of his 'conceptual phase.'[31] While McCaughey was seemingly unaware of Hickey's increasing scepticism towards conceptualism, his anecdote confirms the latter's aversion to the perceived decadence of modernist painting. For Hickey, McCaughey's arrogance was reflected in his condescending remarks to Roger Kemp, an influential senior Melbourne artist whose work was more indebted to the early spiritualist abstraction of Klee and Kandinsky than the post-war American painting promoted by the critic, about how his work could be 'improved.'[32] Hickey's adverse reaction is a further indication that his curiosity to explore outside the boundaries of the prevailing aesthetic sensibility of his time—even if it meant risking irrelevance—was growing stronger.

Hickey's experience in L.A. prompted a re-evaluation of modes of artistic production that were in conflict with modernist or avant-garde sensibility. This was manifest, among other ways, in his increased interest in drawing, which had engaged him on the journey from Melbourne to New York and now demanded his attention in a new way. The final leg of the Hickeys' trip was spent with Kemp and his family in London. During this six-month period, Hickey observed at close range a senior artist whom he deeply respected—Hickey sometimes refers to Kemp as his 'mentor'—absorbed in the simple act of drawing. While in London,

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[31] McCaughey, *The True Names*, 120. Despite the critic's recollections, the records indicate that Olitski did not present a solo exhibition at Lawrence Rubin Gallery in 1971. The exhibition visited by McCaughey, Hickey and Jacks might have been *The Structure of Colour*, curated by Marcia Tucker at the Whitney Museum, which ran from 25 February to 18 April 1971. See Marcia Tucker, *The Structure of Colour* (New York: Whitney Museum, 1971).

[32] McCaughey may have been brash in his interactions with Kemp, but his opinion of the artist was more complex than Hickey's anecdote allows, as reflected in his articles 'The Significance of The Field' and 'Roger Kemp,' *Art and Australia* 8, no. 2 (September 1970), 143—56. McCaughey went on to curate a large-scale retrospective of Kemp's work. See Patrick McCaughey, *Roger Kemp: Cycles and Directions 1935–1975* (Melbourne: Monash Gallery, 1978).

Christopher Heathcote says, Kemp was 'so immersed in the graphic process that he kept using drawing as a creative outlet … fill[ing] sheets of cartridge paper and dozens of sketchbooks with urgent combinations of circle, bar and square.'[33] Hickey's son Silas would 'sit mesmerised as the artist filled up drawing books and intermittently gave the three-year-old avuncular advice.'[34] Kemp's frenetic draughtsmanship presumably made an impression not only on Silas, but also his father.

Hickey was drawing, but had not yet returned to painting. A pivotal episode in the story of his return to the medium took place in London, when he helped Kemp with the presentation and hanging of his *Rhythmical Sequence* (1971), which was exhibited at the Australian Government's Commonwealth Centre in November. Kemp and Hickey initially attempted to stretch the canvas, with unsatisfactory results, before ultimately deciding to hem the edges of the canvas and pin it directly to the gallery wall.[35] Although Hickey was not yet painting, he was refamiliarising himself with the craft aspects of the medium he had rejected two years prior. Simultaneously, despite his growing disenchantment with the avant-garde, Hickey had not given up conceptualism altogether. In the U.K., Hickey produced two photo-conceptual works: *English Fences* and *English Stiles* (both 1971). These, however, were never exhibited, and are now lost.

The Report

Hickey returned to Australia in early 1972 and completed 'Conceptual Art—Implications for Art Education in the Tertiary Sector' in May, a report which would have a major impact on the curriculum at Preston Tech and its successor the Phillip Institute of Technology.[36] Hickey's trip had deepened his suspicions of modernist and avant-garde art and suggested the viability of modes of artistic expression, and this is reflected in his findings. Hickey's report does not propose a militantly conceptualist art school of the kind advocated by Joseph Kosuth, who called for the removal from the curriculum of the technical aspects of painting and sculpture; yet parts of the report argue for an art school more sympathetic to

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[33] Christopher Heathcote, *The Art of Roger Kemp: A Quest For Enlightenment* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 2007), 123.
[34] Heathcote, *The Art of Roger Kemp*, 123.
[35] Heathcote, *The Art of Roger Kemp*, 130.
[36] Hickey, *Conceptual Art*.

conceptualism, which would accommodate students primarily interested in theoretical questions and non-artisanal making.[37]

In Hickey's view, art schools should refuse to align themselves with either traditionalism or conceptualism: they should accommodate both.[38] A scenario in which schools would be forced to position themselves on an ideological spectrum between traditionalism and conceptualism, he warns, is 'educationally unsound' for several reasons: firstly, it fosters 'alienation' between students who adopt different technical or theoretical approaches; secondly, it inadvertently pressures students into aligning themselves with a specific 'art ideology' before the commencement of their tertiary education, at which time they are unable to make an informed decision.[39] A third problem with art schools aligning themselves with a specific art ideology, Hickey stated, is that such ideologies have a limited shelf-life: 'What would happen to such an ideological set-up given … the "supersedence" of the specific ideology?'[40] The latter point is particularly interesting if read as a reflection on Hickey's own increasingly fraught relationship with conceptual art and impending return to painting. It hints that conceptualism, at that time the hegemonic avant-garde style, was losing its currency—if it hadn't done so already.

Hickey argues that a further problem with art schools consciously aligning themselves with a specific ideology, whether traditionalism or conceptualism, is that it limits the choice of the individual student. As this implies, the needs and desires of the student are central to Hickey's educational ideal; the student must be exposed to a range of theories, methodologies and techniques, he argues, in order that they can discover what suits them.[41] According to this logic, an education focused on conceptualism is just as detrimental as one organised around a traditional medium-based method. Instead, Hickey proposes that art students should have a basic knowledge of art history, and should be introduced to a diverse range of theories, techniques and materials. Rather than schools specialising in specific ideologies, or schools offering separate courses aligned with distinct ideologies, Hickey proposes that schools

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[37] Kosuth, 'Art, Education and Linguistic Change,' 44.
[38] Hickeys recommendations anticipate the 'post-conceptual art' education of the present day. This term is used by Peter Osborne in his book *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, where he claims: 'Contemporary art is post-conceptual art.' Also see Peter Osborne, 'Contemporary art is Post-Conceptual Art,' lecture at Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Villa Sucota, Como, 9 July 2010, accessed 17 March 2016, www.fondazioneratti.org.
[39] Hickey, *Conceptual Art*, 2.
[40] Ibid., 2.
[41] Ibid., 10.

should employ a range of part-time lecturers and specialists selected by students.[42] In Hickey's model, the role of the teacher is not that of a 'guru' involved in the 'authoritarian dispensation … of his/her personal attitudes'; instead, the role of the teacher is akin to a 'counsellor,' which demands 'a very broadly based appreciation of art and educational principles and methodology.'[43] Rather than forcing their own position on students, then, the school would cater to the needs of the student.

At an historical juncture marked by hyperbolic arguments for and against painting and conceptual art, Hickey refused to side with either camp. His report makes room for conceptualism's critique of the epistemological foundations of art; moreover, his emphasis on the idea of the art school as a space for open-ended research carries an unmistakeably conceptualist inflection. In Hickey's eyes, the art school of the future would be founded on a 'strong *core* involvement with ideas, both to do with developing individual potential to think conceptually—equally invaluable to painters and sculptors—and the *possibility* to work over an extensive range of media.'[44] Hickey's seemingly simple remark conveys a deep sensitivity to the conceptuality of medium-based practice. The possibility that there could be a conceptuality inherent to painting—a conceptual basis of painting—was lost on many conceptual artists. Painting for Hickey could be as intellectually rich and conceptually complex as theoretical essays presented as artworks. As outlined below, the findings of Hickey's report, which is open to both painting and conceptualism on the other, is a crucial point of reference for understanding their ambiguous co-existence in the *Cup Paintings*.

A 'Collaborative' Exhibition

Considering Hickey's equivocal attitude towards conceptualism, it is fitting that his return to painting took place in the context of a conceptual art exhibition. Hickey's first recorded reference to the exhibition is found in a July 1972 letter sent from Melbourne to Pollard in New York, in which he signals his intention to devote his scheduled exhibition slot the following year to a four-way collaborative exhibition with Hunter, Klose and Rooney.[45]

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[42] Further evidence of Hickey's commitment to an individualist educational model is his proposal that since students mature at different rates they should be permitted to graduate at different times. Ibid., 4, 8.
[43] Ibid., 7–8.
[44] Ibid., 7.
[45] Dale Hickey, letter to Bruce Pollard, 30 July 1972.

Hickey's remark indicates that, at the time he wrote the letter, he was still uncertain about what form his contribution to the exhibition would take. 'I'm back on the rails art-wise after many problems,' he wrote, 'although the "void" is still omnipresent to an extent of my not knowing what I'll do.'[46]

For unknown reasons Hunter declined to participate in the exhibition, leaving Hickey, Klose and Rooney (fig. 4.1). The trio initially agreed that their exhibition would be based on a proposal in Klose's notebook: it would present the findings of a collaborative interdisciplinary research project in which they would utilise every possible descriptive and interpretative system at their disposal to compile the 'complete documentation of a cup.'[47] The subject of the cup, the artists later recalled, was raised in an informal conversation with Pollard, who in response to the question 'What is art?' had responded: 'Art is how you look at a cup.'[48] Although the encyclopaedic documentation project was soon abandoned, as a contribution to it Hickey had already started work on the first of his *Cup Paintings*.[49] If the documentation of a cup was to be attempted, Hickey had reasoned, then painting qualified as a legitimate documentary mode.

The blank canvas onto which Hickey painted the first of the *Cups*, one of several canvases given to Hickey by his student Klose while he was studying at Preston, is of special significance to the exhibition in which they appeared. The canvas is part of a larger collection of fifteen or twenty made by Klose in response to a text score he composed in 1970: 'Make one-foot square canvases.'[50] Klose's canvas is another twist in Hickey's passage from conceptual art to painting not only were the early *Cup Paintings* produced for what had been

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Simon Klose, unpublished notes, 1972. 'Cup. / A complete documentation of a cup. / Historical—where obtained, various uses subjected to. / Practical—a volume of cup, sturdiness, quality of material etc. / Objective—nature of materials. Chemical content. / History of word cup—Greek or etc. / Relation of cup to room—measurements etc.'

[48] Simon Klose, in conversation with Trevor Fuller, 2008. In his 1976 interview with Pollard, Hickey similarly refers to a similar conversation with Klose and Rooney. 'It turned out that the object was going to be a cup because the three of us had heard you [Pollard] talking about cups. We thought we would say nothing about cups at all except for the obvious.' Pollard, 'Interview With Dale Hickey,' 22.

[49] Pollard, 'Interview With Dale Hickey,' 22. Hickey remarked: 'Once we started talking about the guts of the project we decided it was impossible … It could have gone on forever, even though the whole basis of it seemed to be a couple of simple sentences … In the meantime, I started paintings cups because I was thinking that this was another kind of information about cups.'

[50] Simon Klose, unpublished note, 1970, unpaginated. Typewritten on an otherwise blank sheet of paper, the original score reads: 'MAKE ONE FOOT SQUARE CANVASSES'.

conceived as a conceptual art exhibition, but the picture support for the first work in the series was already a conceptual artwork in itself.[51] After they abandoned the idea of the documentation project due to its potential boundlessness, in the absence of any other curatorial premise Hickey, Klose and Rooney adopted the one-foot square canvas as a template for their otherwise separate contributions. Klose's conceptualist canvases thus came to secure a minimal coherence, if only at the level of the picture support, among the thirty-seven canvases displayed in the exhibition.

The uniform picture size did not prevent the exhibition *Dale Hickey/Simon Klose/Robert Rooney*, held at Pinacotheca in July 1973, from becoming a confrontation around the issue of the relationship of painting and conceptual art. It might have seemed that an unbridgeable gulf separated Hickey's nine still life paintings of cups from the deliberately underwhelming repetitive abstractions of Klose and Rooney. Klose exhibited twelve handmade blank canvases, all *Untitled* (1972–73), whose blocky protrusion endows them with a strong 'objecthood,' and *Black Painting with Diagonal* (1969), two triangular canvases painted black and clamped together to form a square, the abutting canvases forming a diagonal line within the square. He also presented three thickly coated monochromes, all *Untitled* (1973), two white and one black, which he created by repeatedly covering the canvas with white paint one day and black the next, until he grew tired of the exercise. Like the blank canvases, Klose's black and white monochromes were based on a text piece that instructs the performer (the artist) to paint the canvas black or white one day and white or black the next, continuing this exercise until they grow tired of it. The process-driven character of the blank canvases and the monochromes invites comparison with the conceptualist work of On Kawara and Roman Opalka, who used painting diaristically, a device to mark the passing of time.[52] Produced from instructional text scores, they demand to be read as documents rather than stand-alone pieces, participating in a process through which

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[51] In 'The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas,' Thierry de Duve argues that the readymade blank canvas is the 'ultimate taboo' of modernism. Even artists who scorned formalism, de Duve argues, 'were probably aware that it [the blank canvas] would have been nothing but a bland repetition of Duchamp's gesture.' See Thierry de Duve, '*Kant After Duchamp*, esp. 'The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas,' 199–279, 258–59. Klose stopped short of actualising the readymade blank canvas (he produced the canvases by hand, as part of a series and in accordance with a text piece), but he came close to it.

[52] For discussion of artworks situated between painting and performance, see Magnus af Petersens, *Explosion! Painting as Action*. Jeffrey Weiss with Anne Wheeler, *On Kawara—Silence* (New York: Guggenheim, 2015). Also see David Joselit, 'Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating (On Time),' in *Painting Beyond Itself*, eds. Graw and Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg, 2016), 11–20.

'art is transformed into a way of life, whereby the work of art is turned into non-art, to mere documentation of this life.'[53]

Rooney contributed two six-canvas serial paintings to the exhibition: *0–5 Black* and *0–5 White* (both 1973; he later retitled the series *Coats [White]* and *Coats [Black]*). The impetus for these works, Rooney later recalled, was a 'Ryman-like' painting with parallel columns of white paint of varying density (a practical model demonstrating the covering properties of white undercoat on linen), which had caught his attention at the art supplies shop Art Stretchers.[54] Rooney based the composition of his own paintings on the pattern of columns on the found painting. The six canvases of *0–5 Black* and *0–5 White*, respectively, correspond to the steps involved in the production of the demonstration model, with both works beginning with a blank canvas and concluding with a layered monochrome. While they avoid complexity and material richness, instead calling attention to the compositional system that guided their production, these works only appear to sever their entanglement with illusion: like his earlier hard-edge paintings based on kitsch, domestic patterns, Rooney's demonstration model-Ryman paintings are best thought of as 'pseudo-abstractions.'[55]

Based around the systematisation of painterly procedures, the paintings of Klose and Rooney are connected to the text and photographic works the pair had produced since 1969, including their collaborative exhibition at Pinacotheca in 1972, for which both artists produced works in the style of the other.[56] Confirmed members of the local anti-painting push, the new works by Rooney and Klose signalled their non-committal attitude towards the medium: they were conceptualist imposters rather than genuine painters. Jeffrey Makin grumbled that the pair were 'still intellectualising around asking "will I paint or won't I?" The result was a number of black or white, small, square canvasses that really are meaningless.'[57] Although the critic apparently failed to register that many artists, including perhaps Klose and Rooney, would accept the charge of 'meaninglessness' as proof of their aesthetic achievement, his observation that the pair were prevaricating about painting reflects

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[53] Boris Groys, 'The Loneliness of the Project,' *New York Magazine of Contemporary Art and Theory* 1, no. 1 (2002), 5.
[54] Robert Rooney, response to author's questionnaire, November 2011.
[55] Rooney is credited with using this term in reference to 'the Mondrian lino on the kitchen floor' in Chris van der Craats, 'As You Were: Recent Paintings by Robert Rooney,' *Farrago* 81 (October 2 1983), 25.
[56] See David Homewood, 'RR/SK: Public Exhibition.'
[57] Jeffrey Makin, 'Hot air is winner at art show,' *The Sun*, 24 July 1973.

the precarious status of the medium at that time at Pinacotheca, the stage on which Hickey's old-fashioned *Cup Paintings* made their uncomfortable debut.[58]

The Cup Paintings

The first *Cup Painting* (fig. 4.2) depicts a white china coffee cup front on, from a slightly raised vantage-point, resting on a table with a white wall in the background. It shows a functional object retired from use, the emptiness of the vessel contrasting with the sculptural fullness of its representation. A far cry from the sparseness and seriality of Klose's and Rooney's conceptualism, Hickey's work aligns with the much older tradition of the still life, evoking a dispersed constellation of modern works in the genre such as Henri Fantin-Latour's paintings of cups and sauces, Clarice Beckett's depictions of lone flower vases with flowers, Giorgio Morandi's images of bottles, bowls, and jugs, Wayne Thiebaud's impastoed candy-coloured rows of desserts, Albert York's paintings of flower pots and Peter Booth's drawings of assorted commonplace objects.

While still life painting has no obvious relation to conceptual art, the *Cup Paintings* were conditioned by Hickey's engagement with the movement in several ways. When it emerged as a distinct genre and specialisation in the late-sixteenth century, a defining feature of the still life was its allowance for greater freedom in arranging elements within a composition than did other forms of painting.[59] Yet Hickey's paintings avoid complex composition and painterly improvisation; similar to the conceptualist paintings of Klose and Rooney, they conform to a largely predetermined structure: firstly, through the one-foot square dimensions of the picture support for all nine paintings, and secondly, in the fact that each painting (with one exception, discussed below) depicts a single cup, centred or almost so.

Hickey's later remarks indicate that the compositional uniformity of the *Cup Paintings* was a deliberate ploy. In a 1979 interview, he classified them as 'anti-compositional still life' as distinct from 'real still life' paintings.[60] He also described the

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[58] According to Adorno, 'works of the highest level of form that are meaningless or alien to meaning are therefore more than simply meaningless because they gain their content [Gehalt] through the negation of meaning.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 153–54.
[59] See Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990).
[60] Gleeson, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 7.

subject matter of the first painting in the series, a white cup against a white background, as a 'cliché,' explaining that its appeal was partially due to its predetermined structure:

> I started out painting a white cup on a white background because there was ostensibly as little or as minimal amount of composition and colour and so forth as you could get in a painting.[61]

As indicated by this statement, when he resumed painting Hickey was seeking out forms and strategies to reduce decision-making in the compositional process. This was not a new concern for Hickey; the strategy of non-composition permeates the deductive structures and already-made forms of his hard-edge paintings, the outsourced production of *Fences* and the factuality and seriality of *90 White Walls*. To the extent that the project of non-composition exerted a powerful hold over the *Cup Paintings*, the series retain a kinship with his earlier conceptual art.

Hickey's still lifes are non-compositional in a further sense. The task of depicting a white cup on a white background is a common teaching exercise.[62] Through sidelining composition and minimising colour, the exercise forces the student to confront the problem of rendering a three-dimensional object on a flat surface purely through the distribution of light and shade. Hickey's appropriation of the painting exercise imbues his work with a 'painting by numbers' quality reminiscent of the works of Klose and especially Rooney, whose paintings were based on a shop window display. It is thus appropriate that Makin, the critic who dismissed Klose's and Rooney's pieces as 'meaningless,' would portray Hickey's works as hopelessly amateurish, an academic failure: 'Hickey's *Cups* are no better,' he contended, 'than any number of basic still-lifes, done by any number of first-year painting students in any art school where "old-fashioned" art is taught.'[63] Makin had inadvertently identified a crucial ingredient of Hickey's works: their lack of technical virtuosity. Although the latter was a practical consequence of Hickey's rusty skills, what the artist later described as the 'awkwardness and stiffness' of his paintings also symbolise the relearning of a lost craft, heralding the precariousness of its uncertain return.[64]

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Pollard, 'Interview With Dale Hickey,' 23.
[63] Makin, 'Hot air is winner at art show.'
[64] Pollard, 'Interview With Dale Hickey,' 26.

Other critics were more sympathetic to Hickey's new work. McCaughey, an ardent supporter of Hickey since his 1967 breakthrough exhibition, claimed that the 'series shows Hickey digging his paintings out of a sort of aesthetic bedrock.' 'The concentration on the cup image,' he wrote, 'wins for them and for Hickey a haunting impersonality, free from the dogmatic and open to the future.'[65] Alan McCulloch, *The Herald* critic who had savaged Hickey's paintings of the last six years, enthusiastically viewed the *Cups* as the end of a phase of frivolous experimentation, signalling the rehabilitation of the former conceptualist. 'Hickey's paintings of cups show him moving miraculously from 20th century hippiedom into the 17th century parlour of Vermeer of Delft,' McCulloch claimed. 'These little paintings have a purity of still-life form that augurs well for his return to painting—purged perhaps of avant gardist shibboleths.'[66] While McCulloch was right that Hickey's new works appeared to disavow the characteristic forms, materials and techniques of conceptual art, he undoubtedly exaggerated Hickey's distance from conceptualism—as outlined above, the *Cups* developed out of a conceptual exhibition and extend the non-compositional strategies central to his conceptual works.

The self-reflexivity of conceptual art also crept into Hickey's exploration of realist painting in another way. Confronted with the ancient problem of rendering an illusion of three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional surface, Hickey adopted an analytical pictorial mode that bears the mark of conceptual art's interrogation of its own foundations. Hickey later said that his mission to realistically depict an ordinary cup brought him face-to-face with the gulf between ordinary perception and realist painting. The eye, Hickey said, naturally focuses on one part of a given object, whereas the conventions of realist painting demand that the entire object be depicted in focus. He reached the conclusion that 'realism is a fallacy' with no basis in natural perception—and that depicting an object entirely in focus constituted a refusal of the world of appearances.[67] Depicting his cups entirely in focus, he thought, would underscore the gulf between object and representation in such a way that would,

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[65] Patrick McCaughey, 'Avant-garde can, and does, change its spots,' *The Age*, 18 July 1973.
[66] Alan McCulloch, 'Around the Galleries,' *The Herald*, 21 July 1973.

[67] 'At that time [circa 1972–73] I was concerned with the question, "What do you really see when you look at something," and I noticed that when you look at a cup you can't see all of it in focus at the same time—yet people think they can. And a realistic painter would paint it as though he did. So in a sense, realism is a fallacy.' Dale Hickey quoted in Colleen Ison, 'What do you really see?,' *Diamond Valley News*, 14 July 1981, 21.

ultimately, defamiliarise perception, which I have identified in preceding chapters as a governing aesthetic principle of Hickey's work:

> Every means is used to give them a sense of being there, to make them even more concrete than you actually see them. In that sense they are surrealist, super-real, surreal because one is trying to get back to cupness [sic] which can only be imagined. It's a dream image.[68]

Adapted by Hickey, realist painting appears in the guise of its opposite: a surrealist device through which the everyday is transformed into something foreign. This was not only achieved through depicting objects in sharp focus; as witnessed in the first *Cup Painting*, Hickey also pursued this imperative through the manipulation of chiaroscuro. A central ambiguity of this work is undoubtedly the bizarre shadow cast by the cup. While it might be expected that the shadow would echo the profile of the cup, instead the shadow jumps to the right of its base. Further exacerbating the spatial ambiguity of the scene is that the cup handle casts no shadow. The shadow, with its illogically straight right edge that abruptly ceases at the end of what is presumably a table, also contributes to the ambiguity in the image between seeing the table and wall as perpendicular surfaces, or seeing the cup as floating out in front of two rectangles flush with the picture plane. In the latter version, the cup does not rest on a table next to a white wall, but rather floats against two flat, parallel rectangles—table and wall appear as surfaces without depth. The fact that, unlike the solid cream of the upper rectangle, the lower rectangle features a fine gradation from white to pale blue multiples the contradictions embedded within the painting, since tonal gradation, the device denoting the sculptural fullness of the cup, is applied to the supposedly flat surface on which the cup stands.

Hickey's toying with realist conventions is partly a continuation of the self-reflexive bent of his earlier foray into conceptualism, but an equally significant reference-point for the *Cup Paintings* is de Chirico's play of spatial paradox and domestic illusions, as well as later surrealist painting. Hickey was aware of these associations: Hickey not only aligned the *Cups*' disfiguration of ordinary perception with surrealism; he even distinguished his brand of surrealism from that of Salvador Dali. Hickey postulated that Dali would customarily

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[68] Pollard, 'Interview With Dale Hickey,' 28.

depict a cup 'in a theatrical context,' he, on the other hand, 'see[s] things in an everyday context. It's that sort of everydayness that interests me.[69] Hickey thus maintained committed to the idea, inherited from Huxley and metaphysical painting, that the artist need not fabricate theatrical or fantastical scenes: instead, everyday subject matter, due to its proximity to ordinary perception, was better-suited to the artist's task of overcoming it.

Notwithstanding Hickey's remarks, the first *Cup Painting* possesses a sort of theatricality. The angling of the handle endows the cup with a frontal orientation, creating the sense that the inanimate object—centred, isolated, forward-facing—blankly gazes out of the picture at the spectator. The subtle theatricality of the first *Cup* is not all Hickey shares with Dali: both artists were motivated by an aesthetic program of defamiliarisation: Hickey's mystical belief in the transcendent power of the banal recalls Dali's comment about his early still life *The Basket of Bread* (1926): 'the power of [the painting's] density, the fascination of its immobility,' Dali claimed, 'creates the mystical, paroxysmic feeling of a situation beyond our ordinary notion of the real.'[70] It will also be observed that the tonally gradated background of Dali's work suggests an impossible extension of the table, which in turn creates a sense that the bread basket is suspended without gravity—not unlike Hickey's *Cup*.

Even if Dali's *Meditative Rose* (1958), which fantastically depicts a red rose floating against a background of clouded sky that blurs into a desert landscape, clashes with Hickey's preoccupation with 'everydayness,' in its chromatic gradation and incongruous configuration of figure and ground it employs painterly strategies similar to Hickey's *Cups* to achieve a defamiliarising effect. *Meditative Rose* anticipates the defamiliarised depictions of mundane objects on smoothly gradated backgrounds in surrealist-inflected pop art, a more contemporary touchstone for Hickey's still lifes.[71] Consider the paintings and prints of Ruscha, an artist who claimed that 'disorientation' was crucial to his aesthetic project, such as *Broken Glass* and *Glass of Milk, Falling* (both 1967), which show objects in motion as frozen in time, or German painter Konrad Klapheck's depictions of modern technological instruments, with their emphatically tubular forms, usually against a monochrome or finely

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[69] Ibid., 26.
[70] Robert Havard, *The Spanish Eye: Painters and Poets of Spain* (Chippenham, Great Britain: Antony Rowe, 2007), 130.
[71] The relation of the still life genre to pop art is demonstrated in John Wilmerding, *The Pop Object: The Still Life Tradition in Pop Art* (New York: Acquavella, 2013).

gradated background.[72] Ruscha's and Klapheck's isolated objects, hard geometries, figure-ground disjunctions, dramatic shadows and lack of atmosphere also feature in the first *Cup Painting*.

Hickey's *Cups* invite comparison with surrealist and post-surrealist pop painting, but as previously noted their non-compositionality constitutes an extension of his earlier hard-edge and conceptualist works. At the beginning of the series Hickey was dedicated to restricting improvisation in the pictorial process, but he relaxed this rule as the series progressed and variation inevitably crept in. The second *Cup Painting* depicts a different cup, a white china teacup, centred against a white background, its basic structure conforming to that of the inaugural work of the series (fig. 4.3). Beyond this, though, are a host of subtle differences between the first and second works. The brittleness of the first, its strong outlines and high contrast, is replaced in the second *Cup* by a more impressionistic style, its looser brushwork and less rigid contours resulting in a more atmospheric picture in which the figure, as though on the brink of disappearance, threatens to dissolve into the ground. In the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth paintings, which follow the ratio of one cup per canvas, Hickey widened his collection of drinking vessels to include an aluminium mug, a china hospital cup, and a blue and white striped kitchen cup.[73] As well as switching cups, Hickey incorporated differences in colour, tone, brushwork, scale and perspective into these works; he also experimented with different background compositions, shifted the position of the cups and the location of light sources.

The *Cup Painting* that depicts an espresso cup from a steep angle, floating in the middle-lower left of a blue background (figs. 4.4, 4.5), signals Hickey's increasing distance from the non-compositional approach. The combination of off-centre positioning, high point-

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[72] Quoted in Yves-Alain Bois, *Edward Ruscha: Romance with Liquids, Paintings 1966–1969* (New York: Gagosian Gallery and Rizzoli, 1993), 19. Regarding the frontality of Hickey's and Klapheck's paintings, consider the following interview exchange between Klapheck and Christopher Williams. The latter suggests 'there is a kind of theatricality in the presentation of the objects that you paint … There is something about the angle of the view … I think it has a lot to do with staging.' Klapheck: 'Yes, the word *stage* is a word I like. I am quite often thinking of the stage … And I might call my objects *subjects*, but I call them *protagonists*, too.' Klapheck and Williams, 'Konrad Klapheck in Conversation with Christopher Williams,' in *Konrad Klapheck: Paintings* (New York: Steidl, Zwirner and Wirth, 2007), 7—21, 12. Regarding the ominousness of Klapheck's paintings arising from their unnaturalness, consider his 1972 remark that his paintings are an attempt to 'explore my unconscious. Through a rigorous use of the Golden section in my machines, I involuntarily create monsters in which I rediscover the desires and anxieties of my childhood.' Konrad Klapheck, *Klapheck* (Milan: Schwarz Gallery, 1972), 8.

[73] Plant, *Dale Hickey*, 6.

of-view and monochrome background, as well as the relatively painterly handling (exemplified by the two prominent brush-marks in the upper right) displays increased compositional improvisation at the level of the individual work. The work reveals Hickey's proximity to the work of Wayne Thiebaud, the Bay Area painter whose work prompted Donald Judd to remark that 'it could be considered further satire to use a conservative technique to attempt subversion. It could also be thought having and eating your cake.'[74] The strategic conservatism of the *Cup Paintings* invites comparison with Thiebaud's dedication to the craft of painting, but they less invite comparison with the Californian's pastel sweetmeats than they do his treatment of common drinking vessels in *Cup of Coffee* and *Coffee* (both 1961).[75]

Although there are differences between Hickey's work and that of Thiebaud, whose paint is characteristically thicker and handling more gestural, there are substantial similarities between them. Most obviously, both their work evinces a general preoccupation with the ordinary object and its painterly metamorphosis. Thiebaud's fascination with centred compositions where objects are 'placed like the cross-hair of a rifle' is another point at which his work intersects with Hickey's.[76] Within these parameters, Thiebaud often set his objects against a monochrome or bi-partitioned background; as outlined above, Hickey explored similar configurations in his *Cup Paintings*. Also note the palpable geometries of both their work. Rachel Teagle explains that Thiebaud regarded works such as *Cup of Coffee* as 'formal studies … a painting about circles: circles and half-circles, and how they merge'; along similar lines, Gary Catalano observes that Hickey's realist paintings signal an 'infatuation for abstraction.'[77]

In a sense, the connection between Hickey and Thiebaud is mediated through Diebenkorn. Hickey saw Diebenkorn's paintings in L.A.; but his social connection to Diebenkorn was no more than by proxy, through the artists he met through Doolin who had

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[74] Donald Judd, 'In the Galleries: Wayne Thiebaud,' *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 10 (September 1962), 48–49. In Judd, *Complete Writings 1959–1975*, 60.
[75] For a discussion of Thiebaud in his regional context see Thomas Williams, *The Bay Area School: Californian Artists from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s* (Farnham, Surrey: Lund Humphries, 2013).
[76] Richard Wollheim, 'On Thiebaud and Diebenkorn: Richard Wollheim talks to Wayne Thiebaud,' *Modern Painters: A Quarterly Journal of the Arts* 4, no. 2 (Autumn 1991), 64–68, 66.
[77] Rachel Teagle, 'Cup of Coffee,' video produced by University of California, date unknown, accessed 25 March 2017, https://vimeo.com/123995256; Catalano, 'On Dale Hickey,' 252. Also see Rachel Teagle, ed., *Wayne Thiebaud: 1958–1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

studied under him at U.C.L.A.[78] Thiebaud, on the other hand, became personally acquainted with Diebenkorn in the early 1960s, with the two remaining close friends until the latter's death in 1993.[79] Diebenkorn's exhibition at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco in 1960 had made a profound influence on Thiebaud, who visited several times, sketching the paintings on view. He was especially fascinated with Diebenkorn's *Girl and Three Cups*, one of numerous late 1950s paintings of coffee drinkers.[80] In 1965, Robert Rosenblum suggested that Thiebaud's 'creamy impasto of pastel sweetness [was] derived from Diebenkorn.'[81] Whether or not this is true, the affinity between Thiebaud and Diebenkorn further consolidates the above suggestion that the Californian scene influenced the development of his *Cup Paintings*.

The Thiebaud-like *Cup Painting* confirms Hickey's departure from the basic compositional template of the series. Although the order in which the *Cups* were produced is unknown, as the series progressed over eight months, Hickey increasingly lost interest in adhering to the non-compositional program inaugurated with the initial white on white work. The significant variation within the series confers on the separate works an individual identity at odds with the seriality and reproducibility characteristic of conceptualism. Hickey's loosening of his pictorial method, which became increasingly improvised, reached a new limit with the depiction of a group of four cups in the final *Cup Painting* (fig. 4.6). With this work, Hickey transgressed the ratio of one cup to one painting and thus undermined the non-compositional rule that otherwise endows the series with its uniformity. When it was originally exhibited at Pinacotheca, the exceptional status of the final *Cup* was enhanced by its solitary presentation on one of the gallery's dividing walls. Manifest in the placement of figurative elements and their relation to their planometric background, the intricacy of the composition indicates that Hickey had finally abandoned the non-compositional strategy that had comprised a crucial thread linking his still life paintings to his earlier conceptualist phase,

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[78] Hickey recalls being 'inspired' by Doolin in 1971, who was involving himself in 'real composition' and 'real tactile values.' Doolin, in turn, says Hickey, was influenced by Diebenkorn. Gleeson, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 7.
[79] Wollheim, 'On Thiebaud and Diebenkorn,' 66.
[80] In particular, Thiebaud recalled he was fascinated with 'how the dense huddle of coffee cups is relieved by the open expanses of the tabletops and walls.' Karen Tsujimoto, *Wayne Thiebaud* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1985), 32–33. Thiebaud also refers to his experience of Diebenkorn's 1960 exhibition in Wollheim, 'On Thiebaud and Diebenkorn,' 66.
[81] Robert Rosenblum, 'Pop Art and Non-Pop Art' (1965), in *On Modern American Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams 1999) 186–189, 187.

and indeed his hard-edge paintings before that. Severing his ties with conceptual art, Hickey had reinvented himself as a genre painter.

Vanguard Anachronism

To bring this chapter to a conclusion, it is necessary to clarify the relationship of Hickey's *Cup Paintings* to the revival of painting in the late 1970s, which was regarded by some as a triumphant celebration and others as an historical regression. It is possible to understand Hickey's embrace of traditionalist still life painting as part of grand rehabilitation of a lost art. The waning of conceptual art coincided with a resurgence of various kinds of painting, especially figurative painting, in the 1970s, which was subsequently surveyed in exhibitions such as *A New Spirit in Painting* (1981). Christos Joachimides, one of the curators of the exhibition, criticised minimalism and conceptual art for 'its narrow, puritan approach devoid of all joy in the senses'; such art, Joachimides alleged, had 'lost its creative impetus and began to stagnate.' Seeking to address this problem, he argued, 'painters [were] turning back to traditional concerns.'[82] Championing the return of figuration in a 1984 television documentary also called *A New Spirit in Painting*, Donald Kuspit argued that the young painters featured on his program 'reinvest art with a fresh sense of the importance of the act of painting.'[83]

The enthusiasm for painting expressed by Joachimides and Kuspit is palpable in Hickey's work from the *Cup Paintings* onwards. In 1976, Hickey explained that his return to painting was due to 'the sensual quality of paint and the technical problems of painting … the simple pleasure of pushing paint around.'[84] He proceeded to clarify that above and beyond his preoccupation with practical matters of painting, he sought out the existential essence of

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[82] Christos Joachimides, 'A New Spirit in Painting,' in *A New Spirit in Painting*, eds. Joachimides, Rosenthal, Serota (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 14–16, 15. Robert Rosenblum echoes this sentiment in a catalogue essay for an exhibition curated by Joachimides and Nicholas Rosenthal the following year: 'as for the viewpoint of the younger artists here, they have already made it clear that they mean to overthrow entirely the spare, cerebral, abstract styles that dominated the 1970s and to replace them with a reckless abandon of imagery, narrative, materials, colours, and free-floating spaces that smack more of the kindergarten than of the aesthetic laboratory.' Rosenblum, 'Thoughts on the Origins of "Zeitgeist,"' in *Zeitgeist*, eds. Joachimides and Rosenthal (Berlin: Verlag Albert Hentrich and Kunstbuch Berlin, 1983), 11–14, 11.
[83] Donald Kuspit, *A New Spirit in Painting: 6 Painters of the 1980s*, television documentary, dir. Michael Blackwell, 1984, 01:00.
[84] Pollard, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 22–23.

ordinary objects—what he was searching for through painting, he said, was the 'cupness' of a cup. Hickey also spoke of a desire to capture the 'the potent image' or 'archetype,' the 'mystical state of perception' that inheres in ordinary experience.[85]

Accompanied by the rhetoric of skills, nostalgia and mysticism, Hickey's genre paintings are susceptible to the kind of critique articulated in Benjamin Buchloh's 1981 essay 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Aggression: Notes on the Return to Representation in European Painting.' Elsewhere Buchloh has theorised the inherent repetitiousness of the modernist avant-garde project, but in this essay he highlights what he perceives as a 'bad repetition' that seeks validation in obsolete artistic paradigms and technical procedures.[86] Buchloh vehemently criticises various kinds of figurative, especially neo-expressionist painters who surfaced in the 1970s—and their critical advocates—for what he perceives as their denial of the radical formal and political ambitions of the avant-garde. The counter-appeal of overtly traditionalist painting, Buchloh argues, 'originates in a nostalgia for that moment in the past when the painting modes to which they refer had historical authenticity.'[87] 'The spectre of derivativeness' hangs over the new representational painters, he contends, because their 'attempt to re-establish forlorn aesthetic positions immediately situates them in historical secondariness.' The reprisal of traditional forms in the 1970s appears in this account as an artistic disavowal of the contingencies of the historical moment, an abandonment of the forms of critical negation definitive of the avant-garde project.

Viewed through Buchloh's critique of painting in the 1970s, Hickey's renewed fascination with the craft of painting, which he spoke of in terms of a 'nostalgic' attempt to arrive at a potent image through which one might 'reconstitute [one's] experience' or 'reaffirm [one's] existence,' appears as an inauthentic resuscitation of an expired aesthetic paradigm. Yet this account fails to acknowledge that the *Cup paintings* were deliberately old-fashioned, designed to offend avant-garde taste. In this way, Hickey's work resists teleological narratives of neo-avant-garde art such as that adumbrated by Buchloh, which

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Rosalind Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition,' *October* 18 (Autumn, 1981), 47–66; Benjamin Buchloh, 'The Primary Colours for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde,' *October* 37 (Summer 1986), 41–52; Hal Foster, 'Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?,' in *Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1996), 1–33.
[87] Benjamin Buchloh, 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Aggression: Notes on the Return to Representation in European Painting,' *October* 16, (Spring 1981), 39–68, 60.

employs terms such as 'derivativeness' and 'secondariness' to delegitimise objects of critique.

Of course, the possibility of anachronistic form is contingent on a preconception of what forms would be appropriate to their historical moment. As Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood explain, an anachronism appears 'only when sensitivity to the historicity of form is so far developed that the entire visual environment is seen to comply with a stylistic "program."'[88] In the Melbourne avant-garde scene of the early 1970s, the emergence of conceptualism as the dominant historical form was accompanied by pronouncements of the obsolescence of traditional artistic media. In this context, Hickey's blunt reassertion of the medium at Pinacotheca, which Ann Galbally described as the 'headquarters of the avant-garde,' must have appeared out of step with the times.[89] The strategy of anachronism had been seized by Hickey as a means to further his project of defamiliarisation.

The anachronism of the *Cup Paintings* depends on a dominant paradigm or hegemonic style of a given moment, but what if no such paradigm or style was able to be identified? As outlined above, the historical context for Hickey's still lifes was conceptualism. But by 1973, Pincus-Witten's earlier observation that conceptualism had grown 'groggy and moribund' had proven correct. The movement's avant-garde status was waning; more than this, the very idea of the avant-garde was crumbling, threatened by a proliferation of practices and discourses that weakened the credibility of grand narratives seeking to define universal aesthetic programs. In his interview with Pollard, Hickey claimed that such a situation emerged in 1970, two years before he started work on the *Cups*:

> Allan Kaprow said a few years ago that art died around 1970. To un-art is to begin to experience again without the art filter. Painters who witnessed the death of art were freed to paint anything.[90]

Kaprow's series of essays on the figure of the 'un-artist' considered the phenomenon of artists shifting their activities beyond the art world by mimicking forms of activity not

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[88] Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Zone Books: New York, 2010), 13–14.
[89] Ann Galbally, Avant-garde is in a New H.Q.'
[90] Pollard, 'Interview with Dale Hickey,' 28.

usually associated with art.[91] In the passage quoted above, however, Hickey interprets this blurring of art and life as licensing painters to paint anything. He might have added that it freed painters from the dictates of international style and the linear progression of styles synonymous with the avant-garde. Indeed, his *Cup Paintings* may be considered to mark the onset of this new art-historical situation where 'anything goes,' in which the artist can 'do whatever': conditions that have been identified with the emergence of contemporary art.[92] On this reading, Hickey's works reflect the proliferation of co-existing temporalities, forms and media that coincided with the dissolution of avant-gardism. Along these lines, Rooney would later remark that Hickey's paintings of the early and mid 1970s 'seem to fit squarely within the ideals of pluralist art.'[93]

From this perspective, Hickey's works are emblematic of the paradigm of contemporary art, where everything is open to appropriation, and anything can be subsumed into an artwork. Yet the very strategy of anachronism indicates the continuation of avant-gardism beyond its apparent demise. To the extent that the *Cup Paintings* seem disjointed from their historical moment, remnants of an expired practice, they bear the imprint of the conditions that allow them to appear that way.

Conclusion

This chapter has tracked the development of Hickey's work during the early 1970s. It covered his research into the implications of conceptual art for tertiary education in America and Europe; his growing disenchantment with conceptual art, particularly the rationalist variant of the movement he encountered in New York; his renewed interest in painting and drawing following his journey to Los Angeles, where he met with Doolin and his circle, and London, where he stayed with Kemp. The account of Hickey's overseas trip, in one sense a story of the demise of conceptual art told from the viewpoint of one of the early protagonists

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[91] See Alan Kaprow, 'The Education of the Un Artist (Part I, II and III),' (1971, 1972, 1974) in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 97–109, 110–126, 130–147.
[92] Paul Taylor's edited collection of essays on 1970s Australian art is called *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*. Also see de Duve, 'Do Whatever,' *Kant After Duchamp*, 327–368, which argues that the expression 'do whatever' embodies the situation of art after the readymade.
[93] Rooney, 'A Thrill-a-Minute Revelation.'

of the movement in Melbourne, concluded with an analysis of his return to painting via the still life genre.

Far from a wholesale rejection of conceptualist experimentation, the analysis conducted in this chapter revealed that the seriality and already-made aspect of the *Cup Paintings* extended the non-compositionality that had earlier shaped Hickey's conceptual art. Yet we know that non-composition impacted not only the serial structures and deskilled production of Hickey's conceptual works of 1969 and 1970; it also shaped the hard-edge and minimalist paintings he produced between 1966 to 1969, which were routinely based on patterns found on domestic and suburban objects, their structures deduced from the literal shape of the canvas. While they heralded an abrupt stylistic shift, the *Cup Paintings* did not mark an absolute break with the non-compositionality of these two earlier bodies of work, but its continuation by other means.

The other significant finding of this chapter, a realisation similarly made possible by the preceding investigation of Hickey's work undertaken in Chapters 2 and 3, is that of another continuous thread that runs from his hard-edge and minimalist paintings, through his conceptualist phase and into his still lifes: the goal of estrangement. The preceding chapters have indicated that the latter was the dominant principle guiding Hickey's work throughout the period in question, albeit manifest in different ways. The principle of defamiliarisation motivated the hybrid amalgamation of pictorial styles and camouflaged representation of ordinary objects in Hickey's paintings of the late 1960s; in his conceptualist works, the same principle was pursued via strategies including the placement of literal objects into an art context, the misuse of academic formats, and the thematisation of painting—the latter an untimely spectre in the age of the post-medium condition.

The *Cup Paintings* perpetuate the defamiliarising impulse of Hickey's earlier work in three main ways. First, the choice of subject matter conveys a desire to disorient (or defamiliarise) perception through a confrontation with seemingly banal objects that are ignored in daily life; second, connected to but distinct from the first point, optical illusion and spatial paradox was exploited by Hickey to expose the artificiality of realist painting (to defamiliarise a pictorial idiom associated with perceptual objectivity). The third mode of defamiliarisation—their anachronism—arises directly out of the incongruousness (or defamiliarising) presentation of the *Cup Paintings* in a conceptual art exhibition at Pinacotheca, an avant-garde scene within which painting of all kinds—not to mention genre painting—was widely considered obsolete. Combining these three strategies of defamiliarisation, Hickey's still lifes align with the quasi-mystical conception of aesthetic

activity that guided his work throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, according to which the artwork served as a vehicle for the contemplation of banal reality, which, through its artistic metamorphosis, now reappeared in the guise of the transcendent.

Part II. Robert Hunter.

5. In the Absence of a Subject

This second part of this thesis—beginning with the current chapter—tracks the development of the work of Robert Hunter during the late 1960s and early 1970s: from his earliest hard-edge paintings in 1966, through his engagement with minimalism and post-minimalism at the turn of the decade, to his ephemeral wall paintings of the early 1970s. In this way, it deals with the same period discussed in the previous three chapters on Hickey's work. The shift of focus from Hickey to Hunter at this juncture prompts a consideration of what is to be gained through studying their work together, one after the other. Among the many reasons for adopting this approach is the network of artistic, cultural and social connections between the two artists. Not only were the artists involved in the scene around the Pinacotheca gallery, but their work was formed in dialogue with the same avant-garde styles and movements. The bi-focal approach of this thesis thus opens a new perspective on the history of hard-edge painting, minimalism and conceptualism in Melbourne, one that is mediated through the art of two of its central protagonists.

Such an approach also brings to light certain differences between their work, chief among which is their respective alignments with the aesthetic programs of estrangement on the one hand and desubjectivisation on the other. Estrangement, which has been established as a primary preoccupation of Hickey's work in the first part of this thesis, demands the transformation of the banal object into a foreign entity. Desubjectivisation, which will emerge in this second part of this thesis as a founding principle of Hunter's work, compels the invention of strategies to remove subjectivity from the pictorial process. The differing priorities of Hickey and Hunter do not constitute an essential difference between their work—as I have already explained, it is more a matter of emphasis. As I argue in my discussion of the context for Hunter's first wall painting in Chapter 7, an indication of the complementary relationship between estrangement and desubjectivisation in the two artists' works is their mutual accommodation within the quasi-mystical conception of painting promoted by Bruce Pollard.

The period of Hunter's art addressed in the present chapter, beginning with his little-known early hard-edge paintings of 1966 and concluding with his iconic 'white paintings' of 1968, predates his involvement with Pinacotheca: it is the story of his initial exploration of non-composition. Like Hickey, Robert Jacks and Robert Rooney, the Eltham teenager's conversion to hard-edge painting occurred in 1966, around the time James Doolin arrived in Melbourne. However, unlike these artists and others, including Peter Booth and Ti Parks,

whose works combine abstract styles with camouflaged representations of domestic and suburban objects, from the outset Hunter's work was strictly non-representational. Within a scene of modernist painting saturated with vernacular references, a puristic investigation into the medium of the kind initiated by Hunter was the exception rather than the norm.

Indicative of the hybrid nature of 'the new abstraction,' Hunter's status as something of an anomaly within his milieu troubles the common art-historical reduction of modernist painting to medium-specificity. The latter issue warrants further attention, but it is not the primary focus of the present chapter (and it has already been broached in relation to Hickey's hard-edge paintings in Chapter 2). Rather than focus on the relationship of Hunter's late 1960s painting to that of his peers, this chapter aims to deepen existing understanding of its resonances with certain types of American and especially European art. Large in scale and reductive in structure, Hunter's work of this period is typically discussed in connection to New York modernist and minimalist painting. Through identifying points of intersection between Hunter's work and that of Stella and Reinhardt, and revealing its congruence with modernist tendencies observed by Greenberg (namely, medium-specificity and post-painterly abstraction), Fried (as in the deductive structure) and the Los Angeles critic Jules Langsner (who coined the term 'colour form painting'), this chapter builds on these existing accounts.

Yet the prevailing tendency to identify historical sources for Hunter's art in American modernism and minimalism has hindered considerations of its possible proximity to other lineages of abstraction. In an attempt to bring to the surface previously neglected aspects of Hunter's work, the reading conducted in this chapter of the interplay between structure and colour in Hunter's 1966–67 works leads me to consider the latter's relatedness to Mondrian and his principles of 'balance' and 'dynamic equilibrium.' This opens onto a discussion of Hunter's similarly overlooked relation to other forms and discourses of European geometric art by van Doesburg, Albers and Morellet, all of whom were variously linked to Max Bill, a Swiss artist, architect, designer and theorist who played a major role in the dissemination of concrete art in the post-war era. The derision of Bill and European geometric art by American modernists and minimalists is one of the factors that has deterred historians from investigating the nature of the relationship between them; this 'allergy' to geometric art, in turn, has also shaped the discourse of Australian art of the 1960s. This chapter contributes to revising this situation.

The subsequent analysis reveals numerous formal connections between Hunter's work and European geometric art, but it also highlights Hunter's distance from the rationalist conception of art advocated by the likes of Bill. Far from seeking the rationalisation of art, I

explain, Hunter desired to produce forms that undermine the certainty of knowledge and sense. Yet beneath this seemingly irreconcilable ideological division there is an affinity between Hunter's mystical notion of artistic activity and geometric art's search for a logical visual language: the desire to eliminate subjectivity from artistic production. For artists such as Bill, the latter is driven by the ideal of objectivity; for Hunter, on the other hand, painting is a technique to avoid decision-making: the idea is merely to negate subjectivity, rather than realise a literal, objective art. Discussed through the framework of Yve-Alain Bois' concept of non-composition, the promotion of desubjectivisation through the systematic organisation of structure and colour in Hunter's 1968 works is shown to be premised on a contemplative notion of aesthetic activity.

Discovering the Grid

In 1966, at the age of nineteen, while studying Industrial Design at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Hunter created several untitled paintings which were unlike anything he had previously made—the flat geometric designs on square canvases, pale colours and impersonal brushwork have little in common with the thick materiality and spontaneous painterliness of his few figurative expressionist paintings, one of which had been awarded the Eltham Art Prize by Patrick McCaughey that same year. Although historians have largely neglected Hunter's early attempts at hard-edge painting, as the earliest works in the abstract mode he would work for the remainder of his career, they occupy a crucial position within his oeuvre, affording crucial insight into the development of the broad parameters of the compositional method with which he remained within for the rest of his career.

Unexhibited at the time, the order in which Hunter produced his hard-edge paintings of 1966 and 1967 cannot be known for certain. The three works from this period I will focus on are uniformly five-foot square, grid compositions. One work, in the collection of John Hunter, features a five-by-five grid, with five colours distributed randomly throughout (fig. 5.1). Two other 1966–67 paintings also feature grid structures, but in these works a different interaction between colour and structure can be observed: colour is integrated into the structural organisation or conception of the painting; colour, in other words, serves a structural function. One of these works, now in the collection of Mal Logan (fig. 5.2), is based on a four-by-four grid structure, with four bronze-coloured squares, one in each outer corner, positioned alongside same-size teal blue rectangles. A remarkable feature of the Logan painting is the thin raised lines that add a relief element to the otherwise flat painting.

Hunter may have discovered this relief effect, a signature feature of his subsequent work, as an accidental by-product of using masking tape to achieve hard-edged compositions, and later factored into his paintings a one-millimetre overlap between neighbouring sections to achieve the desired effect.[1] The other 1966–67 work (fig. 5.3), in the Wesfarmers collection, is divided into four square sections of pale colours; smaller squares, a quarter of the size of the larger squares, are set within each larger square, with the colour of the small squares matching the colour of the large square positioned above or below it.

As was the case for many abstractionists from Mondrian to Martin, Reinhardt to LeWitt, once the grid appeared in Hunter's work it became indispensable to his compositional method. What attracted Hunter to the form? 'I cannot think of anything in particular that led me to grids and modules,' he later said, 'I knew nothing much at the time, and it seemed to me that this was a good starting point; a nothing point.[2] Hunter is not the only painter to have been fascinated by the grid, albeit slightly confused about what attracted him to it. In her 1979 essay 'Grids,' a semiotic analysis of the form in modernist painting, Rosalind Krauss argues that it occupies an ambivalent status: on the one hand, it asserts a 'naked and determined materialism,' in which the 'physical qualities of the surface … are mapped onto the aesthetic dimensions of the same surface'; on the other, it functions as 'a staircase to the Universal,' a spiritual form, a concretisation of the divine.[3] Krauss claims that the grid ultimately belongs to neither camp—it is neither solely materialist nor spiritualist—and as such its significance cannot be grasped until the division between them has been theorised. The final meaning of the grid cannot be conclusively claimed by either camp; rather the meaning of the grid resides in the split between the two.

Krauss' theorisation of the grid is helpful for understanding its ambivalent signification in Hunter's work, which wavers between materialism and spiritualism, mysticism and rationalism. This is not necessarily the outcome of a calculated ploy or deliberate strategy on Hunter's part. In one sense, the grid was merely the most basic form at his disposal, allowing him to combine techniques and materials learnt at art school with those acquired on-the-job as a builder's labourer and house painter.[4] The latter factor perhaps

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[1] Alan Dodge discusses the relief patterning effect in 'Robert Hunter and Minimal Art,' 20.
[2] Hunter paraphrased in Grazia Gunn, 'A Nothing Point: The Paintings of Robert Hunter,' exhibition text, Anna Schwartz Gallery, 2007.
[3] Krauss, 'Grids,' 59.
[4] The concept of skill in Hunter's work is further elaborated in Chapter 6.

accounts for the sense that Hunter's grids are inflected with a common-sense pragmatism, or workmanlike character. At the same time, the same compositions express a distinctly unworldly character, as though they are transcendent forms remaining perpetually out of reach, apparitions beyond ordinary perception.

Hunter's grids conjure a semiotic duality—but how is this affected by his decisions regarding the selection and distribution of colour within the grid? What about the relationship between structure and colour? How does colour affect the ambivalent signification of the grid? In a November 1969 interview with Hazel de Berg, Hunter downplayed the importance of colour: 'I've never really considered colour important, even when I was using colour.'[5] Hunter's remark accurately reflects his antipathy towards colour at that particular time: in 1968 he diluted his palette to a spectrum of creams, greys and whites, and in 1969 he adopted the palette of black, white and grey he used for the next decade, a decision in keeping with minimalism's aversion to colour.[6]

Yet, as Hunter's remark pertains to the role of colour in his 1966–1967 paintings, it is misleading. Colour is an indispensable element of *Untitled* (1966–67), for example, in which five colours are randomly distributed within a five-by-five grid. What determines the relationship of structure and colour in this work? After deciding on the square format and the grid, the bulk of the remaining compositional work revolved around the distribution of colour. This occurred unsystematically, both in terms of the frequency and location of the colours within it. The arbitrary selection and placement of colour means that some adjacent grid cells are filled with the same colour; rectangles and 'L' shapes formed by two or three squares of the same colour disrupts the orderliness of the grid structure.[7]

While the large scale of Hunter's work signals its alignment with the 'new abstraction' that surfaced in Melbourne during the mid-1960s, which was formed in dialogue with American modernist and minimalist painting, the arbitrary colour organisation of *Untitled* recalls post-war grid paintings such as Ellsworth Kelly's *Colour for a Large Wall*

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[5] Hazel de Berg, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' National Library of Australia, Canberra, 23 November 1969, 4. In the same interview, Hunter discusses the use of colour in his early paintings as habitual rather than deliberate: 'The only time when I did use colour, it was just a matter of using something, it was just a—the same as you use anything to make anything.'

[6] Buchloh, 'Painting After the Subject of History,' 156–57.

[7] Catalano 'Robert Hunter,' 78 observes that many of Hunter's 1966 paintings 'are based on a randomly positioned grid in which irregular rectangular shapes are evenly painted in simple contrasts of salmon pink and fresh green.' Catalano's remark is true of certain works, yet others manifest a more complex relationship between structure and colour.

(1951), created in France, and Gerhard Richter's *Colour Charts* (1966), where colour placement was programmed by chance.[8] It also recalls older European precedents of which Hunter was presumably unaware, such as Klee's crooked grids of the early 1930s such as *Colour Table* (1930) and Mondrian's randomly coloured grids of 1919 such as *Composition IX*. That the precedents of Mondrian and the subsequent European geometric tradition remain unmentioned in the literature on Hunter's work represents a significant gap in knowledge; considering the similarities and dissimilarities between them is helpful for deepening current understanding of the historical specificity of Hunter's work. While Mondrian's paintings have often been regarded as plastic expressions of objective or mathematical systems from which subjectivity has been removed—a view supported by the occasional anti-subjectivism of his early writings—Mondrian always affirmed the role of subjectivity in the production of art. Indeed, subjectivity was fundamental to the pursuit of what he called 'balance' and later 'dynamic equilibrium,' by which he meant 'a dynamic rhythm of determinate mutual relations which excludes the formation of any particular form.'[9] Indeed, Mondrian's commitment to this principle prompted him to abandon the pure grid structure on the grounds that it overdetermined the improvisational nature of painting. Similar to Mondrian's *Composition IX*, the selection and organisation of colour in Hunter's five-by-five painting is arbitrary and intuitive, the result of chromatic improvisation. Structure precedes colour, the cells filled after the grid was fixed in place.

Hunter's 1966–67 works in the Logan and Wesfarmers collections establish a greater interdependence between structure and colour. Revolving around a compositional integration of these two aspects, the systematic character of Hunter's paintings less recalls Mondrian's Neo-plasticism than it does later European geometric artists who sought a mathematical basis for aesthetic production. The seemingly remote connection between Hunter and Concrete art has been overlooked due to a continuing overemphasis on American sources of Hunter's art, a critical bias to which Hunter himself contributed. Below I will identify several reference-

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[8] See Ann Temkin, *Colour Chart: Reinventing Colour: 1950 to Today* (New York: M.o.M.A., 2008).
[9] Piet Mondrian, 'Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art' (1936), in *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, eds. and trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin James (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 288–300, 295, 294. In 'Liberation from Oppression in Art and Life' (1939–1940) collected in the same volume, Mondrian envisages an art that 'establishes dynamic equilibrium through a rhythm of forms, lines, and colours in a manner that evokes aesthetic emotion.' (322–330, 328) The idea of dynamic equilibrium is discussed in Carel Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 110–116.

points for Hunter's work in the European geometric tradition. Before this, however, I situate Hunter's work in relation to the discourse of 'colourform' painting that surfaced in America around 1960. My argument is that the entanglement of the discourse of American modernism and minimalism with a nationalist agenda led to exaggerated accounts of its differences with European geometric art of the period that continue to permeate historical perceptions of the period. The latter has influenced the reception of Hunter's work, which is customarily situated in proximity to American discourse, which has meant that Hunter's relationship to the European geometric tradition has been overlooked. In an effort to address this gap in knowledge, I investigate the resonances between Hunter's work and central figures within that tradition including van Doesburg, Bill, Morellet and Albers.

American Type Painting

Based on a four-by-four grid structure, Hunter's painting in the Logan collection features four bronze-coloured squares, one in each corner, joined by blue right-angled rectangular shapes, with the alternating bronze and teal forming a border; in the centre of the canvas is a quartered square comprised of four grid cells: sandstone-brown in the upper-left and bottom-right, teal blue in the bottom-right and upper-left. Unlike the randomly coloured grid painting cited above, where colour disrupts the uniformity of the grid structure, the Logan painting establishes a correlation between structure and colour so strong it is difficult to think of the two apart: colour is paired with structure in an active compositional relationship, rather than arbitrarily dropped within the predetermined structure. (The 'lesson' of the painting is that structure cannot be seen without colour, and conversely, that colour necessary appears within a determinate structure.) The integration of structure and colour is conveyed through the play of structural and chromatic symmetry and dissymmetry between the central square and outer forms. Structurally, the work is triply symmetrical; however, the distribution of colour within the central quadrisected square cancels the vertical and horizontal symmetries, leaving only a diagonal symmetry. In this way, the limited palette underscores its systematic relationship with structure.

To the extent that it underscores the systematic relationship of colour and structure, the Logan painting fulfils a central criterion of what in 1959 Los Angeles critic and curator Jules Langsner (who that same year, with Peter Selz, coined the term 'hard-edge painting' to describe a new tendency in West Coast art) classified as 'colourform' painting: a type of

painting in which colour and form (or colour and structure) cannot be thought apart. 'In these paintings,' Langsner explained,

> colour is not an independent force. Colour and shape are one and the same entity. Form gains its existence through colour and colour its being through form. Colour and form here are indivisible.[10]

Langsner's description of an inseparable relationship between colour and structure is reflected in Hunter's Wesfarmers work. Based on the cross, a derivation of the grid, the painting is divided into square sections of pale colours: clockwise from left, orange, blue, green and red. In each corner is a small square, a quarter of the size of the larger square it is embedded within, the colour of the small square matching the colour of the large square above or below it. Hunter thus establishes an interdependent relationship of structure and colour—the rotation of the colour wheel compels the rotation of geometric forms, emphasising the play of symmetry and dissymmetry between colour and structure. The structure of the painting cannot be seen apart from the harmonious vertical juxtapositions of red and orange, blue and green; these colour pairs, in turn, cannot be seen apart from the triply symmetrical structure, which refer back in turn to the intervals between its alternately warm and cool colours. Hunter's painting thus communicates to the spectator a combination of structural symmetry and chromatic complementarity.

Hunter's penchant for symmetry can be further understood in relation to Stella, an artist who exerted a significant influence on the emergence of colourform painting. Bois has claimed that it was not until the advent of Stella's stripe paintings, for example, *Zambezi* (1959), that symmetry was 'definitively separated from the idea of decoration' and emerged as a distinguishing feature of 1960s painting.[11] Painted with pastel colours of house-paint sold for the purposes of domestic decoration, Hunter's work challenges Bois' notion of 1960s painting as separate from decoration.[12] In its traffic with 'the decorative,' Hunter's painting

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[10] Jules Langsner, 'Four Abstract Classicists' (1959), in *Abstract Art in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Francis Colpitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–10, 7. To smoothen expression, I have changed 'individible' to 'indivisible.'

[11] Yve-Alain Bois, 'Piet Mondrian, "New York City"' (1988), *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1990), 157–186, 181.

[12] As John Stringer observes, 'the colours all seem to come out of that awful suburban predilection for "pastel shades"—which [he] used with a forcefulness quite alien to the otherwise timid overtones of

intersects with Hickey's contemporaneous nesting of domestic references within modernist structures. Returning to the issue of compositional structure, it will be observed that Hunter's pastel cross is similar to certain Stella works that feature a centred cross on a square canvas, for example, *Untitled* (1960). In Hunter's and Stella's paintings, the support is fundamental to the composition: an intimate connection is established between the outer silhouette of the canvas and the pattern painted onto it; the composition foregrounds its relationship to the shape of the canvas. This, it will be recalled, is what Fried called the 'deductive structure': the painted design declares an intimacy with the literal silhouette of the canvas, the latter becoming an integral element of the composition.[13]

Fried claimed the deductive structure as an American, and more specifically East Coast invention. Newman's works of the late 1940s and early 1950s such as *Onement 1* (1948) are for Fried early instances of this device, subsequently exploited by the next generation of painters such as Stella and Noland.[14] Like many other artists, critics and curators of the 1960s, Fried believed that in the post-war period the centre of art-historical innovation had definitively shifted from France to the United States.[15] With the exception of the English sculptor Anthony Caro, Fried's critical investments were located mainly in New York and Washington, in contrast to which contemporary European art seemed (to him) dull and dated, a tired recapitulation of the legacy of cubism, Mondrian and other outmoded paradigms of the early-twentieth century.

Fried was not alone in his belief in the supremacy of American contemporary art, nor was he alone in drawing a hard distinction between U.S. modernism and European geometric abstraction. His concept of the deductive structure might be understood as a sub-category of the 'all-over composition,' a term coined by Clement Greenberg to describe abstract

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the colours themselves.' Stringer, 'Robert Hunter,' memorandum to Jennifer Licht. New York: M.o.M.A., 27 June 1974. The idea that Hunter's inverts the decorative palette is reminiscent of Greenberg's formulation of modernism's relationship to decoration: 'Decoration is the spectre that haunts modernist painting, and part of the latter's formal mission is to find ways of using the decorative against itself.' Clement Greenberg, 'Milton Avery' (1957), in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 39–43, 43.

[13] Michael Fried, 'Three American Painters,' 233–34.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole The Idea of Modern Art*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Also see Laurie J. Monahan, 'Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale,' in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945–1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1990), 369–407.

expressionism's lack of compositional hierarchy and focal point. More than Fried's, Greenberg's writings are shot through with the rhetoric of American nationalism.[16] In 'Post-Painterly Abstraction,' a 1964 essay that describes a type of painting closely related to Hunter's 1966–67 works, Greenberg argued that hard-edge painting was a response to the painterliness of abstract expressionism and thus part of an autochthonous lineage of American art. Post-painterly abstraction, he declared, 'does not constitute a return to the past, a going back to where Synthetic Cubist or geometrical painting left off.' The new cohort of painters, he continued, 'have won their "hardness" from the "softness" of Painterly Abstraction; they have not inherited it from Mondrian, the Bauhaus, Suprematism, or anything else that came before.[17] Growing out of abstract expressionism, a quintessentially American cultural practice, post-painterly abstraction was insulated from the stagnant waters of European art.

Greenberg's writings constitute a robust example of U.S. Cold War confidence that was inherited by a younger generation of critics spearheaded by Fried. In a 1964 interview with Bruce Glaser, Stella and Judd, two of Fried's interlocutors during the 1960s, expressed their distaste for recent European art. Although Stella acknowledged certain formal convergences between his work and that of Victor Vasarely and the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, he rudely dismissed their work: 'I can't think of anything I like less.'[18] He was similarly disdainful of what he called the 'post-Max Bill school,' which he regarded as 'a kind of curiosity—very dreary.'[19] In agreement with Stella, Judd reiterated that there was an 'enormous break' between U.S. modernism and minimalism and European geometric art, and identified 'scale' as a primary point of difference between them.[20] Judd went on to describe Vasarely's work as 'pretty objectionable,' exemplary of the problems with 'European art so

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[16] See Greenberg's dismissal of European critics in 'The European View of American Art' (1950) and his championing of American modernism in 'American-Type Painting' (1955), in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 3: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 59–63, 217–36. The narrative of New York overtaking Paris as the centre of post-war modernism is Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).
[17] Clement Greenberg, 'Post Painterly Abstraction' (1964), in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance*, ed. John O 'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 192–97.
[18] Bruce Glaser, 'Questions to Stella and Judd' (1964–1966), in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), 148–64, 149.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

far,' which he thought was plagued by 'rationalistic philosophy.'[21] Suffice to say, Judd was repelled by any attempt to justify art in mathematical or scientific terms.

Stella, for his part, concentrated on what he saw as an important difference in compositional approach between U.S. and European artists. 'European geometric painters really strive for what I call relational painting. The basis of their whole idea is balance. You do something in one corner and you balance it with something in the other corner.'[22] By contrast, the American attitude towards composition was characterised by unified or 'non-relational' symmetry, Stella alleged, in which 'the balance factor isn't important. We're not trying to jockey everything around.'[23]

> As soon as you use any kind of relational placement for symmetry, you get into a terrible kind of fussiness … When you're always making these delicate balances, it seems to present too many problems.[24]

According to Stella—but also Judd, Fried and Greenberg—while European artists were worrying over obsolete compositional issues, artists on their side of the Atlantic were busy producing bold and unified compositions, serial sculptural arrangements and painted designs that echoed the shape of their canvas.

But what relevance does this have to the argument about Hunter's paintings of 1966–67? An important development in Australian 1960s art that Hunter participated in was the belief that the world centre of the avant-garde art had shifted from Europe to America. Curator John Stringer stated that during the mid-century Australian artists acknowledged that their artistic influences originated in Europe, primarily London, but 'with the 1960s this monopoly was broken.' 'New York enjoyed supreme status,' Stringer claimed. 'Though not without challenge, Manhattan's position as the leading centre of world culture was gradually gaining acceptance.'[25] Hunter's engagement with American art is thoroughly documented. Like Hickey, Jacks and Rooney, Hunter's embrace of hard-edge painting coincided with the arrival in Melbourne of the visiting American artist Doolin. In 1967, Hunter's encounter at

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[21] Ibid, 151.
[22] Ibid, 149.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid, 150.
[25] John Stringer, 'Cultivating The Field,' 16.

the N.G.V. with Ad Reinhardt's black paintings in *Two Decades of American Art*, the M.o.M.A. travelling exhibition (also visited by Hickey) that according to Patrick McCaughey 'dramatically increased the desire to be identified with the strong currents of contemporary American practice,' was a pivotal moment in his artistic trajectory.[26] Hunter's stay in New York in 1968–69 nurtured his taste for American minimalism, which was later consolidated through his affiliation with sculptor Carl Andre, who he befriended at the New Delhi Triennial in 1971 (see Chapter 7).

If during the 1960s Australian artists, of whom Hunter is exemplary in this respect, focused their attention on New York, it is conceivable that the hostility towards European art displayed by their American contemporaries shaped Australian artists' and critics' attitudes towards European art. It is conceivable, too, that this bias would be echoed in art-historical writing—at least, this is one explanation for the absence of discussion about European art in accounts of Hunter's work. Yet the notion that Hunter's work can be understood simply as a mediation between Australian and American art yields an overly narrow view of his work. It is possible to discern, for example, echoes of European art in Hunter's works of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which were significantly shaped by his growing intimacy with American art. Yet there is a distinctly European inflection to the earliest hard-edge paintings, which were produced before the teenage Hunter's aesthetic preferences had been shaped by a diet of American art magazines and catalogues.

Due to Hunter's numerous connections to American art, art historians have tended to position his work within a predominantly American network of influences. For some, it has seemed odd to discuss Hunter's work, and regional hard-edge painting more broadly, in the context of European art at all. This is the opinion of art historian Jim Berryman, who claims that Elwyn Lynn's and Royston Harpur's essays in the catalogue for *The Field*, the exhibition that launched Hunter into the Australian cultural imagination, overstate the historical indebtedness of the exhibited works to European art of the early twentieth century and thus largely overlook 'the more obvious American prototypes.' '*The Field*'s indebtedness to the then-recent New York art world,' Berryman alleges, 'was unequivocal.'[27] However, Berryman exaggerates the European orientation of the catalogue essays; alongside a

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[26] Patrick McCaughey, 'The Transition from "Field" to Court,' in *Australian Art, 1960–1986: Field to Figuration*, ed. Robert Lindsay (Melbourne: N.G.V., 1987), 8–16, 11.
[27] Jim Berryman, 'The Rhetoric of the New: "The Field" and the Foundations of an Institutional Avant-Garde in Australia,' *Journal of Australian Studies* 38, no. 3, 331–344, 339.

republished essay by Greenberg and a Greenberg-inflected essay by Patrick McCaughey, Lynn's and Harpur's texts situate the art of *The Field* primarily in relation to American post-war painting. In the context of the customarily Americanist literature on *The Field*, the brief moments when they incongruously attempt to view selected works in relation to European modern art is precisely what makes their essays interesting. In what follows I investigate Hunter's links with European geometric art, in order to complicate the art-historical context in which it has been embedded, and through this reframe it as a complex mediation of Australian, American and European sources.

Balance, Measure, Reason

Due to their large scale and symmetrical composition derived from the physical shape of the canvas support, Hunter's 1966–67 hard-edge paintings have a strongly American inflection, but in other respects they deviate from the compositional sensibility associated with modernist or minimalist painting. Unlike the monochromatic stripe paintings of Stella, where the sole chromatic decision was which paint tin to open, Hunter's polychromatic paintings involved further decisions about the choice of colours and their distribution across the canvas. As such, the interplay between structure and colour in Hunter's work evokes the work of several proponents of European geometric painting linked to the Swiss artist, architect and theorist Max Bill.

A way to understand what was at stake in Hunter's selection and organisation of colour is to turn to his remark about his 1966–67 works: 'all I was doing was balancing out colours and forms so that nothing had any precedence and nothing was important visually.'[28] What leaps out here is Hunter's mention of 'balance,' the very principle that Stella disparagingly aligned with the European geometric tradition. Equipped with limited art-historical education, it is doubtful whether Hunter used the reference knowingly; nonetheless, the comment suggests that this principle, theorised by Mondrian, may have seeped into his compositional approach. If balance persists in Hunter's works, though, it is not through structure (which largely derives from the predetermined shape of the support) but rather through colour. In Hunter's randomly coloured grid painting, discussed above in relation to Mondrian's 1919 *Composition*, the distribution of colour conforms to the ideal of balance in

[28] de Berg, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' 6.

the sense of formal dynamism, working in tandem with the symmetrical structure to yield a stimulating optical rhythm.

A different kind of balance, predetermined and mathematical, can be discerned in Hunter's Logan and Wesfarmers paintings. The integration of structure and tone in these works indicates that they are the outcome of a compositional plan. In their capacity as material communications of an idea or technical realisations of an immaterial form, these paintings resonate with the idea of Concrete art developed in Paris around 1930 by Mondrian's friend and rival van Doesburg. A core principle of Concrete art, Alexander Alberro explains, was the translation of ideas into pictorial language: 'The Concrete artwork exists as a whole in consciousness before it is translated into materials'; it was seen as the 'concretisation of thought.'[29] Van Doesburg's rationalist conception of art was formalised in his 1930 text 'Concrete Art: The Basis of Concrete Painting':

> we use mathematical data (whether Euclidian or not) … that is to say, intellectual means … *Everything is measurable*, even spirit with its one hundred and ninety-nine dimensions … Absolute clarity must be sought.[30]

Following the death of Van Doesburg in 1931, Max Bill led the cause of Concrete Art, advocating a similarly rationalist conception of artistic production, 'a new form of art … which … could be founded to quite a substantial degree on a mathematical line of approach to its content.'[31] Like Bill and van Doesburg, Hunter emphasised the mathematical foundations of his paintings, which he claimed have 'a rational, logical basis.'[32] Moreover, there are affinities between Hunter's early hard-edge paintings and the work of certain post-Concrete artists: for example Bill's designs *Stabilisierter Kern* (1962) and *1–8 in Four Groups* (1955–1963), and Swiss artist Richard Paul Lohse's *Gruppe von 8 Quadraten Mit Vier Rechtecken* (1952–75) and *Colour Groups around an Oxide-Yellow Center* (1952–73).

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[29] Alexander Alberro, *Abstraction in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-Twentieth-Century Latin American Art* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2017), 18.
[30] Theo van Doesburg, 'Comments on the Basis of Concrete Painting' (1930) in Joost Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 181–182
[31] Max Bill, 'The Mathematical Approach in Contemporary Art' (1949), in *Biennale Nürnberg Kostruktive Kunst: Elemente und Prinzipen* (Nürnberg: Institut für Moderne Kunst, 1969), 110.
[32] Gary Catalano, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' *Building a Picture: Interviews with Australian Artists* (Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 78–86, 84.

Bill's and Lohse's compositional integration of colour and structure, not to mention their organisation of modular pictorial elements into mathematically ordered systems, appears as an important European antecedent for Hunter's work.[33]

Yet Hunter's conception of his role as an artist significantly departed from the Concrete artists. The Concrete artists saw themselves as participating in the rationalisation of culture, their works objective experiments undertaken in the name of science. Hunter, too, agreed that the artwork originated in the domains of knowledge and reason; however, he also thought that through the 'mystical' and 'ultimately unexplainable' artistic process, the known was transformed into the 'unknown.'[34] Hunter's comment accords with Hickey's remarks about 'higher perception,' reflecting the pair's mystical attitude towards aesthetic activity pair during the late 1960s. Unlike rationalist proponents of geometric art, Hunter believed his work transcended the domain of the concept; rather than expanding knowledge, the mathematical composition served the non-rational.

Comparing Hunter's mystical abstractions with the rationalist abstractions of Concrete artists not only reveals the investment of divergent ideologies in near-identical forms. It also indicates that these abstract modes cannot be understood as entirely separate. Similar to the ambivalent signification of the modernist grid discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the bipolar relation between rationalist and mystical, irrationalist and objectivist abstraction brings into focus the nature of the relation itself. Lynn Zelevansky's analysis of Max Bense's reference, in 1966, to the 'rational aura' of Bill's work bears this out. 'The contradiction inherent in Bense's phrase,' she argues, 'underscores the difficulty of demystifying abstraction' and evokes its resistance to totalising interpretations.[35]

A similar failure to eradicate the extra-conceptual dimension of artistic production is seen in the Russian-American composer and theorist Joseph Schillinger's *The Mathematical Basis of the Arts* (a book almost finished at the time of the author's death in 1948 that remained unpublished until 1976), which argues that 'works of art may be produced by

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[33] For a useful overview of European mathematical abstraction between 1920 and 1945 see the chapter 'The Lure of Geometry' in Brandon Taylor, *After Constructivism* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 63–94.
[34] Catalano, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' 84.
[35] For more on the mathematical basis of Concrete art, see Lynn Zelevansky, 'Beyond Geometry: Objects, Systems, Concepts,' in *Beyond Geometry: Experiments in Form, 1940s–70s* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2004), 9–33. Max Bense, *Max Bill*, trans. George Staempli (London: Hannover Gallery, 1966), 16.

scientific synthesis' and that 'originality is the product of knowledge, not guesswork.'[36] Just as Schillinger's preoccupation with the artistic use of mathematics betrays a quasi-religious devotion to his cause, the arithmetical sequences and algorithmic expressions generated through his rationalist enterprise are themselves amenable to a contemplative reading. The inverse is equally true: in spite of Hunter's intention to use geometry to conjure the unknown, his mystical abstractions are also illustrations of numerical sequences or formalisations of abstract concepts.

The work of Josef Albers, the German-American artist and educator who taught Bill at the Bauhaus in 1920s before relocating to the U.S. in 1933, can also be compared to Hunter.[37] While it is premeditated and orderly, Albers' work cannot be straightforwardly identified with the lineage of mathematical abstraction—an indication of the hybridity of European geometric painting.[38] In the introduction to his influential textbook *Interaction of Colour* (1963), an 'experimental way of studying colour and of teaching colour' that was taught at R.M.I.T., where Hunter studied in 1965 and 1966, Albers deliberately distanced himself from the rationalism of the 'post-Max Bill school':

> What counts here—first and last—is not so-called knowledge
> of so-called facts, but vision—seeing.
> Seeing here implies *Schauen* (as in *Weltanschauung*) and is coupled
> With fantasy, with imagination.[39]

As this passage shows, Albers believed that perception has a relationship to understanding, but his assertion that vision harbours an unknowable element resonates with the mystical inflection of Hunter's painting. Similar to Hunter, whose hard-edge works somewhat resemble certain didactic diagrams in *Interaction*, Albers rejected the idea that vision could be boiled down to sensory information: the latter, he thought, was always accompanied by

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[36] Joseph Schillinger, *The Mathematical Basis of the Arts* (1948) (New York: Da Capo, 1976), 3.
[37] The first mention of a possible link between Hunter and Albers is in Robert Hunter, 'Robert Hunter Interview,' *Pataphysics* (Autumn 1989), 3–5, 4. Stephen discusses the link between them in 'Robert Hunter: At the Southern Edge of the Great Iceberg of Minimalism,' 79.
[38] Albers' admiration for the mystical abstraction of Reinhardt, to whom he offered a guest professorship at Yale in 1952, suggests his distance from rationalist abstraction. For more on the connection between Albers and Reinhardt see Heinz Liesbrock, *Ad Reinhardt: Last Paintings* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2011).
[39] Josef Albers, *Interaction of Colour* (1962) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 1, 2.

fantasy and imagination. This is demonstrated through Albers' investigation of the perceptual interaction of structure and colour in *Homage to the Square* (1950–76), in which four basic designs of either three or four nested colour squares form the basis of hundreds of paintings featuring different chromatic combinations four of which were exhibited in *Two Decades of American Painting*. Albers' paintings lead the spectator towards a self-conscious examination of perception, a heightened 'visual acuity,' while at the same time avoiding the reduction of the medium to a performative demonstration of this process.[40] Like Hunter, Albers' paintings are not simply transparent transmissions of conceptual content. Hunter denied this charge even more strenuously: while involving calculation and measurement, he invariably emphasised the irreducible element of intuition in painting.

The figure with whom I will conclude this brief survey of Hunter's European connections is the French artist François Morellet. As with Hunter's hard-edge paintings, Morellet's art of the 1950s and 1960s utilises precise calculations and measurements. Making extensive use of the grid, his paintings frequently centre on the relationship between geometric structure and chromatic-tonal relationships: in *Bleu-Jaune-Rouge* (1956), for example, the relationship between the two is predetermined and interdependent; by contrast, in *Bleu-Vert-Jaune-Orange* (1954), Morellet used chance to determine the colouration of the work, a mode of production that distances it from Concrete art.[41] Despite the parallels between Morellet's and Hunter's art, the former's statements about his own work were often rationalistic. This was a lasting consequence of his encounter with Bill's work in the early 1950s; what Morellet found compelling about Bill was his rejection of Mondrian's intuitive and arbitrary method in favour of one that took mathematics as its point of departure.[42] In a 1962 text, Morellet argued that painting

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[40] Andrew McNamara has adapted the term 'visual acuity'—which means 'visual intelligence,' an expression of thought through vision— from the late writings of Ian Burn, believing it to be a helpful way to describe the subtle perceptual effects of Hunter's painting. 'Inversions, Conversions, Aberrations: Visual Acuity and the Erratic Chemistry of Art-Historical Transmission in a Transcultural Situation,' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 16, no. 1, 2016, 3–21.

[41] For further discussion of Morellet's use of chance see Yve-Alain Bois, 'Chance Encounters: Kelly, Cage, Morellet,' in *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art*, ed. Julia Robinson (Barcelona: M.A.C.B.A., 2009), 188–203.

[42] Jan van der Marck, 'François Morellet or the Problem of Taking Art Seriously,' in *François Morellet: Systems* (Buffalo, New York: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1984), 9–15.

> should be guided by a basis of controllable elements which follow a programme in systematic progression … The development of an experience should be realised in itself, almost without a programmer.[43]

For Morellet, the adoption of predetermined, systematic compositional strategy expelled the personality of the artist from the artwork, cancelling the possibility of understanding it through the notions of intuition or psychology. A decade later he reaffirmed his anti-expressive agenda: 'I have reduced my intervention, my creativity and my sensibility (I hope) to a minimum,' he declared—'I can consequently announce that everything that you find, apart from my small systems (and if this were nothing) belongs to you as observer.'[44] Although Morellet's remarks diverge from Hunter's irrationalism, the French artist's belief in the neutrality of geometry and anti-expressiveness resonates with the terms in which Hunter's work has been understood.

The following section proposes that Hunter's program was guided by an anti-subjectivist orientation broadly similar to that of Morellet. Shifting my attention to the 'white paintings' of 1968, his next group of hard-edge works, I will argue that Hunter's decision to mute his palette enhances, rather than diminishes, the function of colour. Hunter's apparent privileging of structure, that is, remains in dialogue with the persistence of chromatic choices. My argument is that the systematic combination of both is the basis for Hunter's attempt to produce paintings that sideline the subjectivity of the artist. While this tendency developed in Hunter's earliest hard-edge paintings, the near-invisibility of the 1968 works bring the artist's desire to erase the figure of the artist as an expressive being into focus more emphatically.

Muting the Palette

1966 marks Hunter's earliest experiments with hard-edge painting, but it was not until May 1968, with his solo exhibition of white paintings at Tolarno Galleries, that he met with critical and commercial success (fig. 5.4). All thirteen of Hunter's 'diaphanous, haunting paintings,' as they were described by G.R. Lansell, were sold before the show had even

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[43] François Morellet, 'For an Experimental Programmed Painting' (1962), in *François Morellet* (Berlin: Nationalgalerie Berlin, 1977), 61–62.
[44] François Morellet, 'Communication' (1972), in *François Morellet* (Berlin: Nationalgalerie Berlin, 1977), 72.

opened.[45] In many respects, the new works remained within the parameters established in those of the last two years: the five-foot square canvases are populated by symmetrical and near-symmetrical grid compositions. But there are significant differences: unlike the earlier hard-edge paintings, circular and diagonal forms populate several white paintings; their most immediately noticeable difference from their predecessors, however, is at the level of colour. While the systematic use of colour persisted, the colours of his earlier work are replaced by a delicate palette of whites, off-whites and near-whites.

Hunter started working on the white paintings in January 1968, but even before the commencement of the series, he had begun to lighten his palette. The Wesfarmers painting, with its pastel hues, foreshadows the ghostly colours of the works exhibited at Tolarno. The earliest 'white paintings' indicate that the discovery of lightness, or whiteness, which would became a pressing concern for Hunter for the remainder of this career, was more a gradual process than a Eureka moment. For example, *No. 1* (which was not included in the Tolarno show) and *No. 4* (fig. 5.5), in the Q.A.G. collection, with their pinks and greens, are more vibrant than later works such as *No. 8* (fig. 5.6) in the N.G.V. collection, where red and yellow appear as tints rather than solid colours. In the de Berg interview, Hunter narrated this loss of colour as part of a 'logical process of realising what I was doing in the first place was irrelevant. The fact that I was using colour didn't mean anything, so why use colour?'[46] Hunter's scepticism towards colour developed simultaneously with his interest in medium-specificity, which is the terms in which he spoke about the Tolarno exhibition:

> It was purely about: what are we doing painting? What's painting? What the fuck, anyone can paint a landscape and it can be nice and we can enjoy it and it's nice for everyone. It was just talking about painting.'[47]

For Hunter, the task of reducing the medium to its essence demanded the eradication of colour. His remarks echoed those of Patrick McCaughey in his *Age* review of the Tolarno show, which stressed Hunter's modernist orientation: 'He has started his career as a painter by asking just what a painting is or can be.'[48] Undoubtedly, the optical subtlety of Hunter's

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[45] G.R. Lansell, 'Small Mercies,' *Nation*, 25 May 1968, 20.
[46] De Berg, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' 6.
[47] Hunter in Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' 55, n. 54.
[48] Patrick McCaughey, 'Dazzling Debut by Young Artist,' *The Age*, 15 May 1968, 6.

paintings is bound up with their modernist credentials. Since 1968, critics and historians have repeatedly claimed that Hunter's paintings only reveal themselves through extended viewing. McCaughey noted that 'at first glance these thirteen paintings seem nothing but thirteen white squares … in each instance we have to discover the colours for ourselves. It takes time: the revelation happens slowly.'[49] McCaughey claimed that only a disciplined spectator could perceive such 'ghostly, barely discernible form[s].'[50] 'These are paintings,' he said, 'where you must look with every ounce of concentration, every fibre of mind, to recognise the presence of the forms.'[51] Describing Hunter's paintings to Jacks in New York, Hickey claimed that 'one's eye is constantly kept in motion, attempting vainly to capture the painting in its totality.'[52] Later, Catalano described the perceptual elusiveness of Hunter's work from a different perspective, de-emphasising the viewer's voluntary powers of attention and asserting the paintings' elicitation of an involuntary perceptual response: 'your whole sensory organism becomes unnaturally acute as you stare at these almost-white paintings,' he claimed.[53] Mary Eagle has similarly remarked:

> Even the viewer standing face to face with one of Hunter's paintings finds the image virtually imperceptible at first glance. The work actually never shows itself as a stable visual entity, but is revealed fugitively as a pattern of close relations.[54]

These critical responses indicate that Hunter's deceptively simple paintings solicit prolonged contemplation: it takes time for the determined viewer to perceptually acclimatise to them. Perched on the threshold of invisibility, they thematise the property of 'opticality' that critics such as Greenberg and Fried claimed as essential to modernist painting. Yet, as Tom Nicholson has observed, the sculptural dimensions of Hunter's work complicates its relationship to modernist theory, which stipulates that painting differentiate itself from other mediums.[55] Hunter's textured surfaces more readily align with Concrete and Neo-Concrete

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Dale Hickey, letter to Robert Jacks, mid-May 1968.
[53] Gary Catalano, 'A Tale of Two Victors,' *The Age*, 7 May 1986. Catalano and Eagle (see note 55) are discussing Hunter's work in general, but their remarks are especially pertinent to the Tolarno paintings.
[54] Mary Eagle, *A Story of Australian Painting* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1994), 272.
[55] Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' 13.

art's reconceptualisation of the painting as a three-dimensional entity, or, indeed, the sculptural exploration of the medium by the Zero Group or its Dutch variant Nul, especially in the work of Jan Schoonhoven.[56] If Hunter's works are to be considered modernist, their relief patterning, a feature that distinguishes them from this field as it is usually conceived, is crucial to their identity as such.

Hunter's modernism is manifest in his almost-colourless palette as well as his use of geometry. 'Geometry, the science of space, its measurements and relationships, has always been the basic rule of painting.'[57] This 1912 comment by the French poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire sheds light on the way that proto-abstractionists regarded geometry, but it also resonates with the discourse of 1960s abstraction. Another remark by Apollinaire further illuminates the connection between geometry and the essentialising impulse of 1960s painting: 'geometry is to the plastic arts what grammar is to the art of the writer.'[58] The idea of geometry as the 'basic rule' of painting explains its appeal to 1960s artists immersed in the discourse of medium-specificity: geometry would allow painting to investigate its own foundations. The apparent self-evidence of geometry, its apparent value-free neutrality, was viewed by Hunter as a means to tear art away from the inessential or superfluous. When faced with Stella's stripe paintings, Andre remarked: 'Art excludes the unnecessary.'[59] Hunter's white paintings are motivated by a similar ideal, which evokes an unusual

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[56] The morphological connection of Hunter's paintings to Schoonhoven's is a topic that demands further investigation. See David W. Courtney, *Jan Schoonhoven: A Retrospective* (Florida: Ritter Art Gallery, 1987). Existing discourse on the overlap between Nul and American minimalism—Schoonhoven, for example, has polemicised that minimalism was 'the American version of Zero'—suggests the possibility of reading Hunter's work as an antipodean manifestation of the Dutch movement. Jan Schoonhoven, 'Inspiration in White: Diana Stigter and Pietje Tegenbosch in conversation with Jan Schoonhoven,' in *nul = 0: The Dutch Avant-Garde of the 1960s in a European Context* (Belgium: N.A.i., 2011), 174–78, 176. Also see Renate Wiehager, 'Circa 1960: Abstraction, Concrete Art, and Minimalist Trends in Art, Academies and Galleries, and Interaction with the American Avant-Garde. A Roundtable Discussion with Hans Mayer and Franz Erhard Walter,' in *Minimalism in Germany: The Sixties*, ed. Renate Wiehager (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 87–101. Nul artist Henk Peeters 1964 remarks further illuminate the intersection between Nul and American minimalist and conceptual art, in particular the writings of LeWitt (discussed in Chapter 7): '"The process of creation is … completely unimportant and uninteresting; a machine can do it," Peeters said. "The personal element lies in the idea and no longer in the *manufacture*."' Quoted in Antoon Melissen, 'The Dutch Avant-Garde of the 1960s in a European Context,' in *nul = 0: The Dutch Avant-Garde of the 1960s in a European Context* (Belgium: N.A.i., 2011), 12–23, 14–15.
[57] Guillaume Apollinaire, 'On Painting' (1913), *The Cubist Painters*, trans. Peter Read, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 15.
[58] Apollinaire, 'On Painting,' 15.
[59] Carl Andre, 'Preface to Stripe Painting,' in *Sixteen Americans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 76.

temporality evoked by Amelia Groom's comment that 'to paint a canvas completely in white is to paradoxically cover a thing with its own ground, to "clear it" by affirming its origin as its endpoint.'[60] While Hunter's work broadly aligns with modernist essentialism, it also shows the impossibility of reducing art to its essence.[61] If modernist painting is defined as the search for the self-sameness of painting, then the delicate variations between the white paintings reflect an awareness that sameness is the best way to bring forth difference.

The obscure compositionality of Hunter's works sees them approach the paradigm of the 'blank painting,' a term invented by Charles Harrison to describe a species of painting that 'resist[s] being cited in support of any specific identification or association that it might be supposed to carry.'[62] A photograph of *No. 8* at the N.G.V. (fig. 5.7) shows how easy it is to mistake one of Hunter's paintings for a blank white monochrome, as we know these deceptively white canvases are populated by an array of geometric forms and chromatic tints distances them from the monochrome.[63] Hunter never abandoned the task of structure and colour—they merely appear on the brink of imperceptibility. The near-imperceptibility of the white paintings marked a new direction for Hunter. It might be speculated that these works were influenced by Jasper Johns' *White Flag* (1955), which Hunter presumably saw at *Two Decades of American Painting*. But Hunter never mentioned Johns' white-on-white composition. Perhaps he forgot about it, so enamoured was he with three 'black paintings' by

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[60] Amelia Groom, 'There's Nothing to See Here: Erasing the Monochrome,' *e-flux*, no. 37, 2012. Groom is elaborating on a famous passage by philosopher Gilles Deleuze, which inverts the commonsense idea of a painting being built from a tabula rasa, instead arguing that a canvas begins full of images, forms and colours, which must be whittled away into the finished work: 'it is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface …[it is a mistake to think] that the painter does not have to cover a blank surface but rather would have to empty it out, clear it, clean it.' Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), trans. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Continuum Books, 2003), 71.

[61] This point is influenced by Yve-Alain Bois' essay 'Painting, The Task of Mourning' (1986), in *Painting as Model*, 229–244. The trope of the historical inexhaustibility of abstraction is taken up by Briony Fer in *The Continuous Line*.

[62] Charles Harrison, *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2001), 143. On the topic of blankness in painting, see Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, 'Blankness as a Signifier,' *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (Autumn, 1997), 159–175.

[63] For a survey of near-white artworks see Carel Blotkamp, *Basically White* (London: I.C.A., 1974). Also see Stephen Prokopoff, *White on White: The White Monochrome in the 20th Century* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1971).

Ad Reinhardt, which he later claimed had made a deep and lasting impression on him, in the same room, hung directly opposite.[64]

An influential proponent of blank painting during the 1960s, Reinhardt declared that his works, which have been called 'signs which refuse to signify,' were the 'last paintings one could make.'[65] Similar to Hunter's works, in Reinhardt's black paintings chromatic differences and tonal variations are almost imperceptible. Bois' account of one of these Reinhardt's paintings also holds for Hunter: 'At first there is nothing, but gradually, of course, one discerns almost nothing, evanescent entities, phantoms of colours and shapes one can never be quite sure on has seen.'[66] 'What one sees in front of a "black" Reinhardt,' Bois concluded, 'is the narrativisation of one's gaze.'[67] In other words, an awareness of the experience of viewing is folded back into the experience itself; the painting tells the viewer a story about the act of viewing. Another commonality between Hunter and Reinhardt is their use of the five-foot square canvas; used by Hunter for his white paintings as well as selected earlier hard-edge works, Reinhardt once described the format as 'neutral, shapeless.'[68] The triple symmetry of the square was uniquely suited to the creation of the condition of timeless stasis sought by Reinhardt.[69] For Reinhardt, the square was also well suited to the task of avoiding the 'dynamic equilibrium' devised by Mondrian, an artist he nonetheless intensely admired. This stationary quality recurs is fundamental to most but not all of Hunter's white paintings; as Nicholson observes, the arch-way structure of *No. 6* (fig. 5.8) (which is located in the left and is partially repeated on the right), and the curved propeller form of *No. 11* (fig. 5.9), imply movement.[70] The relief patterning of Hunter's works further differentiate them from those of Reinhardt, who obscured the edges of his forms.[71]

From 1966 onwards the square was the starting point of Hunter's compositional process, which typically progressed to the division of the square into a two-by-two or three-

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[64] 'Hunter still remembered the [*Two Decades* exhibition] as "the Reinhardt one" many years later.' Hunter interview with Nicholson, 22 April 1995. Cited in Tom Nicholson, 'Still Flow: Robert Hunter's Paintings 1985–2014,' *Robert Hunter* (Melbourne: N.G.V., 2018), 89–95, 117, n. 8.
[65] Bruce Glaser, 'An Interview with Ad Reinhardt' (1966–67), in *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 12–23, 13.
[66] Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Limit of Almost,' *Ad Reinhardt* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 11–33, 28.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ad Reinhardt, '[The Black-Square Paintings]' (1955), in *Art as Art*, 82–83, 82.
[69] See Margit Rowell, 'Ad Reinhardt: Style as Recurrence,' in *Ad Reinhardt and Colour* (New York: Guggenheim, 1980), 11–26, 23.
[70] Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' 15.
[71] Dodge, 'Robert Hunter and Minimal Art,' 20.

by-three grid as seen in *Untitled* and *No. 10* respectively. A year after his Tolarno exhibition, Hunter declared that his paintings were 'on squares because… there's no reason not to work on a square.'[72] 'The square,' he later remarked, 'is an absolute base.'[73] Hunter's justifications for the square are unsatisfying because they are purely rhetorical; before all else, what they communicate is the self-justifying power of the square in his eyes. Unsurprising given the compatibility of the two forms, Hunter's assertion of the self-evidence of the square is reminiscent of his comment, quoted earlier, about the nothingness of the grid. Like the grid, the self-evidence of the square is symptomatic of its semantically indeterminate position between materialism and spiritualism. The writings of Kasimir Malevich, whose *White on White* (1919) Ann Galbally identified as a precedent for Hunter's white paintings, convey an awareness of the ability of the square to animate these seemingly irreconcilable readings.[74] Malevich described the square as 'the creation of intuitive reason,' the 'zero of form': 'If religion knows God … it has known zero … If science knows nature, it has known zero … If art knows harmony, rhythm and beauty, it has known zero … If someone knows the absolute, he has known zero.'[75] For Malevich, the square unified the divisions between God, science, nature and beauty.

Yet historical interpretations of the square in 1960s art have tended to emphasise its rationalism. Buchloh argues that the appeal of the form at that time derived from its empirically verifiable, self-referential structure; due to the fact that all its sides are identical, referring to one another, he claims that the square is a visual analogue of the linguistic form of the tautology (a = a). According to Buchloh, the seemingly unimpeachable authority of the

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[72] De Berg, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' 6.
[73] Catalano, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' 79.
[74] Ann Galbally, 'Is it New ... or Updated Old?,' *The Age*, 29 July 1970, 10. For a discussion of Malevich's reception in America see Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Availability of Malevich,' in *Malevich and the American Legacy*, eds. Alison McDonald and Ealan Wingate (New York: Gagosian Gallery 2011), 21–32.
[75] Kasimir Malevich, 'The Suprematist Mirror' (1923), in *Essays on Art 1915–1933*, ed. Troels Anderson, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (London: Rapp and Whiting, 1969), 224–225. Russian Suprematist poet and mathematician Vladimir Khlebnikov's portrayal of himself on the verge of death as 'a number, returned to numbers' resonates with Hunter's tendency towards desubjectivisation: the subject, on the threshold of disappearance, presents itself through the impersonal terms of number, ratio and proportion. 'Numbers, eternal numbers, sound in the beyond; I hear their distant conversation. Number calls to number; number calls me home.' Velimir Khlebnikov, 'Zangezi,' in *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov, Volume 2 (Prose, Plays, and Supersagas)*, ed. Ronald Vroon, trans. Paul Schmidt (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 331–374, 338.

square in the 1960s derived from its logical veneer. However, unlike artists such as Bill who saw geometry as illustrative of scientific knowledge and mathematical order, Hunter hoped that the division of the square would result in the manifestation of a form that defies reason and embodies a mystical mode of perception. 'As I see it,' he said, 'anything that comes out of a painting has to be something that is not known beforehand. Working with the knowns is the space for the unknown to occur.'[76]

When the artwork is used to conjure the unknown, what happens to the subjectivity of the artist? According to Catalano, Hunter's paintings were formed through his efforts to avoid the task of composition:

> all that matters is the working-out of the elementary geometric system that underpins each work. Geometry has sustained many non-representational artists, but Hunter's use of it derives from factors other than the harmony or certainty of the knowledge it provides: he deploys it because it excuses him from the need to compose his pictures. Geometry—what was once called divine geometry—does that for him.[77]

According to Catalano, geometry excused Hunter from composing his pictures. This can be rephrased: the procurement of the unknown implies a certain abnegation of the artist's subjectivity. Nicholson has argued that Hunter's systematic sidelining of composition parallels the automatism of Jackson Pollock; however, as demonstrated above, his 1960s works bear close similarities to the arithmetical structures of post-Concrete geometric painting.[78] The word composition (which has its etymological roots in the Latin 'compere,' which means 'to put together') implies an actor behind the compositional act. When we talk about a Hunter painting, or in fact any painting, we presume that it harbours the painter's intention. One way to think about a painting, to borrow a phrase from Michael Baxandall, is in terms of a 'pattern of intentions.'[79] Thierry de Duve has argued along similar lines that

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[76] Catalano, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' 81.
[77] Catalano, 'Robert Hunter,' 77. The term 'non-representative artists' has been changed to 'non-representational artists' to avoid confusion.
[78] Tom Nicholson, 'Still Flow,' 94. Although Nicholson's discussion centres on Hunter's works between 1985 and 2014, it is relevant to my argument about the non-compositionality of Hunter's late 1960s paintings.
[79] Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

intention is a necessary condition of painting: 'before they are anything else,' he has said, 'all pictures are declarations of the intention to make a picture.[80] Insofar as a painting is composed, the result of a deliberate action, it contains an irreducibly subjective element.

If in order to qualify as such a painting must be composed, efforts by the painter to minimise their involvement in the compositional process yields a type of painting that is ambivalent with regards to its classification as such, which is premised on a paradoxical renunciation of subjectivity. One way to theorise this paradox of Hunter's work is through the concept of non-composition elaborated by Bois. Viewed through the prism of non-composition, the constitutive tension in Hunter's work between the expression and erasure of subjectivity becomes visible. According to Bois, non-compositional techniques, which reappear in different guises throughout the history of modern and contemporary art, are attempts to curb or cancel the subjective element of the process of artistic production.[81] As theorised by Bois, non-composition results in the expulsion of subjectivity (the will, the mind, the ego) from the finished work, dissociating the artwork from the humanistic conception of the artist giving concrete expression to their inner world. Hunter's compositional division of the square, his derivation of the internal structure of his paintings from the outer shape of the canvas, is a primary example of non-composition.

After establishing the parameters of the compositional system, Hunter played a marginal role in its execution. The painting stipulated what would happen next, as though it

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[80] Thierry de Duve, 'Intentionality and Art Historical Methodology: A Case Study,' *nonsite* 6 (2012), http://nonsite.org/article/intentionality-and-art-historical-methodology-a-case-study, accessed 23 June 2015.

[81] In an early essay on non-composition, Bois argues that the reductivist compositions of Polish artists Wladyslaw Strzeminski' and Katarzyna Kobro were motivated by the search for a logical mode of pictorial composition that eliminated artistic subjectivity. See Bois, 'Strzemiński and Kobro: In Search of Motivation' (1981), in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1990), 123–56. Building on Bois' definition of non-composition, Howard Singerman has sought to explain how it poses a challenge to artistic intention: 'Composition is an intended, ordered relationship of discrete parts, a relationship that suggests—that at once builds and needs—an interiority, a solid plotted depth that fills both the artist as intentional actor and the visual field, however flat, that underpins the painting: one is an analogue for the order. That space and its meaning are what is at stake in the work against composition.' 'Non-Compositional Effects, or the Process of Painting in 1970,' in *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 1 (2003), 125–50, 132. Also see Benjamin Buchloh, 'Robert Watts: Animate Objects – Inanimate Subjects,' *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts – Events, Objects, Documents*, (New York: Columbia University, 1999), 7–26. For a related discussion of the author as a modern construction, an analysis that implies the possibility of its deconstruction, see the much-quoted essay by Bois's doctoral supervisor Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author'(1968). *Image–Music–Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang), 142–148, 142–43.

had an agency of its own: objectivity asserted itself and subjectivity was sidelined.[82] The resulting painting, then, would be objectively generated by the grid itself, as though Hunter did not make the picture, but rather the picture made itself: a miraculous act of autogenesis. Here Hunter's project reveals the latent mysticism within rationalist abstraction's desire to sacrifice subjectivity in the attainment of pure objectivity. As the figure of the artist as an expressive being recedes, the unknown and irrational emerge.

Techniques of non-composition, such as those adopted by Hunter, are techniques of desubjectivisation, but this does not mean subjectivity disappears altogether. Rather, the non-compositional painting merely cultivates the illusion of vanquished subjectivity. Hunter's decision was to avoid deciding, but the verb 'avoid' implies intention, deliberateness, subjectivity. Fashioned after the look of objectivity, Hunter's paintings are in fact highly subjective, always referring to a form-giving agent. Pollard later spoke of Hunter's painting as an exercise in 'making himself invisible … almost like a disappearing act.'[83] And this is exactly what it was: an act. Hunter's elimination of subjectivity is a technique of subjectivation informed by the sentiment of anti-subjectivism percolating within his artistic and cultural context, from Timothy Leary's claim that 'ego-death' was a passage to enlightenment,[84] to D.T. Suzuki's directive to dissolve one's personality in the attainment of *Satori*,[85] to Willie Sypher's argument that modern art is an existentialist search for 'the irreducible minimum of our experience that can be honestly identified as our own,'[86] to

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[82] So far I have been discussing non-composition from the point of view of the sidelined subjectivity, as a means to thwart subjective expression. But it is equally a means by which objectivity asserts itself apart from the artist-subject. A passage from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* makes explicit that Hunter's attempt to remove himself from the compositional process is only part of the complex interplay between subjectivity and objectivity at play in all aesthetic expression: 'Aesthetic expression is the objectification of the non-objective, and in fact in such a fashion that through its objectification it becomes a second-order nonobjectivity: It becomes what speaks out of the artefact not as an imitation of the subject. Yet precisely the objectivation of expression, which coincides with art, requires the subject who makes it and-in bourgeois terms-makes use of his own mimetic impulses. Art is expressive when what is objective, subjectively mediated, speaks, whether this be sadness, energy, or longing. Expression is the suffering countenance of artworks.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 111.

[83] Bruce Pollard interview with David Homewood with Trevor Fuller, 6 November 2017, Richmond. Elsewhere, Pollard has remarked that in Hunter's life and work 'there seems to be an equilibrium between the creation of self and the extinction of self.' Pollard paraphrased in Dodge, 'Robert Hunter and Minimal Art,' 24.

[84] Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the 'Tibetan Book of the Dead'* (New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1964), 35–46.

[85] D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki* (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 103–108.

[86] Willie Sypher, *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art* (New York: Random House, 1962), 4.

Yayoi Kusama's quest for the obliteration of identity and John Cage's admission 'I have nothing to say and I'm saying it.'[87] Guided by a similar ethic of self-abnegation, the white paintings can be understood as expressions of Hunter's paradoxical desire to paint himself out of existence.

Conclusion

This chapter has contributed to the existing discourse on the connection between Hunter's hard-edge paintings and American modernism and minimalism, which were shown to be key points of orientation for the clean brushwork, symmetrical structure and integrated notion of structure and colour characteristic of his late 1960s work. Yet in an effort to overcome the American-bias of Hunter's reception, it expanded the field of reference for his work to include European geometric art, which illuminated aspects of Hunter's work that have previously been ignored; for example, the presence of Mondrian's ideal of 'balance' in his early hard-edge works.

This chapter has further investigated Hunter's relationship to the geometric tradition by comparing his art and ideas to those of several figures tied to Max Bill. The latter reading generated a dense pattern of similarities and differences, morphological as well as ideological, which culminated in a new understanding of Hunter's position within a lineage of abstraction that is far broader than his American influences. This in turn informed the discussion of the project of desubjectivisation undertaken in Hunter's white paintings; whereas rationalists such as Bill believed that the systematisation of structure and colour would result in a new type of logical art, for Hunter the same formal strategy was shaped by a mystical ideal of painting which, rather than the assertion of the objective, called for the negation of subjectivity as an end in itself.

The next chapter examines Hunter's continued pursuit of desubjectivisation in two works from 1970, produced after his first trip to New York. While these works reflect an intense engagement with elements of minimalist and post-minimalist art, the contemplative intent of Hunter's painting, which distances it from rationalist variants of geometric art, similarly distinguishes it from the materialism of orthodox minimalism. Rather than reduce

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[87] John Cage, 'Lecture on Nothing' (1959), in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 109–27, 109.

painting to its objective or literal properties, as will become clear, Hunter's paintings were attempts to overcome the banal reality of the house-painter's materials and techniques of their production.

6. Picturing Minimalism

It is not difficult to understand why Hunter's occasional work as a house painter is so often mentioned in connection to his artistic endeavours. From the use of Dulux house paint, to the impersonal brushwork and the clean edges achieved with masking tape, vital ingredients of his 'white paintings' evoke the materials and techniques of house painting.[1] In spite of this, the domestic and industrial 'non-art' character of his painting has not been examined in depth. The present chapter, which seeks to address this oversight, locates Hunter's work within a dispersed network of modernist and avant-garde practices that test the conventional materiality of painting, a goal pursued in the 1960s with unprecedented intensity by the minimalists.

According to American minimalists such as Judd, to challenge the material and technical orthodoxies of the traditional artistic mediums was not enough: the mediums themselves had to go. Painting's affiliation with the functions of illusion and contemplation, Judd maintained, compromised the 'real' presence of the art object. By embedding Hunter's appropriation of the house painter's methods, tools and supplies in the discourse of minimalism, his painting is seen in terms of an avant-garde logic of negation—the same logic that compelled Hickey's use of industrial paving paint in 1969. The fact that Hunter experienced minimalist and post-minimalist art during his stay in New York in 1968—a formative moment in his aesthetic education—helps to explain the strong connection between formal tendencies of those movements and the paintings he made after his return to Australia. Yet, as I explained in Chapters 2 and 3, the minimalist scene in Melbourne was different: whereas New York minimalism was hostile to painting, minimalism in Melbourne remained

[1] As the story goes, Hunter won five tins of paint in a short story competition for the *Dulux Digest* in 1967 and after that event exclusively used Dulux. Yet I could not locate any copy of *Dulux Digest* that mention the competition that Hunter allegedly won. The March 1968 issue of *Balm News* (Balm being the distributor of Dulux at that time) does include a short article on Hunter 'Artist Works in Spruce.' The article, which reports that Hunter primes his canvas with Dulux 100% White Wundercoat and mixes artist's pigments with Dulux Spruce Vivid White, is accompanied by a photograph of the artist standing before an unknown painting (fig. 6.1). See *Balm News* 13, no. 3 (March 1968), 10. Dulux Australia Archives. Since there is no evidence that Hunter won the short story competition, the story of his prize-winning submission should be regarded not as fact but rather as part of the mythology surrounding his work. Anna Chave has studied minimalist artists' efforts to cultivate biographical narratives surrounding their work. See Anna C. Chave, 'Minimalism and Biography,' *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (March 2000), 149–63 and 'Grave Matters: Positioning Carl Andre at Career's End,' *Art Journal* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014), 5–21.

a predominantly painterly phenomenon. Related to this, in contrast to the literalist sensibility of New York minimalism, Hunter, Hickey and other minimalists at Pinacotheca regarded the artwork as a vehicle for contemplation.

The two untitled paintings of 1970 that are the primary subjects of the present chapter—I refer to them as *Thread Painting* and *Paper Painting*—emerge in dialogue with these two competing minimalist vernaculars. This becomes evident through my discussion of *Thread Painting* in relation to Fred Sandback's yarn sculptures. Whereas Sandback asserted the physical basis of his yarn-lines, Hunter's canvas recuperates thread as a pictorial element that expands the material lexicon of painting. The persistence of medium-specific concerns is further manifest in the optical effects of Hunter's painting, which absorbs the spectator in contemplation. This marks a point of agreement between Hunter's minimalist works and those of Hickey; however, unlike the camouflaged illusions of domestic and suburban objects nested within Hickey's minimalist paintings, Hunter's paintings engender primarily perceptual illusions.

This chapter additionally considers the manner in which the 'artist's hand,' which is integral to the illusionism of *Thread Painting*, edges the work away from the outsourced production of minimalism and towards the processuality of post-minimalism. The prominence of the hand, I argue, does not constitute a return to expressionism but rather its opposite: the extension of the project of desubjectivisation that—as I argued in the foregoing chapter—began in Hunter's hard-edge paintings. After a brief outline of the history and theory of the artist's hand, the argument proceeds via a discussion of Agnes Martin, whose hand-drawn geometries, perceptual illusions and Platonic musings bring into focus those same aspects of Hunter's work from a position external to minimalism and post-minimalism. The analysis of *Thread Painting* concludes with a reflection on the concept of aura, defined by Walter Benjamin as the quasi-religious power invested in the authentic, original artwork. My argument is that the intricate handmade-ness and perceptual sensitivity of Hunter's work, which make it difficult to photograph, preserve the quality of aura.

Paper Painting, the second work discussed in this chapter, is similarly framed in a tensile relation with minimalism and post-minimalism. To the extent that it is constituted through a simultaneous assertion and cancellation of the pictorial, I argue that Hunter's work expands the medium of painting on four fronts: first, the paper and masking tape of Hunter's work draw attention to the picture surface, but the composition generates a layering effect that evokes the illusion of interiority; second, the six-part, modular format foregrounds the real time and space of the viewer's encounter with the work, but the variation between the

panels invites the spectator to inspect each panel as though it were an individual work; third, the makeshift hanging apparatus increases the literalism of the work, but it is equally a conventional tendency within 1960s painting, as seen in the example of Robert Ryman; and fourth, the drooping paper panels heighten objecthood, but it also reads as a metaphor for the precarious state of painting at that historical moment.

The final section of this chapter raises the issue of repetition in Hunter's art. It observes a parallel between Hunter's painterly asceticism and Kierkegaard's elaboration of an ethics founded on the principle of limitation: both, I argue, are geared towards the production of difference through self-imposed restriction. Expanding the discussion of non-composition initiated in Chapter 5, Kierkegaard's writings permit Hunter's systematic approach to painting to be reframed as a method of subjectivity, rather than its cancellation. A different sort of repetition is manifest in the remaking of *Thread Painting* in 1976 and the instructions, written the following year, for the remaking of *Paper Painting*. The actual or implied replication of these works serves to defamiliarise the distinction between artistic and technical labour, a distinction which, as shown by the analysis conducted in earlier sections of this chapter, is already complicated by the non-art materiality and deskilled production of Hunter's paintings.

Raw Materials

In a 1969 interview with Hazel de Berg, Hunter claimed that his decision to use house paint was merely pragmatic: using common materials, he said, was 'economically better.'[2] How can we understand Hunter's choice of non-art paint beyond its relative affordability? Nicholson has proposed that Hunter's use of house paint 'relates to a regional heritage of poor artists making do with "non-art" paints, the chief ancestor of which was Sidney Nolan,' who is known for his use of non-art paints such as Dulux and Ripolin.[3] Nicholson is correct to identify Nolan as a key local antecedent for Hunter's use of house paint, but his argument can be extended. Nolan was deeply interested in the work of Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, and, as Paula Dredge has observed, it is probably no coincidence that his first use

[2] Robert Hunter, public interview with author, 18 October 2013, The Ian Potter Centre: N.G.V., Australia.
[3] Nicholson, 18.

of gloss medium in January 1940 coincided with the publication of an *Art News* review of a New York exhibition of Siqueiro's airbrushed Duco paintings.[4] Incidentally, it was as a participant in one of Siqueiros' workshops that Jackson Pollock, whose work would become a significant influence on subsequent avant-garde explorations of non-art materials—was introduced to spray gun technology.

It is already clear from this narrative digression that Nolan was not alone in his use of non-art materials; more than a regional phenomenon, the practice was born out of trans-national exchange. Indeed, the appropriation of non-art materials and techniques can be understood as a defining element of modernist and avant-garde art, which, as Thomas Crow argues, 'discovered, renewed, or re-invented itself by identifying with marginal, "non-artistic" forms of expressivity and display—forms improvised by other social groups out of the degraded materials of capitalist manufacture.'[5] Hunter's use of non-art materials and techniques is thus a culturally and geographically dispersed tradition that cuts in two different directions: incorporating non-art elements into the artwork endows those elements with newfound cultural status; on the other hand, through accepting the profane material, the artwork, and by extension the sphere of art, is devalued, edging closer to the world of everyday things.

Questioning the conventional materiality of art was an ongoing preoccupation of modernists and avant-gardists alike. Stanley Cavell, Fried's interlocutor at Harvard during the mid-1960s and a leading theorist of Pollock, claimed in 1971 that 'a modernist art, investigating its own physical basis, searching out its own conditions of existence, rediscovers the fact that its existence as an art is not physically assured.'[6] Similarly, commenting on the general conditions of contemporary art around the same time, Theodor Adorno declared: 'Along with the categories, the materials too have lost their a priori self-evidence.'[7] Cavell's and Adorno's respective arguments—that the use of traditional materials

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[4] Paula Dredge, 'Sidney Nolan and Paint: A Study of an Artist's Use of Commercial, Ready-made Paints in Australia 1938–1953 (Ph.D. thesis, University of Melbourne, 2013), 77. The review: 'Airbrushed Pictures in Duco,' *Art News* 38, 13 January 1940, 12.
[5] Thomas Crow, 'Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts' (1983), in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 3–37, 3.
[6] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film, Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 107.
[7] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 16. Adorno continues: 'Art responds to the loss of its self-evidence not simply by concrete transformations of its procedures and comportments but by trying to pull itself free from its own concept as from a shackle: the fact that it is art.' Also see Adorno, 'Art and The

does not secure an object's status as art and that there are no natural artistic materials—emerged well before 1970; there are plenty of instances of early twentieth-century painters utilising non-art materials and techniques. Consider for example Guillaume Apollinaire's defence of the unorthodox materiality of cubist painting:

> Mosaicists paint with pieces of marble and coloured wood. People have referred to an Italian artist who painted with faeces; during the French Revolution, someone painted with blood. You can paint with whatever you like, with pipes, postage stamps, postcards, playing-cards, candelabras, pieces of oilcloth, shirt-collars, wallpaper or newspapers.[8]

Apollinaire explains that painters have always used a diverse range of instruments, objects and fluids— in other words, there was never any original materiality of painting, it was always a case of 'anything goes.'

Jumping ahead fifty years, from pre-war Paris to the New York minimalist scene, which forms a crucial point of reference for Hunter's art, Apollinaire's formulation was subject to a paradoxical inversion: non-art materials were now mandatory, and the traditional skills and materials of painting—as well as the form of painting itself—was out of bounds. There were of course a notable group of painters affiliated with minimalism such as Jo Baer, Brice Marden, Robert Mangold, David Novros and Richard Tuttle. But the following exchange between Baer and Donald Judd, conveys the minimalist patriarch's hostility towards painting circa 1967:

> Judd recently told me he discusses Art only with first rate artists, and no painter 'starting' after '63 can be first rate … He said that since I could never rank with himself or Stella or Noland … I must stop talking and behaving as if I were his equal… it bothers him.[9]

Arts' (1967), in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 368–87.

[8] Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters* (1913), trans. Peter Read (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004). 39.

[9] Jo Baer, 'Letter to Robert Morris, 1967,' in *Jo Baer – Broadsides & Belles Lettres, Selected Writings and Interviews 1965–2010* (Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2010), 41–42, 42.

What was Judd's objection to painting? The main problem, he explained in his 1965 text 'Specific Objects,' derives from the inherent illusionism of the medium. For Judd, who placed an aesthetic premium on 'the direct' and 'the real,' three-dimensional objects were preferable to illusions that carry the spectator away from the 'here and now.'[10] Judd also took issue with conventional artistic materials, which he argued were encumbered by their recognisably 'art' character: 'Oil and canvas are familiar and, like the rectangular plane, have a certain quality and have limits. The quality is especially identified with art.'[11] For Judd, things that looked too much like art were off-limits; artists' decision to stay safely within the existing categories, materials and techniques diminished the literal impact of their work, which hinged on its non-art character. In a famous polemic against minimalism, Clement Greenberg argued that the type of formal transgression demanded by Judd and others was driven by their belief that the 'most advanced art' 'always arrived looking at first as though it had parted company with everything previously known as art'—this was the 'essential logic' of minimalism.[12] Painting caused headaches for the minimalists, he argued, because they wanted their work to reside in-between art and non-art:

> Given that the initial look of non-art was no longer available to painting since even an unpainted canvas now stated itself as a picture, the borderline between art and non-art had to be sought in the three-dimensional, where sculpture was, and where everything material that was not art also was.[13]

The above discussion gives a sense of the discursive context in which minimalist painters laboured. Propelled by an avant-garde logic of negation, which mandated the continued destruction of the received forms and institutions, through their perseverance with an obsolete medium, the minimalist painter was already at a disadvantage. It was incumbent on Hunter, if he was to prove his avant-garde credentials, to use materials not yet overdetermined by their art character in an attempt to breathe life into his anachronistic medium. Since a painting made with standard materials and techniques would too readily declare its 'art status,' it

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[10] Judd, 'Specific Objects,' 184.
[11] Ibid., 187–88.
[12] Clement Greenberg, 'Recentness of Sculpture' (1967), in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 250–56, 252.
[13] Greenberg, 'Recentness of Sculpture,' 252.

became necessary for painters to use materials and techniques that would diminish their work's resemblance to other objects grouped within that category. The white paintings had tested the material conventions of painting by borrowing the house painter's materials and techniques, and in 1970 Hunter took this a step further, incorporating masking tape, another material associated with house painting, as well as cotton thread, which recalls the plumb lines used by home decorators in the application of wallpaper. Hunter's appropriation was born out of a self-reflexive exploration of the medium, but it can equally be seen as a technique of estrangement that parallels Hickey's hiring of a tradesman to build rows of paling fences in an art gallery (see Chapter 3). As will become clear through the analysis below, the use of ordinary materials does not eliminate the aesthetic dimensions of Hunter's work; as Nietzsche remarked, 'when art is dressed in the most threadbare cloth, we recognise it most clearly as art.'[14]

Thread, Illusion, Touch

Hunter produced *Thread Painting* and *Paper Painting* in the wake of his first trip to America and Europe. In August 1968, he had flown from Melbourne to Los Angeles, where he met with Robert Jacks and James Doolin. In letters to Dale and Rosemary Hickey, Hunter claimed that Los Angeles was the 'bullshit capital of the world,' and observed that its art world 'seems to be very "local" and extremely drug-oriented.'[15] From there, Hunter got a lift with Jacks to Toronto, where the latter was based at that time. After a short stay in Canada, Hunter headed to New York, where he lived in a small, 'vermin-infested,' room on East 23rd Street, working as a chauffeur for the Australian Embassy from October to the end of December.[16] Initially, Hunter was unimpressed by the work he saw there by prominent modernist painters such as Jules Olitski, Al Held, Larry Poons, Walter Darby Bannard and Francis Bacon, and was nonplussed by the sculptures of Tony Smith and Clement Meadmore: 'everything I've seen here has been shithouse,' he complained.[17] Yet subsequent visits to

[14] Frederick Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (1878), trans. Marion Faber with Stephen Lehman (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1984), 119, aphorism 179.
[15] Robert Hunter, letter to Dale and Rosemary Hickey, undated (circa August-September 1968); Robert Hunter, letter to Dale and Rosemary Hickey, 8 August 1968.
[16] Robert Hunter, letter to Dale Hickey, 7 November 1968; Robert Hunter, letter to Dale and Rosemary Hickey, 27 November 1968.
[17] Ibid.

Earthworks, a Dwan Gallery exhibition that included works by Andre, de Maria, LeWitt, Morris and Smithson, and Lucy Lippard's *Benefit For The Student Mobilization Committee To End The War in Vietnam* at Paula Cooper Gallery in late October, which included Andre, Judd, LeWitt and Ryman, as well as his encounter with the work of Richard Serra and a solo exhibition by John McCracken in December, made a profound impression on Hunter, who later described the art scene as 'incredibly exciting.'[18] In New York, Hunter also acquainted himself with Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, and visited Joseph Kosuth's apartment loft.[19] On 22 December, Hunter travelled to London then continental Europe, which he described as a 'waste of time,' before heading home.[20]

Hunter's overseas travels—especially his encounter with New York minimalism and post-minimalism—strongly impacted upon his aesthetic sensibility. But there are signs Hunter's work was already changing prior to his departure.[21] In November 1968, while still overseas, Hunter exhibited in the Transfield Art Prize at Bonython Gallery in Sydney, contributing a work he had made prior to leaving Australia, a thin navy cross on a white ground (fig. 6.2), its contrastive composition a far cry from the white paintings presented at Tolarno earlier that year. In 1969, after returning to Melbourne, Hunter eliminated colour from his palette, creating three 'black and white paintings' (fig. 6.3) which, with their strong tonal contrasts and gridded relief patterns, pick up where the Transfield painting left off. But art-world fashion in Melbourne was changing rapidly, shifting away from the type of hard-edge painting that Hunter had helped to pioneer: in the last months of 1969, the anti-painting sentiment that had been growing throughout the decade in American and European avant-garde circles spread like a fever among young Melbourne artists, with Hickey, Rooney and Partos suddenly putting down the brush around the same time. This was experienced nowhere more intensely than at Pinacotheca, which is where *90 White Walls*, Hickey's ode to the death of painting, was exhibited in September 1970 (see Chapter 3).

This general air of hostility towards painting was crucial to the artistic and cultural scene in which Hunter moved in 1970. Even though he refused to quit painting, it was manifest in a sudden, urgent determination to test the material ontology of the medium. For

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[18] Hunter, letter to Hickey, 7 November 1968. De Berg, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' 8.
[19] Robert Hunter, public interview with author, 18 October 2013.
[20] De Berg, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' 8.
[21] Ibid. While he was energised by New York, Hunter claimed not to have painted overseas. 'I think non-production is as important as production,' he said.

Thread Painting (fig. 6.4), Hunter applied several coats of light grey paint to the primed canvas, marked out the rectangular grid in pencil, hand-drew the diagonal lines over the rectangular grid, glued criss-crossing cotton threads on top of the grid, then coated the entire canvas with several washes of light grey. Up close, the most noticeable element—noticeable because it deviates from the normal materiality of painting—is the thread. With the thread, Hunter incorporated a material that challenged the prevailing notions that a painting must be flat (a challenge already posed by his hard-edge paintings) and made from paint. Hunter's work can be seen as a response to the unorthodox skills and materials used by his peers, for example, Paul Partos' airgun application of auto-duco to *Vesta* (1968) and Hickey's use of reflective paving paint in *Garage Door Painting* (1969), and reflects an awareness of the discourse of minimalism circulating in art magazines and publications such as Gregory Battcock's edited anthology *Minimal Art* (1968).

In the field of minimalism, thread or yarn is primarily associated with Fred Sandback, who started using it exclusively in the late 1960s. In an untitled work from Sandback's debut solo exhibition at Konrad Fischer in 1968, four threads form an upright trapezoid which slants downwards into the room, creating the illusion of a hollow three-dimensional wedge pushed flush against the wall.[22] If the virtual planes suggested by Sandback's yarn have a pictorial bent, demanding to be viewed against the white wall, Hunter's painting might be said inversely to court sculpture, insofar as the threads literally protrude from the canvas into real space. Yet ultimately Hunter and Sandback directed their textiles to different purposes: whereas Sandback's yarn draws attention to the floors, ceilings and walls of the surrounding architecture, Hunter's threads are seen primarily in relation to the two-dimensional planar surface of the canvas—and by extension, the medium of painting.

Hunter's later remarks signal an awareness of the intractable relation of the threads to the medium of painting. He claimed that the thread was 'the logical extension of the raised line,' by which he meant it developed from the relief patterning of his post-1966 paintings, created through the build-up of paint along the taped-off edges between neighbouring forms.[23] Rather than a leap into pure objecthood, Hunter evidently thought of *Thread Painting* in terms of its continuity with the medium. This is further reinforced by his

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[22] For a detailed exhibition history see Herausgeber Friedemann Malsch, Christiane Meyer-Stoll, eds., *Fred Sandback* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2005). Also see *Fred Sandback* (New York: Steidl and Zwirner, 2009), 102.
[23] Dodge, 'Robert Hunter and Minimal Art,' 24.

comment that the 'painting was about thread, ruled line and hand-drawn line,' which suggests an analogy between thread and line and thus illuminates the medium as a linguistic construct subject to negotiation and change.[24] Moreover, Hunter's claim that *Thread Painting* is 'about' different kinds of lines—that line itself is the principal subject of the work—casts it as a self-reflexive investigation into the fundamental elements of the medium as such. While the threads of Hunter's work heighten its physical presence, insofar as they appear as lines within an all-over composition, they also evoke the residual illusion conventionally associated with painting.[25]

Like his teacher Judd, Sandback championed 'real' or 'literal' space over 'illusory' space, which he associated with the tradition of picture-making. 'My work is not illusionistic in the normal sense of the word,' Sandback stated. 'It doesn't refer away from itself to something that isn't present. Its illusions are simply present aspects of it.'[26] Hunter could have said the same of the illusions generated by his own avowedly non-representational paintings. The optical effects of *Thread Painting*, akin to a flickering haze or atmospheric veil in which individual details of the composition momentarily emerge only to just as soon dissolve back into the weave of the whole, are not primarily mimetic or symbolic—they are instead factual or 'ironic illusions,' as Elwyn Lynn called them, arising through a combination of repetition, texture and tone.[27] However, a crucial difference between Hunter and orthodox minimalism emerges at this point. In Hunter's painting, the production of illusion is more than an unavoidable reality of perception: it is central to the formal operation of his work, one of several ways it activates the category of the pictorial. While the network of threads foreground the materiality of the surface, the perceptual illusion generated by *Thread Painting* lures the spectator away from the 'here and now.' In its inducement of a

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[24] Ibid.

[25] To the extent that Hunter's work engages in what Benjamin Buchloh terms a 'pictorialisation of surfaces and materials,' it remains at a distance from the anti-pictorial tendency within minimalism. See Buchloh, 'Villeglé: From Fragment to Detail' (1991), in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 2000), 443–460, 453. Buchloh coins this expression in relation to Kurt Schwitters, but it is equally relevant to Hunter.

[26] Fred Sandback, '1975 Notes,' in *Fred Sandback* (Munich: Kunstraum, 1975), 11–12. Also see Sandback, '1973 Notes,' *Flash Art* 40 (March-May 1973), 14.

[27] Elwyn Lynn, 'Untitled Essay,' in *The Field* (Melbourne: N.G.V., 1968), 84–85, 85. Through the reduction of chromatic and tonal contrasts in Hunter's work, Lynn argues, 'form becomes so fugitive that the observer has to imagine where it goes, but he never imagines it goes where it does not; the illusions are real; they proclaim themselves as illusions and no more.'

contemplative state, abhorrent to the literalist sensibility, the canvas preserves a key function of the pictorial tradition.

The above discussion has established that there is an ongoing dialogue between Hunter's work and the medium of painting, which diminishes its relation to minimalism. While *Thread Painting* contains thread that draws attention to the three-dimensionality of the canvas, the non-art material is ultimately recuperated as a surrogate pictorial element that contributes to the work's contemplative engagement of the spectator. A further dimension of Hunter's simultaneous engagement with painting and minimalism relates to the prominence of the 'artist's hand' in his work.

The artist's hand has historically been understood as a 'sign or expression' of *maniere*, Italian for 'style' (the word is derived from *manus*, which means 'hand' in Latin).[28] In the modern period, the artist's hand was increasingly identified with the individuality and personality of the artist-subject, a mark of existential authority that reinforced the idealised 'artist as creator' that had gained traction with the rise of romanticism.[29] Contributing to the expansion of the discourse of authorial authenticity in the nineteenth century was Giovanni Morelli, the inventor of the discipline of connoisseurship, who analysed eccentricities of brushwork and treated the depiction of seemingly insignificant details of paintings, for example, how a human ear is drawn, as evidence of the artist behind the work.[30] Yet as revealed by the etymological roots of the word 'autograph,' the artist's hand has implied an equation of style with subjectivity since ancient times: 'Auto-' means 'self' in Greek, and 'graphic' stands for writing or drawing: 'autographic,' then, connotes writing drawing of the self, self-drawing. In Nelson Goodman's typological classification of different art forms, the 'autographic' is contrasted with the 'allographic,' which means other-writing or other-drawing, anonymous drawing.[31] Goodman used the distinction to ground his typological classification of different art forms: for example, paintings and sculptures are identified as

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[28] Paul Barolsky, 'The Artist's Hand,' in *The Craft of Art: Originality and Industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque Workshop*, eds. Ladis and Wood (Athens: Georgia Press, 1995), 5–24, 5–6.
[29] Charles Harrison, 'The Conditions of Problems,' in *Essays on Art & Language* (1991) (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 2001), 82–128, 92.
[30] According to Morelli, the identity of the artist was most present in minor details such as these, which he believed were produced unconsciously, without the overt deliberation of the painter. The identity of the artist is revealed, in his account, at precisely the moment he is not himself, a momentarily lapse of selfhood. See Anna Tummers, *The Eye of the Connoisseur: Authenticating Paintings by Rembrandt and His Contemporaries* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2011), 98–99.
[31] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968), 113–122.

autographic, whereas novels and musical scores are allographic. In this formulation, the artist's physical involvement in the production process is integral to the ontology of painting.

The artist's hand has been continually debated throughout the history of modern and contemporary art, with strong arguments in favour of its necessity or obsolescence. It is generally accepted that the most radical critique of it was initiated by Duchamp's readymade, which reduced production to the act of choosing a mass-produced object and recontextualising it within an art context. Subsequent strategies for negating the artist's hand through experimenting with modern technology or models of collective authorship were developed by the avant-garde, for example, the mass-manufacture imagined by Russian Productivism and Moholy-Nagy's ordering paintings by telephone. Duchamp's denunciation of the '"la patte" … the artist's touch, his personal style, his "paw,"' was echoed in Andre Breton's complaint that painting, to its detriment, had become so overwhelmingly preoccupied with its handmade-ness that it had forgotten about the visual technologies of the modern era:

> Painting tends to glorify the hand and nothing else. The hand is the great culprit, so how can one consent to be the slave of one's hand? It is unacceptable that painting should today still stand where writing stood before Gutenberg.[32]

It was not until the advent of minimalism in the 1960s, which normalised the practice of 'making' works out of unmodified industrial materials and outsourcing production to factories (and fence-builders) that Duchamp's lesson was widely received.[33] In a 1981 essay, Ian Burn used the term 'deskilling' to describe 1960s artists' disavowal of traditional materials and techniques.[34] Deskilling, he explained, is a 'a tendency to shift significant

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[32] Andre Breton, 'Lighthouse of the Bride,' in Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (London: Trianon Press, 1959), 88–94, 90.

[33] See Thierry Thierry De Duve's series of six essays published in *Artforum* between October 2013 and April 2014: 'Pardon my French,' *Artforum* 52, no. 2 (October 2013), 246–253; 'Don't Shoot the Messenger,' *Artforum* 52, no. 3 (November 2013), 264–273; 'Why was Modernism Born in France?,' Artforum 52, no. 5 (January 2014), 190–97; 'The Invention of Non-Art: A History,' *Artforum* 52, no. 6 (February 2014), 192–199; 'The Invention of Non-Art: A Theory,' *Artforum* 52, no. 7 (March 2014), 270–275; 'This is Art: Anatomy of a Sentence,' *Artforum* 52, no. 8 (April 2014), 242–249.

[34] Burn adapted the term from the writings of industrial sociologist Harry Braverman, under the influence of West Coast union activist Bruce Caiper. See Bruce Kaiper, 'The Human Object, and its Capitalist Image,' *Left Curve* 5 (Fall-Winter 1975), 40–60; Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly*

decision-making away from the process of production to the conception, planning, design and form of presentation. The physical execution [of an artwork],' he argued, 'often was not carried out by the artist, who instead could adopt a supervisory role.'[35] In the 1980s, Burn was concerned that by outsourcing production, artists had forfeited technical, material and conceptual competencies that had formerly granted them a degree of specialisation and independence. But in the late 1960s he had championed deskilling.[36] In a 1969 letter to Pollard, he dreamt of 'detaching art's energy from the craft of tedious object production.'[37] Of the outsourced fabrication of his *Mirror Pieces* (1968) for *The Field*, he wrote: 'This eliminates any preciousness from the object itself and makes a much healthier art.'[38] Evidently, Burn regarded deskilling as a critical strategy, identifying it with a utopian promise. Through deskilling, it was hoped, artistic production would be democratically dispersed into other parts of society, and the romantic ideal of the artist as a higher creator would be replaced by the anonymous labourer.[39]

Hunter's work lacks many technical skills historically associated with painting—they may be called deskilled in this sense—but he stopped short of outsourcing the production of his work. Indeed, it could be argued that the consistent handmade-ness of his work embodies a rejection of the split between conceptual and manual labour—both are involved at each stage of the production process.[40] Furthermore, Hunter's work may seem deskilled by earlier standards, but expanding and reconfiguring the medium is not a purely negative activity: the appropriation of the technical and material competencies of the house painter also qualifies as a kind of reskilling. By adapting the skills and materials of house painting, Hunter widened

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Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

[35] Ian Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath,' 394–395.

[36] Irene Sutton recalls having dinner with Burn, celebrating his 1993 exhibition, and Burn talking of the importance of artists possessing skills, which he thought give them autonomy, flexibility and independence. Irene Sutton, interview with author, August 2015.

[37] Ian Burn, letter to Bruce Pollard, March-April 1969.

[38] Ibid.

[39] This position aligns with the Marxist critique of individual authorship formulated by Marx and Engels: 'The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of the division of labour.' Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology, 1845–46* (New York: International Publishers edition, 1970), 109.

[40] 'All the work of the hand is rooted in thinking,' Martin Heidegger argues in *What is Called Thinking*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 357. This statement implies that painting, too, is a means of thinking.

his painterly repertoire. From this perspective, his work involves re-applying the skills of one job for another: the house-painter's repertoire was now assigned a new role: the production of contemplative objects made from materials detached from their humble origins. Hunter's 'white paintings' are void of the familiar signs of expressive painterliness; their semi-opaque surface, achieved through multiple layers of thinned-down paint, powerfully evokes the monotonous labour-time of their production. In this way, the pale glow of those paintings—which is fundamental to their phenomenological character—is a literal emanation of the manual work involved in their production.

The artist's hand became more prominent in Hunter's 1970s works, which traded the hard geometries and strict seriality of minimalism for a looser processual approach reminiscent of post-minimalism. Lynn Zelevanksy observes that whereas minimalism's modular compositions of industrial materials lent it a 'cultural authority,' post-minimalism's freer handling of pliable materials reintroduced signifiers of intimacy, expression and idiosyncracy into the work.[41] This is true of *Thread Painting* insofar as the shaky hand-pencilled grid (and as discussed below the irregularly covered geometries of *Paper Painting*), imbues it with a palpable intimacy, evoking the artist working away, patiently and methodologically, before the canvas. Robert Pincus-Witten, the critic who invented the term post-minimalism, observed that the movement was 'marked by an expressionist revival of painterly issues.'[42] Yet the inconsistency of the hand-drawn grid in *Thread Painting* complicates expressionist readings in the vein of Roger Fry's claim that 'the drawn line is the record of a gesture, and that gesture is modified by the artist's feeling which is thus communicated to us directly.'[43] Rather than a conduit for the artist's 'inner world,' the singularity of Hunter's wavering lines are the result of his attempt to give form to a geometric system. The singularity of Hunter's lines are the result of the involuntary movements of his hand rather than deliberate improvisation, marks of his failure to perfectly execute a predetermined plan.[44]

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[41] Lynn Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* (New York: M.o.M.A., 1994), 9.
[42] Robert Pincus-Witten, 'Introduction to Postminimalism,' in *Postminimalism to Maximalism: American Art, 1966–1986* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: U.M.I. Research Press, 1987), 10.
[43] Roger Fry, 'An Essay in Aesthetics' (1909), in *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920), 11–30, 22.
[44] While Hunter's work is distant from the extreme gesturalism of abstract expressionism, with its connotations of wild and excessive artistic subjectivity, to the extent that *Thread Painting* complicates the link between expressionist gesture and subjective expression it is worth recalling artist Gerhard

The grid allowed Hunter to curb the extent of his decision-making in the pictorial act; by hand-drawing the grid he introduced indeterminacy into the production process. Paradoxically, the heightened visibility of the autographic trace in Hunter's works also underscored their allographic status—their status as other-drawings, anonymous drawings—autographic traces through which the artist-subject performed a disappearing act. Hunter had added a new non-compositional technique to his repertoire, which, operating in tandem with the grid, extended the project of desubjectivisation that had provided a vital impetus for his work of the last five years.

Painting With One's Back to the World

More than anything within the domain of minimalism or post-minimalism, the grid patterning, artisanal production and optical illusion of *Thread Painting* evokes the work of abstractionists on the fringes of those movements such as Brice Marden and especially Agnes Martin, whose paintings *Friendship* (1963), *Morning* (1965), *Grass* (1967) and *Trumpet* (1967) bear a close resemblance to Hunter's. Indeed, the perceptual effects of Martin's *Morning*, as described by curator Rachel Barker, might as well have been attributed to *Thread Painting*:

> If the viewer stands a certain distance from the painting, the eye is not hooked to any compositional detail. Almost like a holographic image, the eye tries to rest on a flat surface but finds it focuses on a space between the field and grid.[45]

Owing to the tonal proximity of the uniformly grey elements of *Thread Painting* and the shadow cast by the threads on its surface, it is perhaps more difficult to distinguish between

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Merz's critique of the notion of the expressionist gesture as a 'seismograph of the soul.' Even if the painter thinks they have 'given expression to the innermost parts of their soul,' even if they think they have 'paint[ed] intuitively,' he argues that '[they] actually don't paint [their] innermost soul'—instead, '[they] fall subject to what [their] elbow allows [them] to do.' For Merz, rather than conveying some inner subjective truth, what so-called expressionist painting actually expresses is the physiognomy of the creature wielding the brush. The heightened presence of the 'artist's hand' in *Thread Painting* is more readily aligned with Merz's 'physiognomic expressionism' than authentic gestural expressionism. Gerhard Merz in *Measure Colour Light*, dir. Jan Schmidt-Garre (Berlin: Pars Media, 1992).

[45] Rachel Barker, 'Morning (1965),' in *Agnes Martin*, eds. Frances Morris and Tiffany Bell (London: Tate, 2015), 88–92. 90.

the separate elements of *Thread Painting* than of *Morning*. But more striking than any minor differences between the works are the similarities. More so than Hunter, the grid was central to Martin's compositional approach.[46] 'So relentlessly do [Martin's] works address the grid that it acquires an air of content,' Thomas McEvilley commented, 'which seems to accumulate in a series of thin filmy layers of elusive intention.'[47] What McEvilley means is that through its repetition, the grid is transformed into a deeply personal, enigmatic symbol; a paradoxical marker of anonymous artistic identity, an anonymous signature. The same goes for Hunter: the grid is a technology for the abnegation of the self, a seemingly impersonal mode of pictorial expression, an expression of negated subjectivity; at the same time, it is an embodiment of subjectivity as such, a cypher for intentionality, an emblem of emptied selfhood.

Whereas Hunter's hard-edge paintings of the 1960s usually feature square grids on square supports, *Thread Painting* is a square canvas covered with a rectangular grid, another similarity with Martin, who was famously devoted to the latter combination and explained its appeal in the following terms:

> My formats are square, but the grids are never absolutely square; they are rectangles, a little bit off square, making a sort of contradiction, a dissonance, though I didn't set out to do it that way. When I cover the square with rectangles, it lightens the weight of the square, destroys its power.[48]

A square grid on a square canvas, Martin observed, reiterates the outer shape of the picture support, unifying the squareness of the overall composition. The rectangular grid, on the other hand, retains the orthogonal dimensions of the square while at the same time injecting a degree of structural difference into it; by cancelling its diagonal symmetry, she thought, the

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[46] The grid is central to Hunter's compositional approach during the period on which I am focusing, but it becomes less prominent in his paintings from 1985 until 2013, which constitute a distinct body of work in his oeuvre. Painted on four-by-eight boards, the patterns of diagonal lines running from the edge to the centre of these works offset the primacy of the grid.

[47] Thomas McEvilley, 'Grey Geese Descending: The Art of Agnes Martin,' in *The Exile's Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1993). 65–73, 65.

[48] Agnes Martin, 'Answer to an Enquiry,' in Lucy Lippard, 'Homage to the Square,' *Art in America* 55, no. 4 (July–August 1967), 55.

self-identity of the square is weakened. The rectangularised square of Hunter's *Thread Painting* yields a similar effect: it weakens the power of the square.

A further aspect of both Hunter's *Thread Painting* and Martin's works that hampers the unity of the square are their hand-drawn lines. If the art of Hunter and Martin is similarly marked by a classicist devotion to geometry, the irregularities of their hand-drawn lines compromise the association of geometry with knowledge, perfection and beauty.[49] The prominence of the artist's hand exaggerates the material imperfection of the grid, dragging the ideal form down into the crude material world, as though dramatising the insurmountable gap between pure form and everyday reality. Pure form, Hunter's painting implies, as though echoing Plato, is only ever perceived as a degraded worldly simulacra. For Hunter and Martin alike, the imperfect rendering of the geometric form serves to negatively illuminate the ideal version of that form. The mathematical imperfections of the hand-drawn grid signals that pure form can only be evoked as a mirage—the artwork is enlisted in a game of shadow-play in which pure form is conjured through its absence.

Martin's writings manifest a distinctly Platonic influence, nowhere more evident than in a passage of her poem 'The Untroubled Mind' (1972), co-authored with Ann Wilson: 'Just follow what Plato has to say / Classicists are people that look out with their back to the world.' The following lines appear later in the same poem: 'Classicism is not about people / And this work is not about the world.[50] Martin's Platonism is further evident in her elliptical statement 'The painting is not what is seen, it is what is known forever in the mind,' which implies that the truth of the artwork resides in the realm of the immaterial; elsewhere, she argued that the experience of beauty transcends the domain of the senses: '[Beauty] is not in the eye it is in the mind. In our minds there is awareness of perfection.'[51] These and other statements by Martin communicate a Platonic belief that the material form of the artwork is

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[49] Things that are 'straight or round, and the surfaces and solids which a lathe or carpenter's rule and square produces from the straight and round,' Plato argued, 'are beautiful, not like, most things, in a relative sense; they are always beautiful in their very nature, and they offer pleasures peculiar to themselves, and quite unlike others. They have that purity which makes for truth. They are philosophical.' Plato, *Philebus*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntingdon Cairns, trans. R. Hackworth (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), 1132.
[50] Agnes Martin and Ann Wilson, 'The Untroubled Mind' (sections of which come from notes for a lecture delivered by Martin at Cornell University, January 1972), *Flash Art* 41 (June 1973), 6–8. Reprinted in *Agnes Martin* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1973), 17–24.
[51] Agnes Martin, 'Beauty is the Mystery of Life' (1989), in *Agnes Martin* (New York: Whitney Museum, 1992), 158–59, 158.

oriented to the ideal form; classicism is oriented towards the other-worldly, a space beyond the 'here and now,' which is fundamental to the contemplative intent of Hunter's work.

The Platonic inflection of Martin's writings can arguably be discerned in Hunter's painting, but in both cases this philosophical association is attenuated by the artists' mutual disregard for rationalist theories of art. 'All human knowledge,' Martin declared, 'is useless in art work. Concepts, relationships, … deductions are distractions of mind that we wish to hold free for inspiration.'[52] Despite the geometric proportions and mathematical sequences in her work, then, like Hunter, Martin claimed that art transcends the domain of reason. Elsewhere, she critiqued intellection as an end in itself: 'Living by intellect—by comparisons, calculations, schemes, concepts, ideas—is all a structure of pride, in which there is no beauty or happiness—no life. The intellectual life is in fact death.'[53] Like Hunter, Martin sought to distance herself from rationalist theories of art: painting, she argued, is a product of inspiration rather than knowledge.

There is a contiguity between Martin's theoretical reflections and Hunter's statements about his work. As discussed in Chapter 5, although Hunter's paintings are invariably underpinned by simple geometries that acknowledge their materiality or objecthood, he insisted that they transcend their status as literal objects. The artistic process, he claimed, involves the artist surrendering their subjectivity to the artwork—a mysterious event beyond reason, measurement and calculation.

The final convergence between Hunter and Martin I wish to draw attention to here relates to the 'aura' of their work. Both artists' work is rarely mentioned without reference to its perceptual subtlety, which makes it difficult to photograph. Martin claimed that her works are essentially unphotographable because they 'are light and luminous and deal with fusion and formlessness, i.e., the dissolution of form.'[54] While Hunter was silent on the topic, the legend of the unreproducibility of his work originated with *The Field* catalogue, where instead of documentation of Hunter's exhibited work is printed an explanatory note:

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[52] Quoted in Anna C. Chave, 'Agnes Martin: "Humility, the beautiful daughter …. All of her ways are empty,"' in *Agnes Martin* (1992), 131–53, 135.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Martin's argument against photography is paraphrased in Heinz Liesbrock, *Agnes Martin: The Islands* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2005), back cover. Anna Chave has noted the difficulty of reproducing Martin's work: 'So subtle are the effects of Martin's paintings, in fact, that it has widely been considered that there is little or no point in trying to reproduce them, and this has also helped to bring viewers to her work on her own terms, rather those of the media age.' Chave, 'Agnes Martin,' 149.

> Due to the close tonal relationship between white and off-white in this painting, the camera has been unable to produce an image and reproduction is therefore impossible.[55]

It is tempting to read this note, most likely authored by John Stringer, as merely a statement of fact about the unreproducibility of Hunter's work, but in my view it reveals more than this: what it reveals is a connection between the tonal subtlety—and more generally the formal intricacy—of Hunter's paintings and their production of presence or aura. In Walter Benjamin's famous definition, aura is a property of objects that served a ritual function in traditional societies, initially of a magical then of a religious character, which was subsequently transferred to artworks in modern societies.[56] In the context of the latter, he argues, the ritual function (or 'cult value') of artworks is less important than 'their being on view' (what he calls their 'exhibition value'), through which they assume the status of quasi-devotional objects at a remove from the everyday world, capable of occasioning transcendent experience.[57] In Benjamin's account, the sacredness of the artwork is contingent on its authenticity or originality, its unique presence in time and space, which distinguishes it from other objects. Insofar as the artwork is bound up with authenticity, it follows that it is endangered by technologies of mass-reproduction such as photography and film, which saturate culture with timeless and placeless images—images, that is, without aura.[58]

Returning to Hunter, it is difficult not to read *The Field* catalogue entry as narrating his work's unsuitability—or even hostility—to photography. The sense of narrative drama is heightened by Stringer's phrase 'the camera has been unable to produce an image.' By ascribing a quasi-agency to the mechanical apparatus, it is as though he is describing a duel between the painting and its would-be technology of reproduction: the camera seizes up before the painting, disabled by its auratic charge. The difficulty in photographing Hunter's work—whether his painting in *The Field*, *Thread Painting* or indeed the object on which I focus my attention below, *Paper Painting*—might be an unintended consequence, but it

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[55] John Stringer, *The Field*, 29.
[56] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 217–251, 222–24.
[57] Ibid., 223–24.
[58] Ibid., 220–23.

nevertheless means that it now keeps a distance from the image economy of the present day, dominated by the rule of endless reproduction and distribution. In this context, the artwork, described by Pollard as a 'mysterious icon'—a phrase that gives a sense of the religious attitude towards aesthetic experience circulating within Pinacotheca—emanates a presence bound up with the necessity of viewing it first-hand.[59] In opposition to a culture of distraction, Hunter's work solicits a mode of contemplative engagement, which sees the spectator 'lose themselves' in the act of beholding. The intensification of the spectator's mindfulness of themselves looking, in other words, corresponds to the diminution or suspension of their awareness of other subjective faculties and functions; simultaneously, the spectator's alertness to their surroundings is dimmed. It is worth noting the symmetrical relation between the beholder's surrender to the artwork in the contemplative act and the non-compositional techniques employed by Hunter in its production: both are constituted through their avoidance or negation of subjectivity.

One and Six

During the first half of 1970, in the months leading up to the re-opening of Pinacotheca at the new address of Waltham Place, Richmond, Hunter lived downstairs, helping to renovate and paint the gallery above. In June 1970, to celebrate the opening of the space, Pollard curated a group show that included Hunter alongside Hickey, Booth, Davidson, Rooney, Parks and Vickers. In his review, Terry Smith claimed that the industrial architecture—'three floors of enormous spaces, an unfinished look, a roughness, a place which has not lost its sense of being a disused factory'—was key to the formal operation of the exhibited works.[60] Smith's identification of an aesthetic reciprocity between art and architecture is certainly true in the case of Hunter's *Paper Painting* (figs. 6.5, 6.6), with the six-part modular work of paper, masking tape and acrylic paint reflecting the raw look of its surrounds. Yet the painted panels do not exhibit the cold anonymity of minimalism, nor the aggressive physicality typical of that movement. While Hunter had made picture supports for earlier works, cutting the stretcher bars and stretching the cotton duck for his 'white paintings,' the ad hoc

[59] Bruce Pollard, cited in Sweet, *Pinacotheca*, 23. The immediate reference for Pollard's remark is Hickey's hard-edge paintings.
[60] Terry Smith, 'Pinacotheca Group Exhibition,' 45.

constructedness and fragile materiality of the picture supports in *Paper Painting*—pieces of paper taped together, billowing outwards and sagging downwards—emanate a craft element which, like *Thread Painting*, is reminiscent of post-minimalism.[61]

Through its incorporation of non-art materials and techniques, *Paper Painting* transgresses painterly convention, yet like *Thread Painting* before it, it does not simply break the rules of the medium. Configured around various tensions between the pictorial and the non-pictorial, Hunter's work constitutes an expansion of the medium that distances it from the literalist sensibility of minimalism and post-minimalism.

Whereas in the Renaissance tradition a painting is analogous to a window, the flat and modular designs of the 1960s eclipsed the illusion of spatial depth.[62] Its grid structures flush to the picture plane, delineated by tape that emphasises the materiality of the picture surface, *Paper Painting* broadly aligns with the literalist assertion of objecthood and the negation of the pictorial, the idea there is 'nothing to see' behind the actual surface. Yet the combination of symmetrical geometry, masking tape and painterly handling also challenges the literalist dogma of 'what you see is what you see.' [63]

In total, three layers of tape were fixed to the paper sheet-supports at successive stages of the production process: the first tape layer joining each of the sheets together from six smaller sheets, the next two layers reinforcing the makeshift supports; during each stage, the paper was treated with a coat of paint, the last a thinner coat that inconsistently reveals sections of the pinkish tape.[64] The result of this process is that the tape supplying the linearity and chromaticism of *Paper Painting* is more visible in less-painted sections of the paper sheets, the alternation between disclosure and concealment generating a layered effect, which infuses the work with a fugitive depth. In this vein, Nicholson argues that Hunter's work appears to generate—rather than reflect—light:

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[61] Hunter said he painted on 'the very cheapest cotton duck' on 'homemade stretchers.' Robert Hunter, interview with author, 18 October 2013.
[62] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (1435), ed. Martin Kemp, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Penguin, 1991), 54. On the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen]). After Pollock and Johns, Robert Morris argued, paintings were 'looked at rather than into.' 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects' (1969), in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1993), 51–70, 51.
[63] Glaser, 'Questions to Stella and Judd,' 158.
[64] Jennifer Phipps, 'Memorandum to: Director and Conservator; From Curator of Australian Art,' Melbourne, N.G.V., 17 February 1977.

> Geometric forms—crosses, single lines, whole lattices—shine through the grey paint, giving the impression that the grid is not so much subject to light, but rather the generator of light, if not light itself.[65]

The observation that Hunter's work appears to emit light implies there is a pictorial interior, or reserve, from which light shines outwards, is a further way that it contradicts the anti-illusionist rhetoric of post-minimalism.

Another source of tension between the pictorial and non-pictorial properties of *Paper Painting* is its modular format. The internal division of the artwork into six separate parts encourages the viewer to pace back and forth before it, directing their attention towards the real time and space of the encounter.[66] The type of relation between spectator and artwork promoted by *Paper Painting* is similar to that described by Patrick McCaughey in relation to Hunter's work in *The Field*: 'The spectator must become physically active, moving around the painting,' McCaughey argued, 'establish[ing] what the painting is only by experiencing it as a participating agent in its workings.'[67] This passage captures the way that *Paper Painting* encourages the viewer to move between multiple vantage points, patching up their incomplete knowledge of its elusive form. Through its dispersal of aesthetic experience into real time-real space, serial repetition aligns with the literalist desire to create 'an art that is not much differentiated from ordinary things,' as Richard Wollheim alleged.[68]

However, in the case of *Paper Painting*, serial repetition does not succeed in cancelling the spectator's contemplative engagement altogether. This is due to the illusion of layered interiority generated at the level of each of the six panels that together comprise the work, but it is also due to the variation between them. For although each of the panels was taped together in the same way, and each was treated with three coats of paint, the final coat applied to each panel is noticeably different in each case. Painterly improvisation endows

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[65] Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' 25.
[66] Writing about his six-part modular painting *Yellow Premiss* (1966), which was presented with *Paper Painting* in the 1976 exhibition *Minimal Art*, Ian Burn claimed that: 'individually, each single canvas may invite contemplation (suspending the viewer's sense of 'real' time and physical space), but that this experience will be continually disturbed by an awareness that the work next to it is the same … thus continually re-establishing an experience of real time and space.' Ian Burn, 'Glimpses: On Peripheral Vision,' in *Dialogue: Writings in Art History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 183.
[67] McCaughey, 'Experience and the New Abstraction,' 89.
[68] Richard Wollheim paraphrased in Barbara Rose, 'A B C Art' (1965), in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), 274–297, 277.

each of the six panels with a distinct identity within the series: rather than homogenous or interchangeable units, they are 'variations on a theme,' as John Coplans described the results of this common artistic strategy in his essay for *Serial Imagery* (1968), an exhibition at Pasadena Art Museum, the catalogue of which was known to Hunter and others at Pinacotheca.[69] The play of similarities and dissimilarities within *Paper Painting* invites a highly focused looking, the individual panels functioning as portals that absorb the spectator's gaze, facilitating detachment from the immediate environment that is, at the same time, foregrounded by the seriality of the work.

I will now discuss the final aspects of *Paper Painting* that simultaneously activate and negate the category of the pictorial: the picture support and the hanging apparatus. Attached to the upper corners of each paper panel are small rectangular canvas strips wrapped in masking tape, through which a nail is punched into the wall. The fact that the same material—tape—at once holds together the picture support, secures it to the wall and determines the basic linear structure of *Thread Painting* serves to promote its objecthood. However, this formal operation is not itself wholly external to painting but is instead native to a painterly tradition associated with figures such as Giulio Paolini, Blinky Palermo and Robert Ryman. Hunter's use of 'tape as line' especially calls to mind fellow 'white painter' Ryman's *Prototypes* (1969), modular paper paintings stuck to the wall with tape, in which the tape doubles as hanging apparatus and compositional element.[70] Yve-Alain Bois has observed that in spite of its extensive variation, running throughout Ryman's project is a 'testing habit,' a penchant for experimentation: 'first decompose the synthetic activity of painting into constitutive elements, then alter or redistribute the function of these elements.'[71] As signalled by the *Prototypes*, one such element repeatedly tested by Ryman is the means by which paintings are fixed to the wall; while Hunter's works of the 1960s and 1970s manifest an experimental approach consonant with Ryman, in contrast to the latter, Hunter's work rarely troubles hanging conventions, which makes *Paper Painting* something of an anomaly within his oeuvre.[72]

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[69] John Coplans, *Serial Imagery* (Pasadena: Pasadena Art Museum, 1968). Lawrence Alloway, *Systemic Painting* (New York: Guggenheim, 1966) was also familiar to Pinacotheca artists.
[70] John Stringer observes that *Paper Painting* 'has notable affinities in format and material with the work of Robert Ryman.' 'Cultivating The Field,' 23.
[71] Yve-Alain Bois, 'Ryman's Lab,' in *Abstraction, Gesture, Ecriture: Paintings from the Daros Collection* (Zurich: Scalo, 1999), 115.
[72] Ibid., 110.

The interaction of hanging apparatus and paper support in Hunter's work further exaggerates the dialectic of the pictorial and the anti-pictorial in another way. As indicated by a side-angle photograph of *Paper Painting* in its original exhibition context alongside one of Rooney's *Superknit* paintings (1970), the flimsy paper panels of Hunter's work curl away from the wall and sag downwards, the warped picture surface troubling the common assumption that a painting must be flat. The visible crinkles and ruffles on the panels are accentuated by the pull of gravity, literally stressing the fragile picture support. But it would be incorrect to regard the literal stressing of the picture support as some sort of unmediated manifestation of physicality: it takes on significance only in relation to, and by being absorbed into, the tradition of painting. Indeed, the billowing paper is central to the stylistic character of Hunter's work, which bears the trace of post-minimalist hanging works such as Robert Morris's *Untitled (Tangle)* (1967), Richard Serra's *9 Rubber Belts and Neon* (1968) and Eva Hesse's *Aught* (1968), all of which depict the medium of painting under pressure, a subject of critique. Viewed as part of a widespread proliferation of practices variously engaged in a critique of painting during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the material precariousness of Hunter's work reflects the state of the medium at a moment when its future seemed uncertain.

Painting Again

Modular forms and serial structures of the kind encountered in *Paper Painting* were widely adopted by minimalist and post-minimalist artists as a means to diminish the distinction between the artwork and the ordinary object. Seen in combination with his use of house painter's materials and techniques, the repetitiousness of individual paintings—their rotating, symmetrical geometries derived from grid patterns echoing the shape of the support—heightens their physicality, edging them closer to the status of literal things. Yet as outlined above, the contemplative intent of Hunter's work ensures that it remains at a distance from the aesthetic goals of literalism: his intricate forms engross the spectator in the act of looking, transporting them away from their immediate surrounds. Nevertheless, repetition is central to Hunter's painting, not only at the level of the individual artwork; it is fundamental to his method of production more broadly, manifest in the numerous continuities between his works

and the basic uniformity of his oeuvre as a whole. In this final section of the chapter, I return to consider the issue of repetition as a principle of production in Hunter's art.

More than a preoccupation of critics and historians, Hunter spoke often of the importance of repetition to his work.[73] He claimed to be 'doing the same thing all the time'; he also said that his career 'had been like painting one house over and over,' and that all his paintings 'dated back to the first idea'—the white paintings exhibited at Tolarno in 1968.[74] 'It's the simple nature of my initial assertion that's stayed with me,' Hunter's said elsewhere—meaning that his work was conceived in response to an original problem.[75] There are various ways to understand this emphasis on repetition. Rosalind Krauss understands the repetition of the grid in modernist painting at a broad historical level as revealing the conventionality of art itself: 'once the grid appears it seems quite resistant to change,' she argues: it is 'a mode of repetition, the content of which is the conventional nature of art itself.'[76] The persistence of the grid, its apparent inexhaustibility, throws into relief the essential rule of art: that it is nothing more than an arbitrary rule. Krauss' account of the historical recurrence of the grid is helpful for understanding the function of repetition within Hunter's individual practice. The grid functions as the basis of Hunter's painterly method, suggesting a quasi-religious commitment: the grid as a transcendental form or condition.

With the grid as his primary element, Hunter developed an aesthetic program around geometric systems, ghostly colouration and domestic materiality—which might seem like a seemingly limited formal vocabulary. However, by subjecting these constitutive elements to continual repetition and modulation, Hunter's paintings demonstrate the boundless difference that can be achieved within seemingly strict limits. To the extent that it is sustained by limitation, Hunter's art recalls the concept of the 'rotation method' elaborated by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* (1843). Kierkegaard presents the rotation method as an effective strategy for escaping boredom, which he contrasts with an ineffective strategy of 'changing the soil' that 'depends upon the boundless infinity of change, its

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[73] Robert Rooney described him as a 'one-idea artist.' See Robert Rooney, 'Hunter's a Quiet Contrast,' *The Age*, 9 September 1981, 10. Also see Dodge, ''Robert Hunter and Minimal Art,' 92.
[74] Charles Green, 'Persistent Subjectivity,' *Robert Hunter* (Melbourne: The Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne, 1989), 1. Hunter in Catalano, Building a Picture, 79. Discussing his recent paintings in the early 1990s.
[75] Hunter in Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' 30.
[76] Krauss, 'Grids,' 61.

extensive dimension.'[77] The latter is illustrated with the following examples: 'One is weary of living in the country and moves to the city; one is weary of one's native land and goes abroad'; 'one is weary of eating on porcelain and eats on silver'; and 'burns down half of Rome in order to visualize the Trojan conflagration.'[78] This attempt to defeat boredom fails, according to Kierkegaard, because it involves an endless replacing of one novel thing with another, the problem being that each new thing soon becomes as boring as the thing it replaced. 'This method cancels itself and is the spurious infinity,' Kierkegaard argues; it is 'the vulgar, inartistic rotation and is based on an illusion.'[79] Rather than escaping boredom, then, the practitioner of this method succumbs to it—instead of discovering anything original, they ultimately become more bored.

The true escape from boredom, Kierkegaard argues, involves embracing rather than evading limitation. The rotation method he advocates

> does not consist in changing the soil but, like proper crop rotation, consists in changing the method of cultivation and the kinds of crops. Here at once is the principle of limitation, the sole saving principle in the world. The more a person limits himself, the more resourceful he becomes.[80]

The main difference between the two methods of crop rotation outlined by Kierkegaard, then, derives from the 'the principle of limitation.' Rather than seeking a new patch of land to grow the same crops, it is recommended that the farmer adjust how and what they grow: the powers of inventiveness intensify through self-restriction. Scenarios given of the rotation method in action include a prisoner sentenced to a life of solitary confinement finding amusement in observing the spider in his cell, and schoolchildren deriving pleasure in observing a trapped fly. 'How entertaining it can be to listen to the monotonous dripping from the roof!,' Kierkegaard exclaims. 'What a meticulous observer one becomes, detecting every little sound or movement. Here is the extreme boundary of that principle that seeks

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[77] Søren Kierkegaard, 'Rotation of Crops: a Venture in Social Prudence,' in *Either/Or* (1843), ed. and trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 280–300, 291.
[78] Ibid., 291–92.
[79] Ibid., 292, 291.
[80] Ibid., 292.

relief not through extensity but through intensity.'[81] Through the voluntary acceptance of restraint, the practitioner of the rotation method mobilises creativity to allay boredom.

The analogy between Kierkegaard's rotation method and Hunter's approach to painting should now be clear. Through the recombination and redistribution—or rotation—of a basic set of forms, techniques and materials, Hunter carved something new out of the familiar. To show endless difference Hunter embraced the rule of repetition. His commitment to a limited formal vocabulary can be understood as a voluntary act of imprisonment, which, although it may appear to close off avenues of creative expression, actually reveals the vast scope for experimentation within a seemingly narrow terrain, leading to an expansion of formal possibilities as well as a heightened awareness of overlooked facts of looking. Such a project, it will be observed, similarly recalls the terms of defamiliarisation as defined by Shklovksy, which demands the disruption of routinised, everyday perception through the 'roughening of form.' What Hunter's work reveals is that repetition, in its various guises, can restore to perception a semblance of aliveness—qualities which were cherished by Shklovksy and Kierkegaard alike. All this is far from the monotonousness of 'one thing after another' associated with minimalism.

Kierkegaard's argument that limitation as an ethical maxim, that is, a practice through which subjectivity is constituted, also dovetails with the idea of repetition as a non-compositional technique—a painterly technique through which subjectivity is constituted, paradoxically, through its negation.[82] If, as I argue in Chapter 5, Hunter's reductive structures and muted palette are manifestations of non-compositional techniques at the level of the individual painting, then the repetition of these techniques across multiple works itself constitutes a further manifestation of non-composition. Looking at Hunter through Kierkegaard offers an additional explanation for the repetitiousness of his practice: limitation

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[81] Ibid., 292.

[82] A fascinating convergence between Kierkegaard's ethical maxim and Bois' concept of non-composition is discovered in their mutual emphasis on arbitrariness. In Bois' argument, it is impossible to totally expel subjectivity from the non-compositional work: there is always an element of arbitrariness involved. Championing restriction as an ethical foundation, Kierkegaard stresses the essential arbitrariness of any limitation: 'Arbitrariness is the whole secret. It is popularly believed that there is no art to being arbitrary, and yet it takes profound study to be arbitrary in such a way that a person does not himself run wild in it but himself has pleasure from it. One does not enjoy the immediate object but something else that one arbitrarily introduces.' Ibid., 299. In the case of both painting and ethics, the designation of a limitation, an action that may appear to cancel the arbitrary, is instead understood as *the* moment of arbitrariness, the purest expression of subjectivity. In both cases, the apparent restriction of subjectivity is the precondition for its expression.

is adapted as the rule of conduct for an artistic practice that seeks to give form to the expression of subjectivity under erasure. Hunter's artistic process involves an act of self-imprisonment, which eliminates many possible artistic manoeuvres he could make, but which was ultimately an expression of agency, or subjectivation. It could even be argued that the adherence to a repetitive aesthetic program signals that subjectivity is always constituted through limitation—that it does not employ limitation towards some other end, but rather redirects attention to the fact of limitation itself beyond the material form it takes in any specific instance.

'Everything will surely come again but in a different way; what has once been taken into the rotation process remains there but is varied by the method of cultivation.'[83] Kierkegaard's concept of the rotation method is helpful for understanding the production of difference achieved through Hunter's ostensibly narrow program, but it is not the only model of repetition inflecting the formal and historical character of *Thread Painting* and *Paper Painting*. For both these works raise the possibility of a thing, cultivated in the same way, returning in the same form: in the guise of a replica. *Thread Painting* was remade in 1976, when it was irreparably damaged after falling out of a truck. When *Paper Painting* was acquired by the N.G.V. after it was shown in the 1976 exhibition *Minimal Art*, curator Jennifer Phipps penned a note, presumably dictated by Hunter, with technical and material information about its production: which paint was used, how the six picture panels were constructed out of paper and tape, and the order in which layers of tape and paint were applied to each panel.[84] Written for the purposes of conservation and restoration, the clinical account of the work's coming into being clears away some of its mystery. Rather than an alchemical activity shrouded in secrecy, the making of the work is simply explained—and, it is implied, repeatable.

Earlier in this chapter, I brought the concept of aura to bear on Hunter's *Thread Painting*. I argued that a configuration of elements in Hunter's work—handmade character, formal intricacy and perceptual nuance—demand that it be viewed in the flesh, while also resulting in its unphotographability. This configuration, I argued, is instrumental in the painting's production of aura. Insofar as it distances the work from ordinary things, aura might be thought of as the enemy of the literalist sensibility of minimalism and post-

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[83] Ibid., 296.
[84] Phipps, 'Memorandum.'

minimalism, which wants to close the gap between the work and the object. One of the constitutive tensions of Hunter's work is that, in other respects—namely, its use of house-painter's materials and techniques and its assertion of the physicality of the artwork—it too expresses a desire to close this gap—which is closed further by the replication, implied or actual, of Hunter's work.

The distinction between artworks and ordinary objects defined by Benjamin has been theorised by Giorgio Agamben in terms which, despite their difference from his German predecessor, bear his distinctive influence, and which similarly illuminate the aesthetic and technical character of Hunter's work. In *The Man Without Content* (1970), Agamben argues that the distinction between aesthetic objects and man-made products only emerged with the industrial revolution of the late eighteenth century, which brought about the 'establishment of an ever more widespread and alienating division of labour.'[85] Prior to this, he explains, 'technics [or skill] was the name that designated both the activity of the craftsman who shapes a vase and that of the artist who moulds a statue or writes a poem.'[86] Referring to Heidegger but echoing Benjamin, Agamben argues that the primary difference between the two types of work is that one is original, while the other is reproducible.[87] It is on these grounds that Agamben distinguishes the artwork from the ordinary object: the former possesses a proximity to an origin, while the latter is endlessly reproducible.

How does this relate to Hunter's painting? The remaking of *Thread Painting*, and the authorisation to remake *Paper Painting*, troubles the distinction between the original artwork and the reproducible technical object. Through its replication, *Thread Painting* is no longer tied to a unique place and time, but split between two places and two times: the artwork's connection to an authentic origin—the source of its aura—is corrupted through repetition. Phipps' account of the coming-into-being of *Paper Painting* not only implies the devaluation of the significance of the artist's hand: the disclosure of the production process tacitly certifies the reproducibility of the artwork, denigrating its proximity to origin. Reproduction edges the artwork further towards the condition of its 'other,' the technical object, and through this heightens the connection between artistic and other kinds of work already

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[85] Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content* (1970), trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 60.
[86] Ibid.
[87] For a comparative analysis of Benjamin's and Heidegger's theories of the artwork, see David Ferris, 'Politics of the Useless: The Work of Art in Benjamin and Heidegger,' in *Sparks Will Fly: Benjamin and Heidegger*, eds. Benjamin and Vardoulakis (New York: S.U.N.Y., 2015), 259–282.

implied by Hunter's appropriation of the materials and techniques of house painting—a type of painting without origin or aura. And similar to Hunter's use of non-art materials, rather than eclipsing the aesthetic character of Hunter's work the shadow of repetition became absorbed into it, part of its story. Ultimately, the remaking, implied or actual, of Hunter's work deepens the defamiliarising back-and-forth—between aesthetic and technical labour, between the production and diminution of aura, between painting and objecthood—already playing out within it.

Conclusion

The analysis of *Thread Painting* and *Paper Painting* conducted in this chapter has indicated that medium-specific concerns continued to shape minimalism and post-minimalism. Hunter's use of house paint, thread and masking tape was in step with the avant-garde's liquidation of the material inheritances of painting, but the incorporation of these foreign materials also constituted a self-reflexive testing of the boundaries of the medium. Although these materials heightened the objecthood of Hunter's works, as manifest in the protruding threads of one and the sagging panels of the other, they were ultimately recuperated as elements of painting. Connected to this, the presence of historical features of the medium such as the artist's touch, the fiction of interiority and the solicitation of the contemplative gaze, were shown as central to Hunter's work.

Hunter's continued engagement with the medium was shaped by the same mystical conception of painting that influenced Hickey's work of the period, according to which the contemplative artwork reveals the otherworldliness of banal reality. It became evident that there is a symmetry between the suspension of selfhood in contemplation, and the non-compositional techniques employed by Hunter in the production of his paintings: both are premised on the avoidance of subjectivity. The analysis of Hunter's program of desubjectivisation, initiated in Chapter 5, was further expanded in this chapter through considering the central role played by his use of repetition. Showing Hunter's adherence to self-imposed rules as a type of painterly asceticism enriched my account of the quasi-religious properties of his work. Kierkegaard's concept of the 'rotation principle,' which informed this account, deserves to be further investigated in relation to the existing discourse of non-composition. Invariably, Hunter's mystical brand of non-composition challenged the technical and material basis of the medium; in the final section of this chapter, the real and

implied remaking of Hunter's 1970 paintings was exposed as a further means by which they blur the boundary between aesthetic and technical objects.

Hunter's experimentation with unconventional picture supports, which began with the masking-taped panels of *Paper Painting*, was taken a step further in the wall painting the following month, which eliminated the portable picture support altogether. This development aligned with the 'dematerialisation' of art that took place at that time, coinciding with the proliferation of new forms such as installation, performance and video. As will become clear in the following chapter, Hunter's wall work was shaped by the persistence of painterly concerns such as illusion and contemplation. Aura had been generated through the handmade-ness and photographic irreproducibility of his earlier paintings; now, through the elimination of the picture support, it emanated from the gallery surrounds.

7. Mural at the Picture Gallery

From 1970 to 1977, Hunter produced only wall paintings. This chapter examines his first works of this kind, which were presented at Pinacotheca in June 1970, and in February the following year at the Second Indian Triennial, New Delhi. The argument in what follows proceeds by first relating the stencilled seriality, messy brushwork and processual character of the 1970 paintings to American post-minimalism, while demonstrating that the illusionism of Hunter's work contradicts the movement's materialist leanings. Subsequently, the painterliness of the work is discussed in relation to Pollock's drip technique. Hunter's use of indeterminacy as a non-compositional strategy, I argue, resists modernist critics' identification of this technique as a cypher for intentionality. The argument then turns to explore the after-life of the first wall painting, from its appropriation by artist Mike Brown, to Hunter's reuse of the stencil design in New Delhi. The latter event leads to a consideration of the 'artist statement' for the Indian exhibition, which was actually ghost-written by Hickey and Pollard and which qualifies as a form of non-composition, and the beginning of Hunter's friendship with Carl Andre. Rather than Andre's sculptures, it is Sol LeWitt's wall drawings that offer the closest analogue to Hunter's wall paintings. The connection between them exceeds morphology; LeWitt's writings, too, are identified as a source for Hunter's project of desubjectivisation. Through a comparative analysis, I distinguish the wall works of Hunter and LeWitt from contemporaneous works by Daniel Buren and Blinky Palermo.

At this point in the chapter I raise the question of what motivated Hunter and his peers to abandon the portable support and to paint directly on the wall. Rather than a critique of the commodity status of the artwork or the institution of art, I argue that Hunter's adoption of the wall as a picture support was driven by a contemplative conception of painting. Due to its architectural embeddedness and ephemeral nature, the contemplative suspension of the 'here and now' achieved by a wall painting has an acutely temporal inflection. In Hunter's case, this blurring of 'lived time' and 'pictorial time' did not result in the destruction of aura; drawing on Boris Groys' idea that aura resides in the art context rather than the artwork, I maintain that Hunter's paintings were auratic insofar as they demand that the spectator travel to the authentic place of art. This leads me finally to reconsider the context in which Hunter's first wall painting was presented at Pinacotheca, which Pollard and insiders such as Hickey regarded as a space of contemplation. The chapter concludes by demonstrating how Hunter's painting was an ornament to the gallery architecture, an aesthetic supplement that deepens its separation from ordinary experience.

Pinacotheca Painting

In July 1970, for his first solo exhibition at Pinacotheca, Hunter painted a row of eleven grey patterns along the main gallery wall (fig. 7.1).[1] Extending the painterly technique and loose geometry of his earlier 1970 works, each part of Hunter's wall painting featured the same design, a drooping upright lattice interlaced with diagonals; however, the splashy, messily applied paint resulted in considerable variation within the series. The fact that the patterns were negatively articulated—in that the space *around* the individual lines of each pattern was what was painted rather than the lines themselves—indicated the use of a stencil, which Hunter had patched together from masking tape then pinned to the wall as a guide, with the resulting one-inch wide lines determined by the width of the tape.

Hunter's invention of the stencil grew out of his earlier use of masking tape in his hard edge painting, which is sometimes disparaged as 'the masking tape school of art.'[2] Between 1966 and 1970, Hunter used tape to achieve straight lines; then, in June 1970, he used it to make the picture support for *Paper Painting* by sticking together pieces of paper. For the wall painting, produced the next month, instead of sticking tape to the picture support, he made a stencil by sticking strips of tape together face to face, then weaving the doubled strips together into a grid pattern. Unlike the earlier works, where tape ensured crisp geometry, in Hunter's wall painting the tape stencil resulted in its opposite: its corners pinned to the wall, the flimsy stencil drooped downwards, generating patterns whose outer shape was described by Alan McCulloch as 'shadowy oblongs' rather than squares.[3] Hunter's work started from a geometric design, but it was as though the materiality of tape stencil and splashed paint conspired against it. Ultimately, the stencil creates a lapsed geometry, evoking either a striving towards or falling away from pure form, in a manner reminiscent of *Thread Painting* from earlier that year, as discussed in Chapter 6.

The geometry of the design, compromised by the drooping stencil, was further compromised by Hunter's brushwork. For each of the eleven iterations of the design, two coats of diluted paint, light and dark grey, were brushed, dripped and splashed onto the wall.

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[1] Except for a proof sheet, photographs of Hunter's 1970 wall painting have been lost. Knowledge of the work is based on eyewitness accounts and three photographs of Hunter's New Delhi wall painting, which was created with the same stencil design, as well as subsequent remakes at Milani Gallery in Brisbane in 2011, and the N.G.V. in 2018.
[2] Dodge, 'Robert Hunter: The Transcendental Minimalist,' 92.
[3] Alan McCulloch, 'Graphics and White Walls,' *The Herald*, 29 July 1970, 17.

Up close, the loose handling drew attention to itself and the materiality of the production process, the variation between iterations emphasising the processual character of the work. The drooping forms recall the 'large, supple grids pinned to the wall' by Daniel Dezeuze in the early 1970s, and other works by the French Supports/Surfaces Group such as Claude Viallat's *Filet* (1970) and Louis Cane's *Toile découpée* (1970). Hunter's patterns are equally reminiscent of American post-minimalist sculptures such as Howardina Pindell's *Untitled* (1968–70), a sagging grid of sausage-like canvas forms that drapes onto the floor, Eva Hesse's *Rope Piece* (1969–1970) and Robert Rohm's *Rope Piece* (1969).[4]

Hunter's distinctive combination of stencil composition, loose paintwork and serial repetition bears above all the influence of American post-minimalism. Like the post-minimalists, Hunter reconciled painterly handling with linear structure, revelling in the apparently accidental dripping and splashing of paint. The painterliness of post-minimalism, a reference-point for Hunter's messy brushwork, was in the American context viewed as a revival of abstract expressionism.[5] The drip technique, which was made famous by Pollock in the late 1940s and led others to experiment with pouring, spilling and staining processes the next decade, prompted Stanley Cavell to observe that 'painters before Jackson Pollock had dripped paint, even deliberately. Pollock made dripping into a medium of painting,' by which he meant that the technique had become part of the standard painter's repertoire.[6] While it looks uncontrolled and chaotic, for Cavell a drip painting is the product of deliberate activity, an acknowledgement of the conventions which define the medium at a given moment. For Cavell, art is a search for expression and meaning, which always implies an acknowledging, knowing subject.[7]

It is possible to understand dripped paint such as that encountered in Hunter's wall painting as a gesture of acknowledgement of the medium, but it can also be read as an assertion of the material properties of paint. Robert Morris, a leading practitioner and theorist of post-minimalism, emphasised Pollock's and Morris Louis' manipulation of the 'physical,

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[4] Raphael Rubinstein, 'The Painting Undone: Supports/Surfaces,' in *Polychrome Profusion: Selected Art Criticism: 1990–2002* (Lenox, M.A.: Hard Press Editions, 2004), accessed 16 August 2016, http://www.artcritical.com/2004/02/01/the-painting-undone-supportssurfaces/; Michael Darling, 'Target Practice: Painting Under Attack 1949–78,' in *Target Practice: Painting Under Attack 1949–78* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2009), 16–83, 68–69.
[5] Pincus-Witten, 'Introduction to Postminimalism,' 10.
[6] Cavell, *The World Viewed:* 31–32.
[7] Ibid., 110.

fluid properties of paint,' and how they 'deal[t] with the properties of fluidity and the conditions of a more or less absorptive ground' as underscoring the processual character of painting.[8] 'The forms and the order of their work,' Morris claimed, 'were not a priori to the means.'[9] It is tempting to assimilate Hunter's loose paint handling, which welcomes accident and chance into the production process and generates internal difference, to this version of post-minimalism, where 'chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied.'[10] From this perspective, Hunter's dripping paint is an affront to the modernist privileging of intentionality. Exceeding and escaping the artist's control, it counts as another manifestation of non-compositionality within his work, a further technique implemented by Hunter to thwart the extent of his subjective control over the production process.

If Hunter's wall painting shuttled between competing ideologies of intention and indeterminacy, it also embodied a tension between the illusory and the literal. Any semblance of illusion was anathema to the literalist sensibility of post-minimalism, which according to Morris '[did] not demand pre-thought images,' instead focusing on 'its means, stuff, substances in many states.'[11] Marcia Tucker, curator of the first museum survey of the movement, *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (1969), similarly argued that post-minimalist painting eliminated 'all representation and illusion.'[12] Hunter's wall work harmonised with this literalist sensibility in several ways: the dripped and splashed paint foregrounded the production process, endowing the work with a raw physicality; its modular structure encouraged a mobile mode of spectatorship; the decision to paint directly on the wall heightened the interdependence of the painting and its immediate environment.

Yet the combination of distorted geometry, painterly handling and serial repetition also yielded a subtle illusionism. This was not lost on local critics. Emphasising the irreality of Hunter's work, Alan McCulloch described Hunter's patterns as 'phantom murals.'[13] Ann Galbally similarly observed that the designs appeared to 'disengage' from their support and 'float out in front of the wall.'[14] G.R. Lansell also attributed a phantasmagorical dimension to

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[8] Robert Morris, 'Anti Form' (1968), in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1994) 41–47, 44.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 46.
[11] Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture Part 4: Beyond Objects,' 67.
[12] Marcia Tucker, *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1969), 28.
[13] McCulloch, 'Graphics and White Walls,' 17.
[14] Galbally, 'Is It New … Or Updated Old?,' 10.

Hunter's wall, asking: 'Could not these murals be … the shadows in Plato's cave?'[15] In Plato's allegory, the shadows represent reality, but related back to Hunter, the comment implies that Hunter's work forces a re-evaluation of the connection between perception and knowledge. Although Hunter's work was radically materialist, to the extent that it harboured a residual illusionism and solicited a mode of contemplative detachment, it was also a gesture beyond the concrete.

New Delhi Painting

A principal goal of this chapter is to analyse Hunter's wall painting as it was installed at Pinacotheca in 1970. However, this analysis is extended through a consideration of the work's significant 'after life.' Michael Asher reflected on the uncertain status of an ephemeral artwork that has outlived its intended duration:

> As a visual fact, the [expired] work could be perceived as anything ranging from a remnant of an aesthetic production to interior decoration. It could be perceived as a vestige of aesthetic production—for example, a disassembled installation—but only if the artist were to define it as such.[16]

Another possible destiny for the expired work, not mentioned by Asher, is its appropriation by another artist. This was the fate of Hunter's wall painting, or sections of it, which fellow Pinacotheca artist Mike Brown coloured, embellished and incorporated into the thirty-metre mural forming part of his 1971 installation *Planet X* (fig. 7.2). Brown's mural comprised painted swirling patterns, cartoonish graphic explosions, distorted figures, and graffiti-style scrawled lyrics, speech-bubble aphorisms with sexually explicit content.[17] The incorporation of Hunter's painting is indicative of the rambling, collaborative impulse of *Planet X*, which was co-produced with Trevor Vickers and Jan Lucas; the 'quiescent patterns,' as McCulloch described them, was a contrast to Brown's tendency towards disjunction, fragmentation and

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[15] G.R. Lansell, 'Paintings for a Fortnight,' *Nation*, 8 August 1970, 16–17, 16. Elwyn Lynn also reviewed the exhibition: 'In a Womb-Room,' *The Bulletin*, 13 August 1070, 40–41.
[16] Michael Asher, *Writings 1973–1983 On Works 1969–1979* (Halifax, N.S.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 1983), 84.
[17] See Richard Haese, *Permanent Revolution: Mike Brown and the Australian Avant-Garde 1953–1997* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2011) 167–70.

disorder.[18] Brown's authorised vandalism also added another dimension to the non-compositionality of Hunter's original painting, dovetailing with his efforts to limit his subjective control over the production process through the use of deductive geometry, the masking tape stencil, and the gestural roughness of his paint handling.

Besides artistic co-option, another destiny of an ephemeral work—one that was also in store for Hunter's wall painting—is to be remade. Around the time Brown was embellishing the wall painting, Hunter demonstrated that the work was not site-specific by reusing the same stencil design for another exhibition. (This remake, Hunter's first, set the precedent for his remaking of *Thread Painting* in 1976, discussed in Chapter 6.)[19] On the strength of his Pinacotheca show, Hunter had been selected to represent Australia at the Second Indian Triennial. Hunter travelled to New Delhi in early 1971, creating his paintings at the Lalit Kala Academy with the same stencil design, repeating the design fewer times to avoid overcrowding the small booth (figs. 7.3, 7.4). A photograph of the exhibition shows that Hunter's patterns were distributed across two adjoining walls, spaced around a corner, rather than across a single wall like at Pinacotheca.

Hunter was selected for the Triennial on the false assumption that his wall painting was the creation of an Aboriginal artist.[20] According to selector William Dargie, the elaborate geometric structure and handmade execution of Hunter's work looked like Aboriginal art; it was only when Dargie met Hunter at the Triennial that he discovered, to his surprise, the artist was of European descent. The artist statement accompanying the New Delhi presentation only deepened the identity crisis. Due to the scarcity of such statements by Hunter, the text is quoted here in full:

> I want to make something alien—alien to myself. I want to produce something that is neutral—if it is neutral enough it just is. I suppose that these are questions about existence. If something is to exist simply then all symbols and associations have to be eliminated. Looking back, I think that my paintings on canvas probably look precious, even though I was not involved in appearances—that is too much like making objects

[18] McCulloch, 'Graphics and White Walls,' 17. See Ann Galbally, 'Show's Accent was on the Negatives,' *The Age*, 28 April 1971, 2.
[19] The wall painting was remade again in 2011 at Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Its most recent iteration was at Hunter's retrospective in 2018.
[20] This is discussed in Tom Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' 27.

> d'art. I was, and still am, concerned with the specifics in as straight a way as possible: that is why the mathematical progressions are obvious. What seems to have happened recently is a greater acceptance of what is in a material sense. I used paper after canvas because it was there and available. In my last exhibition I accepted what was there in the form of the walls. I am not sure about the meaning, but I do know that what I do is humble.[21]

The statement touches on some of the core themes of Hunter's work, from the pragmatism of his method to his anti-subjectivist intent. The last line, 'I do know that what I do is humble,' is noticeably incongruous, due to the self-contradiction involved in describing oneself as 'humble,' which is usually a quality bestowed by others. This is a clue to the fact that Hunter did not author the statement, which had been ghost-written by Hickey and Pollard.[22] The reason why Hickey and Pollard secretly authored the statement was that in late 1970, Hunter was involved in a serious motorcycle accident that he only narrowly survived. Hunter was left in a coma, but made a full recovery. So rather than an aesthetic decision, Hickey and Pollard's subversion of the 'artist statement,' a genre reserved for artistic self-reflection, was prompted by circumstance. Nonetheless, the ghost-written statement fortuitously provides a suitable accompaniment to the self-negating impulse of Hunter's painting. Hunter's opportunity to 'stand behind' his work, to reveal his intentions and aspirations, became an exercise in authorial impersonation.

The Indian Triennial proved to be a decisive exhibition for Hunter not only because it was his international debut, but because it brought him into contact with Carl Andre, whose sculpture *The Life and Revival of Art Painting in North America* (1971) was presented in an over-crowded U.S. booth alongside Sam Gilliam, Eva Hesse, Robert Rohm, Robert Ryman, Alan Saret, Richard Serra and Keith Sonnier.[23] Although Andre did not enjoy his time in New Delhi, he was impressed by Hunter's sparse installation, located adjacent to the American booth, immediately introducing himself to the Australian, with the pair soon

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[21] Robert Hunter, artist statement, Second Indian Triennale at the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, 1971.
[22] Green, 'Thief in the Attic,' 119.
[23] Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (Chichester, West Sussez: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2016), 88.

finding they had much in common.[24] The meeting marked the beginning of an ongoing friendship. The next time the pair met was in Melbourne in 1973, when Andre came out to Australia with curator Jennifer Licht for her *Some Recent American Art*, a M.o.M.A. travelling exhibition. The following year, they met again when Hunter participated in Licht's curated exhibition *Eight Contemporary Artists* at New York M.o.M.A. Andre subsequently used his personal and professional connection with Konrad Fischer to help him secure a 1974 solo show at the gallery.[25] The friendship peaked in 1978 when Andre travelled to Australia, presenting a series of two-man exhibitions with Hunter in Melbourne, Brisbane and Newcastle. A sign of the enduring bond between the two is a curious event in 1985 when, Hunter later recalled, working on the fourth painting of his 200 Gertrude Street residency, and for four consecutive days Andre 'spoke to him' (like a spirit) through the painting. The apparition coincided, Hunter discovered on the fourth day, with Andre being charged with the murder of his wife Ana Mendieta.[26]

Hunter and LeWitt

Andre was Hunter's authentic link to the inner circle of New York minimalism, yet the wall paintings invite comparison less with Andre's floor pieces than with the gridded wall works of another member of his circle: Sol LeWitt. The similarity of Hunter's first wall painting, exhibited in July 1970, and LeWitt's wall drawings, the first of which, *Wall Drawing 1: Drawing Series II 18 (A & B)* (1968), was presented at the anti-Vietnam War benefit exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery in late October 1968, was immediately observed by critics.[27] The belated resemblance of Hunter's work to LeWitt's could be taken as evidence of a provincial artist imitating the latest avant-garde style; in New York in 1971, for example, Hickey reported that Burn and Ramsden 'criticise[d Hunter] for taking Ryman and LeWitt

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[24] Robert Katz, *Naked By The Window: The Fatal Marriage of Carl Andre and Ana Mendieta* (New York: The Atlanta Monthly Press, 1990), 278. Katz passingly refers to Andre's time in New Delhi as 'his first and worst Third World travelling experience.'

[25] 'I am so convinced that Robert Hunter is the best painter you have never seen,' Andre wrote to Fischer, 'I will bet you the price of his airline ticket—if you don't like the show he does for you I will pay for it.' Carl Andre, postcard to Konrad Fischer, 6 February 1974.

[26] Robert Hunter, public interview with author, Melbourne, 18 October 2013.

[27] Both Lansell and Lynn likened Hunter's work to LeWitt's wall drawings. See Lansell, 'Paintings for a Fortnight,' 16 and Lynn, 'In a Womb-Room,' 41.

back to Australia,' a charge Hickey vehemently resisted.[28] This anecdote, which indicates the continuation of the ideology of provincialism during the period, invites further speculation about the tangible connections between Hunter and LeWitt—not in order to reach a verdict on the alleged derivativeness of Hunter's work but rather to deepen understanding of its art-historical resonances.

In a November 1968 letter to Hickey, Hunter confirms that he visited Lippard's exhibition and viewed LeWitt's wall drawing. He wrote that the most interesting work he had seen in New York was by 'Smithson, LeWitt, Andre and such': 'a great show recently was very concerned with the Viet. War … about the best show I've seen of recent work.'[29] While there is debate over the question of whether Hunter saw LeWitt's first wall drawing while in New York, there is evidence suggesting this is the case. Upon his return to Australia, Hunter's interest in LeWitt continued to grow. In his 1969 interview with de Berg, Hunter spoke deferentially of LeWitt, describing him as 'a very obvious example of someone who is doing something that clicked very much with what I thought I was doing, but in a much better, much more specific way.'[30] Hunter further acquainted himself with LeWitt's art and writings; in late 1970 or early 1971, he borrowed a LeWitt book from Robert Rooney; most likely the catalogue for his 1970 exhibition retrospective at The Hague.[31]

Hunter' awareness of LeWitt suggests the pertinence of the writings of the American artist, central to which is the theme of desubjectivisation, to Hunter's art. The idea that the concept of an artwork is more important than its execution is repeated throughout LeWitt's writings on conceptual art. In 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,' he proposed:

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[28] Hickey, letter to Bruce, 22 March 1971.
[29] Hunter, letter to Hickey, 27 November 1968. Nicholson mistakenly alleges that Hunter arrived in New York after the closure of Lippard's exhibition, so did not have the opportunity to view any of LeWitt's wall drawings in New York. See Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' 28.
[30] De Berg, 'Interview with Robert Hunter,' 8.
[31] Robert Rooney, response to author's questionnaire, November 2011. 'I first became aware of Simon Klose at the second meeting of Pinacotheca artists in 1971 [regarding how the gallery would be run in Pollard's absence the following year] … The next morning Simon turned up at the suburban bookshop where I worked (Halls Book Store, Prahran). Robert Hunter had shown him a Sol LeWitt retrospective catalogue I had lent Bruce and he wanted to know where he could get a copy.' The catalogue was presumably *Sol LeWitt* (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1970).

> When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.[32]

LeWitt argued that while the conceptual artist freely intuited the concept of the artwork, its form is decided in advance, as though the work made itself. With all improvisation and spontaneity expelled from the production process, the familiar signs of subjectivity are avoided: 'To work with a plan that is pre-set,' he argued, 'is one way of avoiding subjectivity.'[33] LeWitt rearticulated his arguments for working within a plan in order to eliminate subjectivity, or ego, in 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' (1969): 'The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course'; 'The artist's will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion. His wilfulness may only be ego.'[34] Through producing a work 'mechanically,' LeWitt thought, the conceptual artist rejects the humanistic ground of art, adapting the artwork towards the end of desubjectivisation.

Like LeWitt, Hunter believed that a predetermined compositional system—in the case of his wall painting, premised on the serial repetition of a grid pattern—would eliminate or diminish subjectivity during the production process. He even fused LeWitt's description of the mechanical labour of the conceptual artist into his autobiographical recollections of manual labouring jobs he worked between exhibitions as 'a builder or a builder's labourer or demolition worker … involved in purely mechanical activity. And the making of anything [in the way of art] had to be the same and use the same process.'[35] Thus Hunter claimed that in his case, the mechanical productions of the conceptual artist developed from unskilled labouring. The stencils were 'pure thought,' he claimed, precisely because they were patterns that appeared in the midst of the routinised, repetitive work of house painting—the 'pure unthought.' Thus Hunter put his own spin on the figure of the conceptual artist: if Hickey's conceptual artist was a disgruntled clerk, Hunter's conceptualist was less a clerk than a

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[32] LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,' 12. For a parallel account of seriality in conceptual art see Mel Bochner, 'The Serial Attitude' (1967), in *Solar System & Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews, 1965–2007* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2008), 42–47, 42.
[33] LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,' 13.
[34] Sol LeWitt, 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' (1969), in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 106–08, 106.
[35] Hunter cited in Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' 29.

unskilled manual labourer, blue collar rather than white, working towards a state of semi-consciousness, his laconic manner reflected in the slapdash painterly execution of the stencilled wall patterns.

A final point of convergence between Hunter's and LeWitt's wall works relates to their interaction with their architectural context. LeWitt claimed that 'the physical properties of the wall: height, length, colour, material, architectural conditions and intrusions, are a necessary part of the wall drawings' is also true for Hunter; yet as demonstrated by their reproduction of wall works in different contexts, neither Hunter nor LeWitt regarded their wall works as site-specific, in the sense of belonging to a single site.[36] This factor distinguishes their work from other minimalist wall painters. In Blinky Palermo's exhibition *Wall Drawings* at Heiner Friedrich Gallery in Munich in December 1968, as Anne Rorimer explains, 'the limits of the specific walls, and the layout of the three rooms of the gallery, were determinants of the forms drawn.'[37] Rorimer likens Palermo's work to the early fabric placements of Daniel Buren, which referred incessantly to their architectural and institutional environment. For his solo exhibition at Milan's Apollinaire Gallery in 1968, for example, he glued white and green striped material to the outside door to the gallery, drawing attention to the threshold between art and non-art space.[38] In both Palermo and Buren, the picture support, the context of the work's display, is drawn into the work itself.

Compared to the wall works of Palermo and Buren, Hunter's 1970–71 wall paintings and LeWitt's wall drawings were shifted between different contexts. LeWitt's wall designs can be projected at different scales appropriate to a given gallery architecture. Hunter's wall paintings are even less context dependent, the conception and production of the stencils occurring separately from any architectural considerations. While the wall paintings themselves were ephemeral, the stencils could be preserved and transported from site to site, as indicated by Hunter's use of the same design for Melbourne as well as New Delhi. Further enhancing the independence of Hunter's wall paintings from their gallery context was the

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[36] Sol LeWitt, 'Doing Wall Drawings' (1971), in *Drawing Rooms*, ed. Michael Auping (Fort Worth: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 1994), 93.
[37] Anne Rorimer, 'Blinky Palermo: Objects, *Stoffbilder*, Wall Paintings' (1978), in *Blinky Palermo* (Barcelona: Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003), 49–81, 66–67. Also see Susanne Küper, 'About Space and Time: Blinky Palermo's Wall Drawings and Paintings,' in *Blinky Palermo: Retrospective 1964–1977*, eds. Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly & Barbara Schröder (New York and New Haven: Dia Art Foundation and Yale University Press, 2010), 61–79.
[38] Rorimer, 'Blinky Palermo,' 66–67. Also see Anne Rorimer, 'From Painting to Architecture,' *Parkett* 66 (2002), 62.

presentation of the designs, roughly the same size as hard edge paintings, around standard hanging height, with generous spacing between them.

Further cancelling the architectural reading of Hunter's wall paintings was their illusionism. In each exhibition, the painting as a whole appeared as hologram, shimmering in front of the wall; as Galbally observed, the 'white brick surface is visible through the soft, grey squares but the stencils as entities are disengaged and float out in front of the wall.'[39] Part of the illusionism of the work, in addition, was the flickering play of similarities and differences, the result of paint-handling, stencil warping and tonal modulation, between the patterns repeated at regular intervals across the wall. Rather than foregrounding its architectural embeddedness, Hunter's painting was like an apparition that hovered forth from its surroundings, absorbing the spectator in its phantasmagorical rhythm.

The Motivation of the Wall

What drove Hunter—as well as many other artists of the 1960s and 1970s—to abandon the canvas and work on the wall? The wall painting, a temporary inscription on a pre-existing architectural surface, stands in opposition to the modern concept of the picture as a 'portable, framed panel.' In 1970, the shift from one to the other was seen as radical; in her text for *Using Walls* (1970), an exhibition at the Jewish Museum, curator Susan Tumarkin Goodman identified the wall painting with a critique of the commodity status of the artwork.[40] Since such a painting 'is immoveable,' Goodman argued, 'it is less concerned with the process of ownership than with active experience, thus eliminating traditional notions of historical or monetary value.'[41] A wall work 'rejects the accepted channels between artist and viewer, as well as the intermediary machinery consisting of dealers, critics and museums,' she continued. 'It must therefore be useless to all those who would not accept it for its own sake.'[42]

Goodman's passage reflects the belief, common within avant-gardist circles, that minimalist and conceptualist wall works, due to their transitory nature, critiqued their

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[39] Galbally, 'Is It New … Or Updated Old?,' 10.
[40] David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 163.
[41] Susan Tumarkin Goodman, 'Introduction,' in *Using Walls (Indoors)* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1970), n.p.
[42] Ibid.

commercial and institutional context. By 1973, however, even Lucy Lippard, who had championed the 'dematerialisation of art' as a way to resist its 'commodity status and market orientation,' reported that artists who spearheaded this tendency were represented by respected galleries and their work was selling well.[43] Today, in an art world where dealers, collectors and museums unquestioningly embrace temporary, site-specific forms, the notion that wall works automatically constitute a critique of art's commodity status and institutional context sounds naïve.

Yet such a sentiment continues to shape art-historical writing on 1960s and 1970s wall paintings. For example, Gabriele Knapstein has argued that underlying minimalist and conceptualist wall works 'is a critical reflection upon the setting and institutional conditions of the artwork.'[44] Wall works of this kind are habitually explained in terms of minimalism's desire 'to reflect on the contextual conditions of art,' and linked to the neo-avant-garde agenda to engage in 'a practical critique of the institution of art.'[45] Historicised in these narrow terms, as the prelude to the 'institutional critique' of Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke and others, the primary significance of the wall painting seems to be its potential to critique the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of art.

An influential contribution to the discourse of institutional critique that continues to inform the discourse around minimalist and conceptual wall paintings is Brian O' Doherty's *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976). The classic modernist exhibition design, developed during the 1930s by Alfred Barr at M.o.M.A., was governed by the principle of the autonomous artwork: in order to 'let the pictures stand on their own feet,' artworks were presented in a neutral setting: on white walls, at eye level, generously spaced.[46] It was precisely these conventions that O' Doherty's study aimed to denaturalise:

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[43] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object, 1966 to 1972* (1973) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 263.
[44] Gabriele Knapstein, 'On the Wall, Against the Wall, Through the Wall,' in *Wall Works: Working With The Wall Since The 1960s* (Berlin: Berlin Nationalgalerie, 2014), 39–45, 40.
[45] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1996), 57.
[46] Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1998), 62–70. Despite its decisive influence on the emergence of the white cube aesthetic, the walls of early M.o.M.A. exhibitions were covered in natural, beige-coloured monk's cloth. As his colleague, the architect Philip Johnson recalls, Barr preferred monk-cloth 'because it doesn't leave marks and the beige colour [is] far better for painting than white. Never, never use white for painting. Then your frame is much brighter than the painting you're taking away from the painting.'

‘The white wall’s apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions,’ he argued.[47] As the ‘single major convention through which art is passed,’ he continued, it ‘subsumes commerce and aesthetics, artist and audience, ethics and expediency.’[48] Whereas it has been generally thought of as the natural residence for aesthetic contemplation, for O’ Doherty the white cube—and the idea of an autonomous aesthetic sphere it reinforces—is an ideological construct shaped by social, cultural, political and economic forces. Developing these ideas in his 1986 introduction to O’ Doherty’s book, Thomas McEvilley frames the white cube as a dead, non-living space that disguises the real forces that constitute it, allowing it to appear as neutral, value-free, ahistorical. ‘The white cube,’ McEvilley argues,

> appeal[s] to supposedly transcendental modes of presence and power. But the problem with transcendental principles is that by definition they speak of another world, not this one. It is this other world, or access to it, that the white cube represents. It is like Plato's vision of a higher metaphysical realm where form … is utterly disconnected from the life of human experience here below.[49]

McEvilley’s discussion of the white cube represents it as an escape from real time and space into pure form, a detachment from the ‘here and now,’ forces a reconsideration of Hunter’s wall paintings’ affiliation with institutional critique. I have already observed the Platonism of Hunter’s vocabulary of geometric forms; moreover, I have observed his paintings’ solicitation of the contemplative gaze. The very ideals dismissed by McEvilley as ‘uncritical,’ then, turn out to be founding principles of Hunter’s project. What this indicates is that Hunter’s wall paintings share little with this conception of institutional critique—in certain respects, they are opposed to it. This is backed up by Hunter’s (ghost-written) explanation for painting on the wall in the New Delhi statement—‘What seems to have happened recently is a greater acceptance of what is in a material sense … In my last exhibition I accepted what was there in the form of the walls’—which is less about disrupting than affirming the white cube. Indeed, through their reliance on the blank geometries of the

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[47] Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica: The Lapis Press, 1986), 79.
[48] Ibid., 79–80.
[49] Thomas McEvilley, ‘Introduction,’ in *Inside the White Cube*, 7–12, 11.

gallery as a compositional element to be manipulated rather than an ideological constructs to be undermined, Hunter's wall paintings could even be accused of fetishising the white cube.

Rather than undermining the ideology of the white cube, Hunter used it to engage the spectator in a contemplative experience. The latter implies a suspension of the 'here and now' that accords with the illusory effects of Hunter's wall painting; however, more than his hard edge paintings, the contemplative mode of the wall painting is invested with a prominent temporal aspect, as Tom Nicholson has argued, reflecting the 'relocation of art from the (timeless) object to an experience (in time).'[50] Rather than subverting its institutional context, the 'ontological assertion' of Hunter's work, Nicholson argues, was 'impermanence': 'the ephemeral imprint of the stencil on the wall mirroring the transience of art in the consciousness of the viewer.'[51] A similar rationale for the minimalist wall work has been given by Mel Bochner. 'It was the wall, at once the most traditional and the most invisible of sites,' he says, 'which offered itself as the 'negligible' support.'[52] Bochner has also said that 'by collapsing the space between the artwork and the viewer, a wall painting negates the gap between lived time and pictorial time.'[53] Bochner's comment conveys the sense in which a wall painting seems to belong to the same time and space as the spectator, a fundamental principle of literalism theorised by Fried, which calls for flattening the distinction between the artwork and ordinary object, with the corollary that art was moving towards 'a neutral pleasure of seeing known to everyone.'[54]

Now, the idea that the wall painting establishes a heightened spatiotemporal intimacy between artwork and viewer also implies a degradation of the aura of art, which Walter Benjamin characterised as 'the unique phenomenon of a distance [between the spectator and the work], however close it may be.'[55] The wall painting is in conflict with this principle insofar as it establishes a relation to the spectator of proximity rather than distance. However, I argue that the question of the aura (or otherwise) of Hunter's wall paintings is not so straightforward. Described by Boris Groys as 'a sacral dimension of the things,' as defined

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[50] Nicholson, 'The Art of Robert Hunter,' 40.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Mel Bochner, 'Blue Powder Pigment Wall Pieces,' in *Solar Systems and Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews, 1965–2007* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2008), 182–85. 183
[53] Mel Bochner, 'Why Would Anyone Want to Draw on the Wall?,' *October* 130 (Autumn 2009), 135–140, 140.
[54] Dan Flavin cited in Lucy Lippard, 'Introduction,' in *Minimal Art* (The Hague: Gemeentemuseum, 1968), n.p.
[55] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' 222.

by Benjamin aura is a form of religious experience in modern societies that was threatened by modern technologies of reproduction, primarily photography and film.[56] As I explained in Chapter 6, aura is negated by reproduction because it is inseparable from the issue of authenticity: the 'here and now' of the original, its unique existence in space and time, is integral to its identity as such. This summary makes clear that it is not only through collapsing the distance between artwork and spectator that Hunter's wall paintings threatened aura; Hunter's use of a stencil, a primitive technology of reproduction, mobilised in different contexts, erodes their originality.

Repetition weakens aura because, historically speaking, auratic objects such as artworks have been defined through their authentic proximity to an origin; they are distinguished from other objects through their attachment to a unique place and time: this imbues them with aura. Yet as shown by Groys' theorisation of aura in installation art, which hinges on a novel re-reading of Benjamin's concept, repetition as seen in Hunter's wall paintings does not automatically weaken aura, but instead merely alters its mode of distribution and appearance. The original, Groys argues, paraphrasing Benjamin, has a particular site, 'and through this particular site the original is inscribed into history as this unique object'; the copy, on the other hand is 'virtual, siteless, ahistorical: from the beginning it appears as potential multiplicity.'[57] What this means, he claims, is that the difference between original and copy is 'exclusively a topological one': whereas one has a relationship to its 'here and now,' the other does not belong to any place; 'aura is … the relationship of the artwork to the site in which it is found.' If this is true, Groys alleges, then

> every installation re-creates an aura of originality precisely because it installs things—gives them topologically defined here and now. So installation can do something mysterious, quasi-religious, making an original out of a copy.[58]

Aura resides in spaces that have been designated as 'art,' which, crucially, the spectator travels to. This is important: the spectator travels to the artwork; the artwork does not travel

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[56] Boris Groys, 'The Art Seminar,' in *Re-Enchantment*, eds. James Elkins and David Morgan (Oxfordshire: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 165.
[57] Boris Groys, 'Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation' (2002), in *Art Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2008), 53–66, 62.
[58] Boris Groys, 'The Art Seminar,' 165.

to the spectator.[59] According to Benjamin, the modern dissipation of aura in modernity is when 'the cathedral leaves its site to be received in the studio of an art lover'; yet this leaves open the possibility of aura subsisting in the format of the exhibition: to experience an exhibition, it is necessary for the would-be viewer to make the pilgrimage to the space of art.[60]

Gallery as Monastery

The idea that the space of art imbues its objects with aura, the sacral dimension of things, invites a renewed consideration of the context in which Hunter's first wall painting was shown. What this reveals is that the idea of the destruction of aura was not on the agenda at Pinacotheca, where art was sometimes spoken about in religious terms. A central proponent of a mystical view of art was Bruce Pollard, who theorised the contemplative brand of minimalism practiced by his artists (see Chapter 2) and recently described Hunter's paintings as akin to 'a religious experience.'[61] Pollard recently spoke of the Renaissance art he encountered while travelling through Italy in the late 1950s and early 1960s as shaping his aesthetic sensibility: 'I visited some monasteries in Florence with paintings on the wall—all peaceful and white and contemplative.'[62] He has also declared: 'I'm a great contemplator, I feel as though the force is in the icon, it's iconic, the force is in the object.'[63] The goal of art, he believed, is to bring about a contemplative experience. Accordingly, Pollard's gallery would be a sanctuary, a place distant from worldly pressures, which would facilitate contemplative experience.

This contemplative ideal shaped Pollard's proposal in 1971 for Pinacotheca to be operated as an artist cooperative while he was travelling overseas. An open letter by Pollard published in the Melbourne magazine *High Times* opens with a 'description of organisational changes' implied by the cooperative: 'no catalogues; no openings; no wine; no mailing list; the artist looks after his own show for half the time it is on; the artists as a group select who

[59] Boris Groys, 'Art in the Age of Biopolitics,' 63.
[60] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' 221.
[61] Bruce Pollard, interview with David Homewood and Trevor Fuller, Melbourne, 6 November 2017.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Bruce Pollard, interview with Trevor Fuller, 2000. Located in the the Pinacotheca Archive, Melbourne; compiled by Bruce Pollard and Trevor Fuller.

shows in future; the artists will run their own magazine; the gallery charges 20c admission.'[64] Pollard hoped that running the gallery as a cooperative would escape the pomp, luxury and ego that defined an art world he believed was preoccupied with celebrity, glamour and material wealth.[65] Pollard later described his vision of the gallery as 'a bit pure'—it could also be called 'puritanical.'[66] Christopher Heathcote, for his part, has described Pollard's approach to running Pinacotheca as driven by an 'ascetic impulse.'[67]

In the *High Times* letter, Pollard described Pinacotheca as a 'quiet, rather monastic, non-utilitarian space.'[68] He was not the only one to liken Pinacotheca to a monastery. In a letter to Pollard the following year, Hickey recounted a midday soiree at Tolarno in honour of Robert Hughes, which he attended with Hunter and Ti Parks. After his confrontation with 'the voracious bourgeoisie which constitutes "the art audience" in this country,' Hickey wrote, 'Pinacotheca seemed by contrast a monastery. I'm glad I can get back with Pinacotheca with renewed faith.'[69] In a 1991 open letter reflecting on his relationship with Pollard, Mike Brown made reference to the same religious organisation: 'Bruce's "line" as a gallery director was to maintain an almost reclusive or monastic isolation from the Passing Parade, the Art Circus, the cut-and-thrust of 20th century Cultural-Life-as-she-is-Lived.'[70]

Crucial to the monasticism of Pinacotheca was its distance from the surrounding culture. Hickey summarised Pollard's mindset:

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[64] Bruce Pollard, 'Letter to the Editor,' *High Times*, 1971.
[65] Others have played down the significance of the cooperative. Hickey suggests that the cooperative was born out of 'circumstances rather than anything else.' Hickey cited in Sweet, *Pinacotheca*, 29. This is corroborated by Alex Selenitsch, who remembers it primarily as 'a symbolic gesture. All the money and admin decisions were out of our [the artists'] hands.' Alex Selenitsch, response to Trevor Fuller questionnaire, 3 October 2003. Located in the the Pinacotheca Archive, Melbourne; compiled by Bruce Pollard and Trevor Fuller.
[66] Pollard cited in Sweet, *Pinacotheca*, 33. Pollard described his approach to building an art collection as 'puritanical.' Bruce Pollard, interview with Homewood and Fuller, 6 November 2017, Richmond.
[67] Christopher Heathcote, *Inside the Art Market: Australia's Galleries 1956–1976* (Sydney: Thames and Hudson, 2016), 161.
[68] Pollard, 'Letter to the Editor,' 1971.
[69] Dale Hickey, letter to Bruce Pollard, 20 July 1972.
[70] Mike Brown, 'Letter to Bruce Pollard,' 1991, print-out from www.mikebrown.com.au (now defunct), located in the State Library of Victoria. Mike Brown AAA file.

> The community would come here. I refuse to send out invitations, I refuse to put on dinner parties, I refuse to do any of the run of the mill stuff of the art world because I expect Melbourne to come to me.[71]

Pollard's stubborn insistence that the spectator would take the trouble to visit the gallery harmonises with the reconfigured idea of aura outlined above, according to which the spectator makes a pilgrimage to the space of art. A literal manifestation of Pinacotheca's separation from the outside world was its formidable, steel front door, which was a source of ongoing dispute between artists in the early 1970s.[72] A group of artists involved in the Pinacotheca cooperative, Mike Brown the most vocal among them, regarded the door as a sign of unwelcome that would potentially deter visitors and scorned the gallery's unwillingness to communicate with the outside world as detrimental to the public role of the gallery. But Pollard and many artists including Hickey and Rooney were content to leave the industrial façade intact, viewing their separation from the surrounding environment as a fortunate situation rather than a problem to be overcome. The door was another barrier between the space of art and its outside, an architectural safeguard for the authenticity of its contents, which by heightening inaccessibility intensified aura.[73]

The topological concept of aura indicates that aura resides in the space of art rather than the artwork itself, but there is little doubt that Hunter's use of Pinacotheca as a picture support endowed it with additional aura previously reserved for modernist paintings. By painting directly onto the wall, the gallery itself edged closer to the status of an artwork. On the basis that Hunter's work was oriented towards the same contemplative agenda as its auratic gallery setting, their relation was one of harmonious interdependence rather than critical antagonism, a new interpretative possibility emerges: it becomes possible to see the wall painting as serving an ornamental function. Given modernism's well-documented fear, or even hatred, of ornament, as formulated in Adolf Loos' manifesto 'Ornament and Crime'

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[71] Dale Hickey, cited in Sweet, *Pinacotheca*, 33.
[72] Sweet, *Pinacotheca*, 31.
[73] In imposing a boundary between the space of art from the everyday world, Pinacotheca's imposing door recalls the function of 'broad flights of steps, grandiose portals and generously proportioned interiors' in nineteenth-century museum architecture, which as Hans Zitko explains, 'delimit a sphere removed from the profane world. In such surroundings contact with art assumed the aura of a cultic act.' Zitko, 'Rationalisation in the Service of Tradition,' *Ornament and Abstraction: The Dialogue Between non-Western, Modern and Contemporary Art,* ed. Markus Brüderlin (Riehen/Basel: Foundation Bayeler, 2001), 56–63, 59.

(1908), such a claim may seem odd or even a pejorative judgement of Hunter's work. While such a reading potentially opens Hunter's wall painting to pre-modernist and non-Western conceptions of ornament, it does not mean it was anti-modernist. In Chapter 5, I argued that Hunter's hard edge paintings evince a determination to eliminate the inessential, and his decision to eliminate the portable picture support and work directly on the wall is an extension of this. Ironically, though, this essentialising impulse now resulted in a hybrid of painting and architecture: in Hunter's hands, the zero-degree painting took the form of an architectural embellishment.

Looking at Hunter's wall painting in this way involves a shift of emphasis: instead of painting incorporating its architectural support, architecture absorbs the painting; painting is seen as an adornment. In Kant's definition, ornament is that which is external to an artwork: 'what does not belong to the whole presentation of the object as an intrinsic constituent, but is only an extrinsic addition.'[74] This definition informs recent definitions of ornament as that which is 'essential neither to the underlying structure of an object or building nor to its serviceability,' or 'the art we add to art.'[75] When it is the space of art that it is invested with aura, rather than the artwork, this idea of ornament—art added to art—proves more useful for understanding the nature of the relationship between Hunter's wall painting and the picture gallery than the modernist conception of the gallery as a space within which artworks 'stand on their own feet.' Instead, the painting is the necessary supplement that registers the gallery as an auratic space. In authorising the art context as such, the wall painting serves to reinforce the distinction between aesthetic and ordinary experience.[76] Aura, in other words, was not destroyed by Hunter's rudimentary forms—it was produced.

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[74] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 226.
[75] Eva Baer, *Islamic Ornament* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 2. James Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective* (Canada: University of Washington Press, 2003), 23. Oleg Grabar distinguishes between ornament and decoration: 'Decoration is anything, even whole mosaic or sculpted programs, applied to an object or to a building, whereas ornament is that aspect of decoration which appears not to have another purpose but to enhance its carrier.' Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 5.
[76] This is identified by Hans Zitko as a basic function of ornament: 'As formal complexes held to be equipped with evocative force, ornaments were especially well suited to representing temporal and spiritual power: they not only embodied claims to such power; they also formed a means of implementing those claims. They staked out territory, creating magical thresholds and barriers—like the bands of ornament placed on the exteriors of temples and churches to protect the sacred realm from enemy powers.' Hans Zitko, 'Rationalisation in the Service of Tradition,' 59.

Conclusion

By charting the development of Hunter's early wall paintings in relation to minimalist, post-minimalist and conceptualists such as Buren, Dezeuze, Hesse, LeWitt, Morris and Palermo, this chapter has signalled Hunter's complex involvement in 1960s and 1970s art outside Australia. I have demonstrated that the illusionism and contemplativeness of Hunter's paintings are at odds with prevailing materialist and rationalist accounts of this period; the same works also resist historiographical efforts to frame radical art of these years in terms of socio-political critique. This chapter has argued that Hunter's first wall painting, far from being an institutional disruption, harmonised with the curatorial vision of Pollard—the director of Pinacotheca—who subscribed to a mystical view of aesthetic experience according to which the artwork was understood as a vehicle for contemplation. The heightened interdependence of the artwork and its context achieved through wall painting is often thought to blur the distinction between aesthetic and ordinary experience. Yet this blurring did not take place in Hunter's work, the reason being that it was presented in the context of an auratic space that was conceived by Pollard as separate from worldly concerns. Reconceiving aura as a substance that is located in the space of art rather than the artwork, this chapter revealed that Hunter's wall painting served an ornamental or decorative function: by merging with its architectural support, the 'phantom mural' heightened the auratic presence of the gallery itself.

Through contemplation, the privileged mode of experience that Pinacotheca was meant to facilitate, the otherworldliness of banal objects would be revealed. As I argued in the first half of this thesis, the pursuit of estrangement motivated Hickey's incorporation of domestic and suburban objects into modernist abstractions, and his insertion of commonplace references into minimalist and conceptualist works; it also drove his abandonment and subsequent resumption of the craft of painting. A similar defamiliarising tendency is also visible in Hunter's work of the same period, for example, in his appropriation of house-painter's materials and techniques. While the pursuit of defamiliarisation arguably drove Hunter's transition from the canvas to the wall, it did not lead to any comparable subsequent transgression of the medium. This was not due to Hunter's lack of commitment to the contemplative ideal, but rather to his different means of enacting it. The suspension of subjectivity in contemplation finds its corollary, at the level of production, in the non-compositional strategies adapted by Hunter to eliminate subjectivity from the painting process. Hunter's non-compositional program emerged in the gridded structures and rotating

geometries of his hard-edge paintings of the late 1960s, and continued in the gridded structures, gestural roughness and serial formats of the 1970 grey paintings; in the first wall paintings, the use of the masking tape stencil curbed his decision-making in the production of each wall pattern, and the casual application of watered-down paint generated random results. The medium of painting, historically a privileged site of subjective expression, would remain the stage on which Hunter performed this disappearing act.

8. Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to enrich historiographical understanding of 1960s and 1970s art on several fronts. Its first contribution to scholarship relates to an acknowledgement of the contemplative bent of Hickey's and Hunter's work; its second finding involves the matter of painting in the so-called post-medium condition; third, it provides a new understanding of the artists' specific artistic and cultural context. After summarising these outcomes and outlining the contribution made by this thesis to the existing literature, this final chapter will survey the material covered in each chapter, before indicating directions of future research opened by this thesis.

Between 1966 and 1973, Hickey and Hunter engaged with modernist hard-edge painting, minimalism and conceptualism. Beneath these stylistic shifts, this thesis has shown, their work was structured around the aesthetic goals of estrangement and desubjectivisation. Although Hickey's art was motivated by estrangement and Hunter's by desubjectivisation, the argument has been that there is a complementary relationship between these tendencies, which recur in various forms throughout the work of both artists. These tendencies align with the mystical conception of aesthetic activity promoted by Pollard, according to which the artwork served as a vehicle for contemplation. By discussing the 'mystical' modernism of Hickey and Hunter, and its ties to estrangement and desubjectivisation, this thesis deepens existing knowledge of the quasi-religious dimension of modernism. In the existing literature, mysticism is less often discussed in connection to minimalism and conceptualism, which are typically framed in materialist or rationalist terms; in highlighting the persistence of defamiliarisation and desubjectivisation in Hickey's and Hunter's minimalist and conceptualist art, this thesis augments existing understanding of numinous elements within these movements.

A further finding of this thesis concerns the issue of painting and the rise of the post-medium condition. Standard accounts of avant-garde art during the 1960s and 1970s emphasise the eclipse of traditional artistic mediums by a range of new forms including installation, performance, video and conceptual art. Building on existing research into conceptualist experimentation in Melbourne circa 1970, this thesis investigated developments such as Hickey's relinquishment of the traditional materials and techniques of painting for installation, text and photographic forms, and Hunter's switch from the stretched canvas to wall painting. Yet, as seen in the work of Hickey and Hunter, painting remained a crucial

factor within minimalism and conceptualism in Melbourne. This thesis thus aimed to enhance and deepen understandings of the status of painting within those movements. By reframing these movements through the medium they are often said to displace, this thesis provides new insight into the vernacular specificity of minimalism and conceptualism as it was practiced by Hickey, Hunter and others within their Melbourne milieu.

The third major contribution to knowledge made by this thesis comes through its framing of both artists' work within a local artistic and cultural context that is shown to be part of an international network of practices and discourses. This approach revealed the contemplativeness and painterliness of their work as defining traits of the art shown at Pinacotheca, and central to Pollard's curatorial vision, thus adding to knowledge of Melbourne art of the period. At the same time, by emphasising the interconnectedness of Hickey's and Hunter's work with art outside Melbourne and Australia, this thesis avoided the parochialism of metropolitan and nationalist art histories. The thesis found that Hickey and Hunter looked to New York rather than London or Paris for influence; however, it aimed to deepen existing understanding of Australian art through exploring previously neglected correspondences between Australian art of the late 1960s and early 1970s and European art. In addition, this thesis critiques the entrenched perception of Australian art as a provincial echo of American and European art. As an alternative, it highlights the dynamic relationship between Australian, American and European art.

The main argument summarised above has played out across the two parts of this thesis, each comprised of three chapters on Hickey and Hunter, which I will now briefly summarise. Chapter 2 discussed Hickey's modernist paintings in relation to the forms and discourses of late modernism. Situating Hickey within a local scene of vernacular abstractionists, it found that Hickey's work was determined by an aesthetic of estrangement. The final part of the chapter related Hickey's minimalist paintings of 1969 to Pollard's theory of contemplative minimalism. In Chapter 3, the defamiliarising tendency of Hickey's work was shown to continue into his conceptualist works of 1969 and 1970. Although Hickey had shifted away from painting, the medium was shown to be primary preoccupation of his installation, text and photographic works. The first part of Chapter 4 gave an account of Hickey's research trip to America and Europe to observe the impact of conceptualism in art schools. His experiences overseas were shown to inform the *Cup Paintings*, which marked Hickey's dramatic return to painting via the anachronistic genre of the still life. Hickey's adoption of the anachronistic form, it argued, was shaped by the defamiliarising tendency that had shaped his earlier works.

The second part of this thesis tracked Hunter's work of the late 1960s and early 1970s, beginning in Chapter 5 with his hard-edge paintings. Addressing the historiographical neglect of Hunter's relationship to European geometric art, this chapter compares his work to figures in that tradition with links to Max Bill. Identifying numerous formal and discursive similarities between Hunter and European art, this chapter ultimately differentiates Hunter's contemplative abstractions from the rationalist conception of art promoted by the likes of Bill. It concludes by framing the non-compositionality of Hunter's 'white paintings' as a form of desubjectivisation. Chapter 6 revolves around an analysis of Hunter's *Thread Painting* and *Paper Painting*. It established their proximity to minimalism and post-minimalism, and observed the deep affinity between Hunter's painting and the work of Agnes Martin. These works, it was discovered, extended Hunter's agenda of non-composition through combining grid structures with techniques of hand-drawing and gestural handling. The analysis of Hunter's wall paintings of 1970 and 1971 conducted in Chapter 7 positioned them in relation to comparable wall works of the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on their similarities and differences with the wall drawings of Sol LeWitt, whose writings were identified as a source for Hunter's project of desubjectivisation. It argued that Hunter's wall paintings served an ornamental function within the auratic space Pinacotheca.

The analysis of the art of Hickey and Hunter during the late 1960s and early 1970s undertaken in this thesis opens up various directions of future research. One option would be to broaden the discussion of hard-edge painting into a survey of significant exponents of the art in Melbourne including Peter Booth, James Doolin and Robert Rooney, whose abstractions incorporate commonplace imagery. In order to further establish the vernacular traits of Melbourne hard-edge painting, its connection to British pop art could also be considered in more detail. A related topic overdue for analysis is early installation art in Melbourne as practiced by Mike Brown, Domenico de Clario and Ti Parks. The crossover between hard-edge painting and installation in Melbourne, which share in common a preoccupation with 'the banal' and 'the ordinary,' warrants further attention. Another possible research direction would be to consider the links between the principal protagonists of this thesis and other artists based elsewhere, such as Carl Andre, Roger Cutforth and Ian Burn, all of whom had links to Pinacotheca in the 1960s and 1970s. This could form the basis of a global history of painting in the post-medium across multiple locations. A similar framework could be used as the basis for a comparative analysis of the art of Hickey, Hunter and others at Pinacotheca alongside the contemplative minimalism of Californian minimalists Robert Irwin (who knew Robert Hunter), John McCracken and James Turrell. The mystical

conceptualism of Moscow artists Ilya Kabakov and Mikhail Roginsky, which emphasised the subjective properties of artworks that often took the blank surfaces of domestic environments as their subject matter, present a further parallel with the art of Hickey and Hunter. In opening up these and several other potential lines of art-historiographical enquiry, this thesis has not only made a significant contribution to research into Melbourne art of the 1960s and 1970s but has also laid the groundwork for innovative approaches to cognate art forms originating in countries across the globe.

Figure 2.1: Dale Hickey, *Abstract*, 1966.

Figure 2.2: Dale Hickey, *Untitled (Pipe Painting)*, 1966.

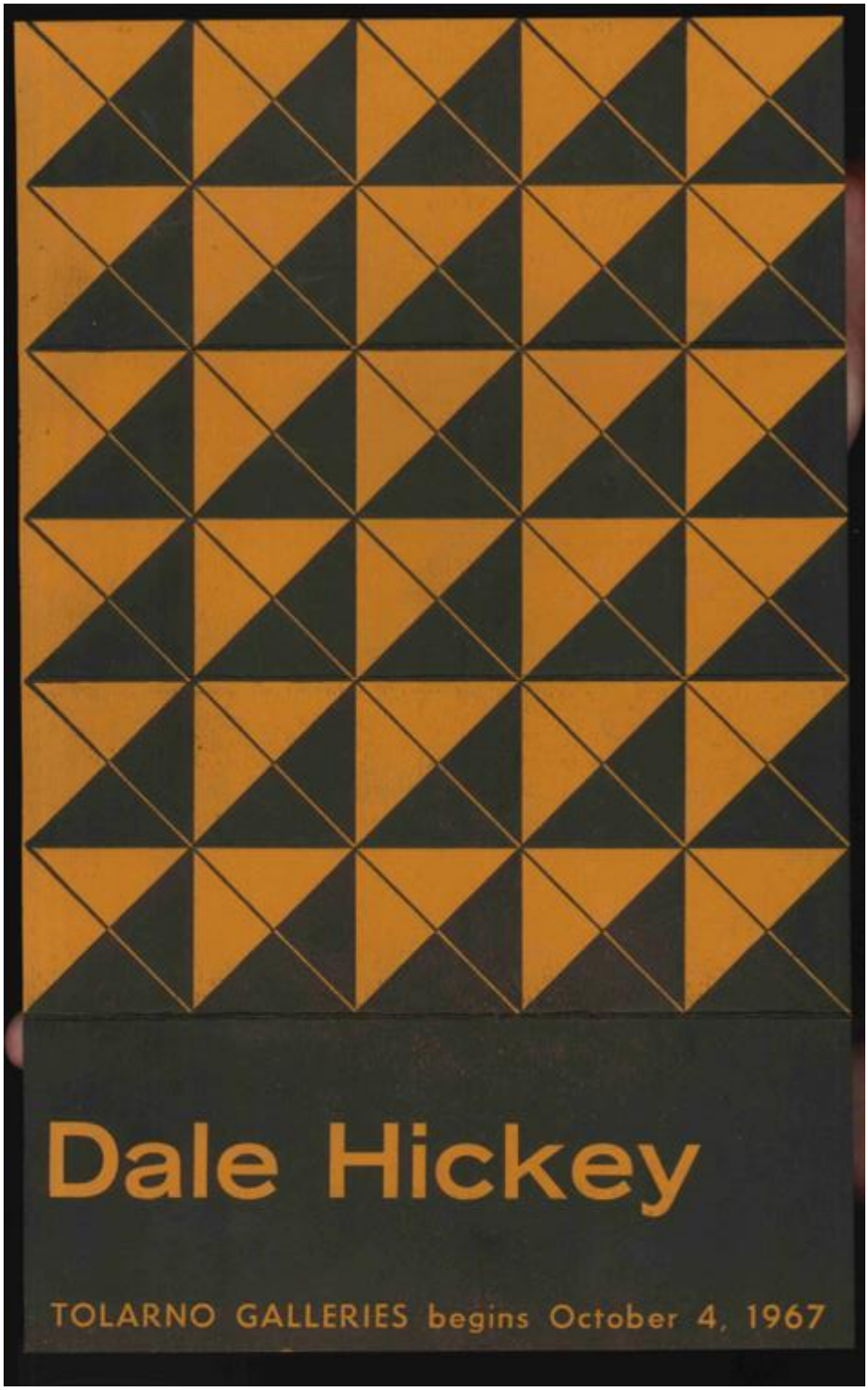

Figure 2.3: Dale Hickey, exhibition invitation, 1967.

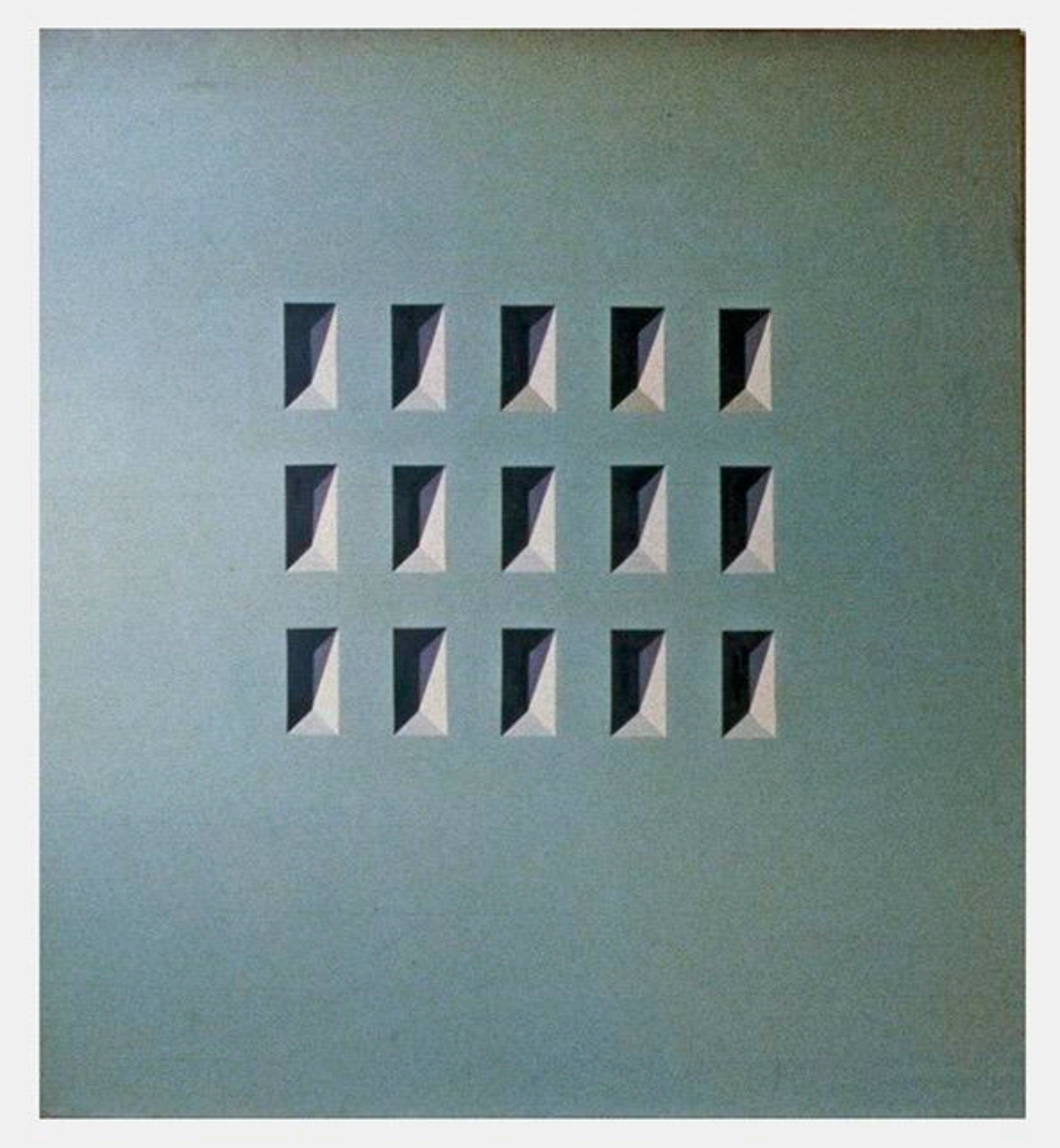

Figure 2.4: Dale Hickey, *Wall*, 1966

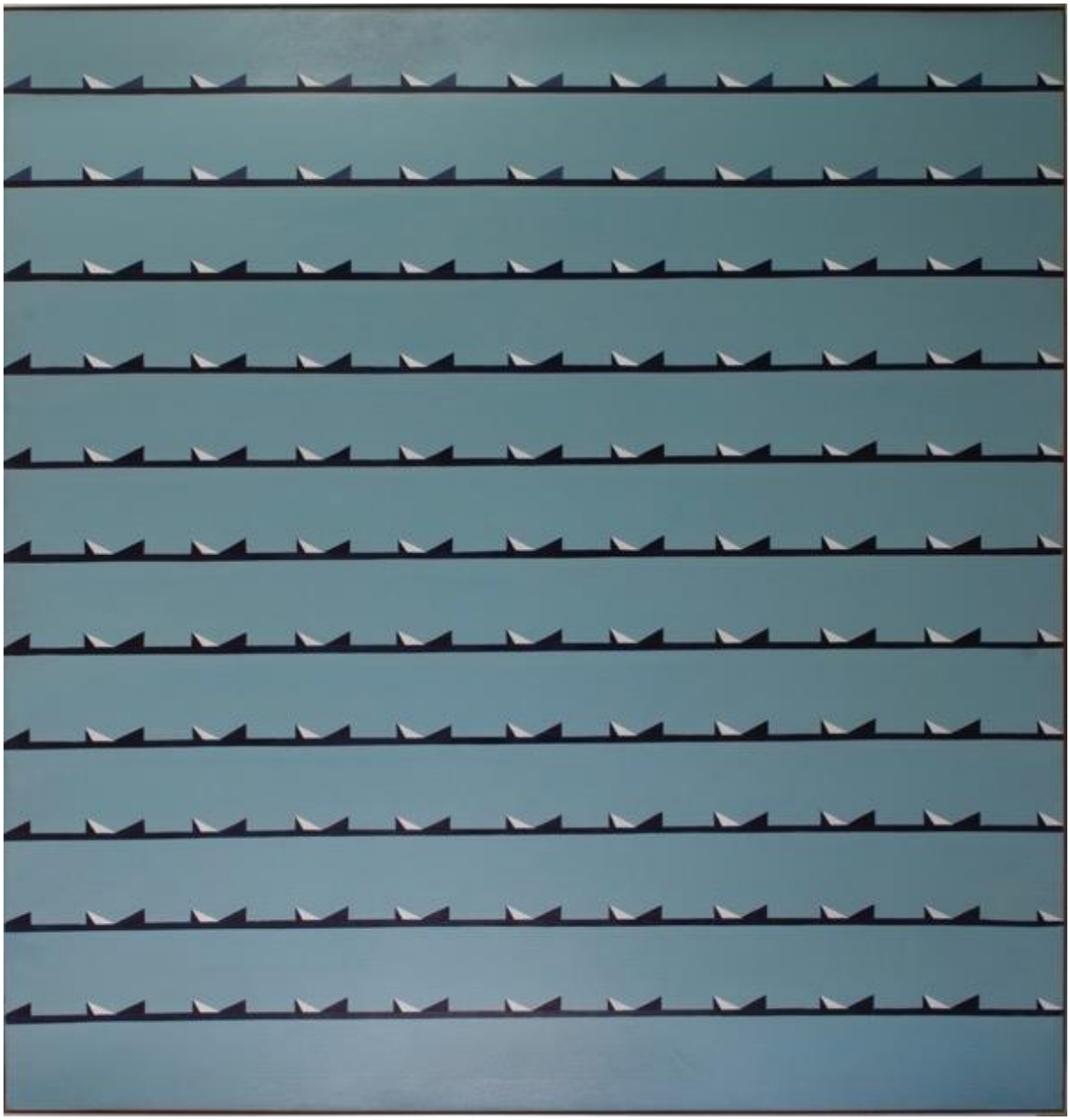

Figure 2.5: Dale Hickey, *Malvern*, 1967.

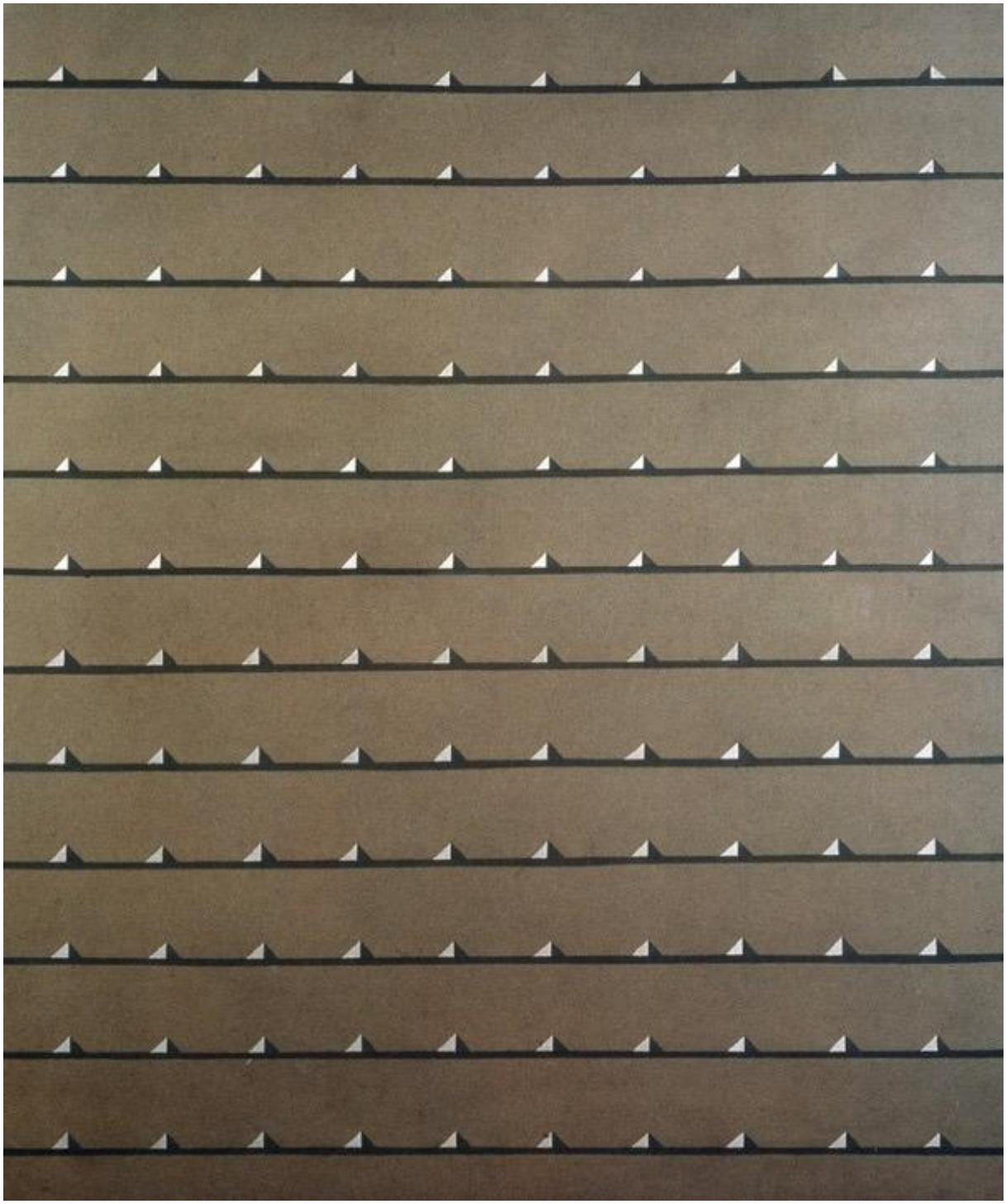

Figure 2.6: Dale Hickey, *Untitled (Malvern II)*, 1967.

Figure 2.7: Melbourne suburban exterior circa 1970, photographer unknown.

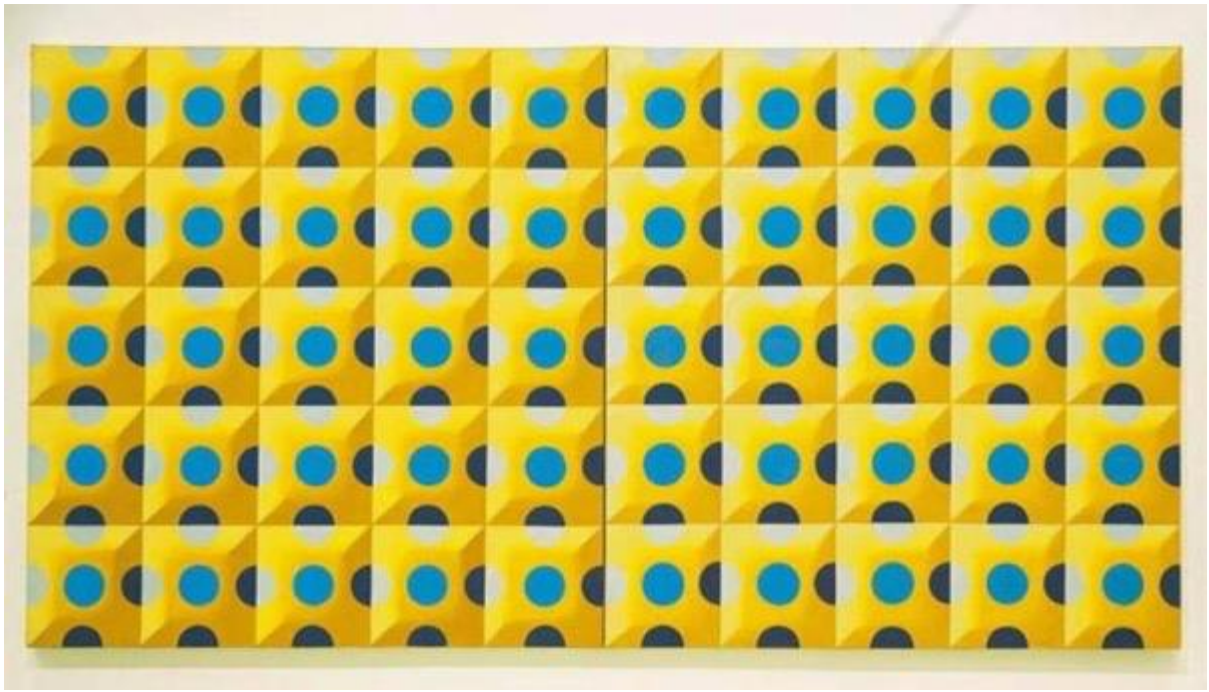

Figure 2.8: Dale Hickey, *No. 2* (*Quilt Painting)*, 1967.

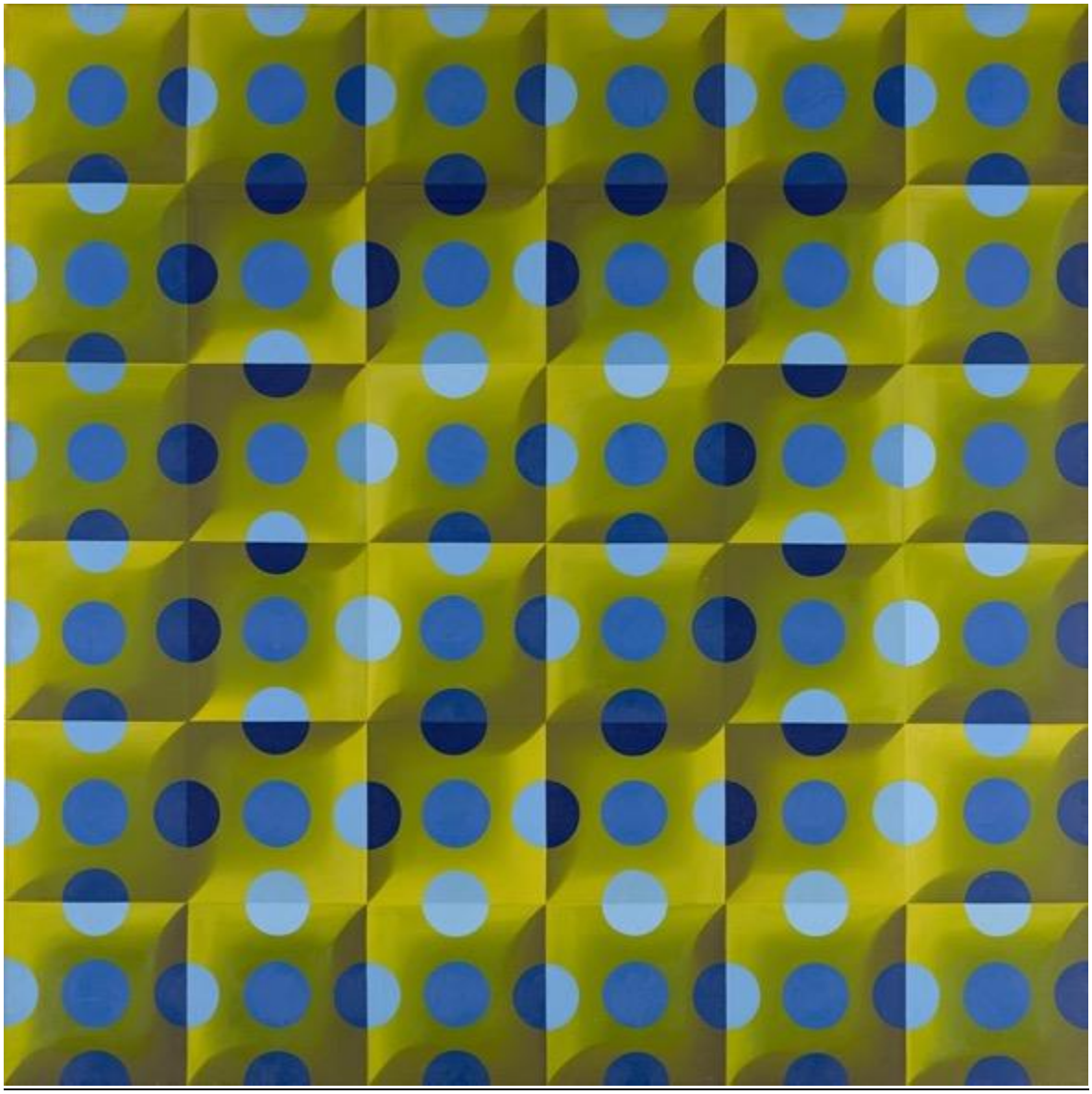

Figure 2.9: Dale Hickey, *Untitled (Quilt Painting)*, 1967–68.

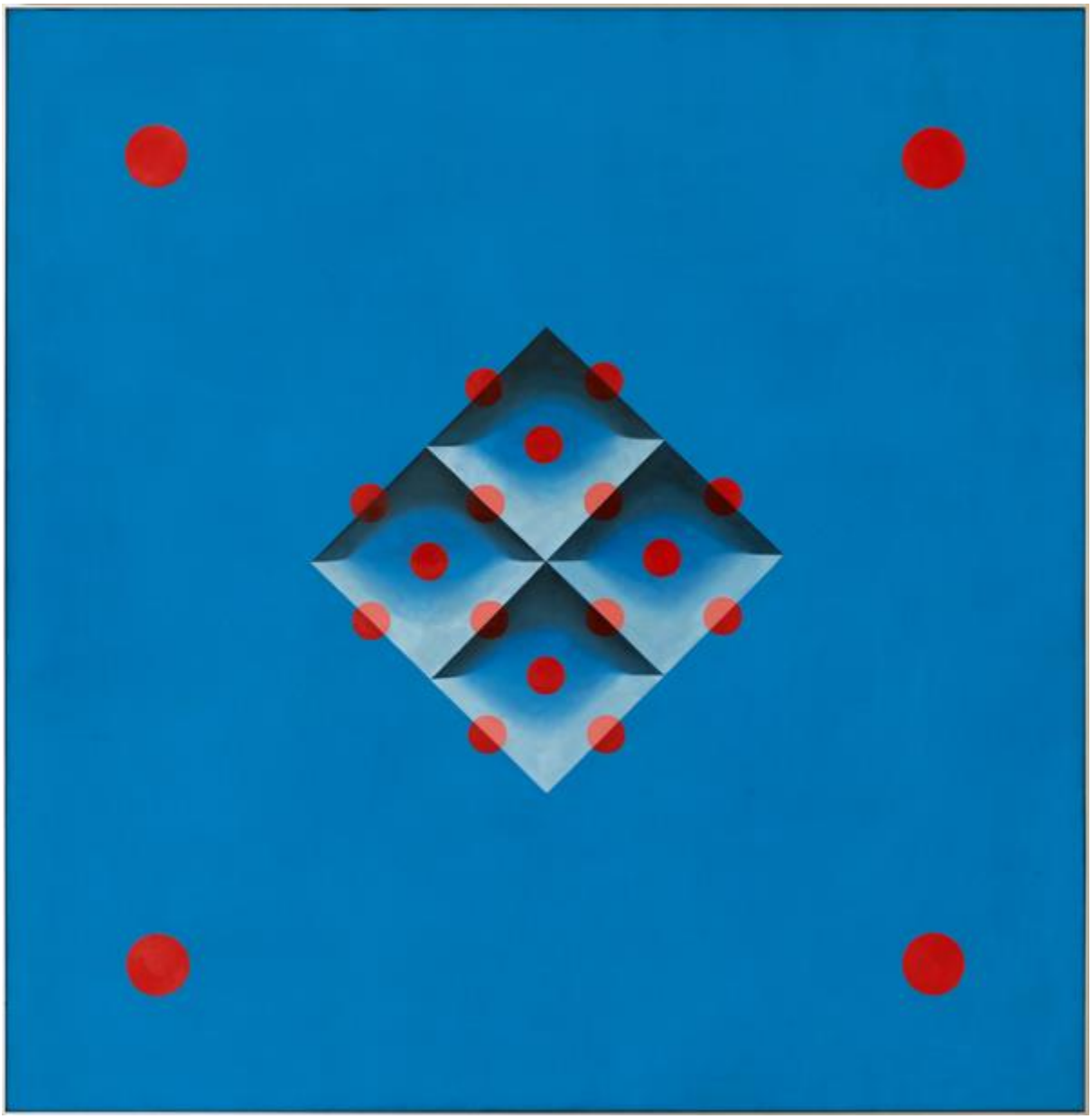

Figure 2.10: Dale Hickey, *Untitled (Quilt Painting)*, 1967.

Figure 2.11: Dale Hickey, *Untitled (Fence Painting)*, 1967.

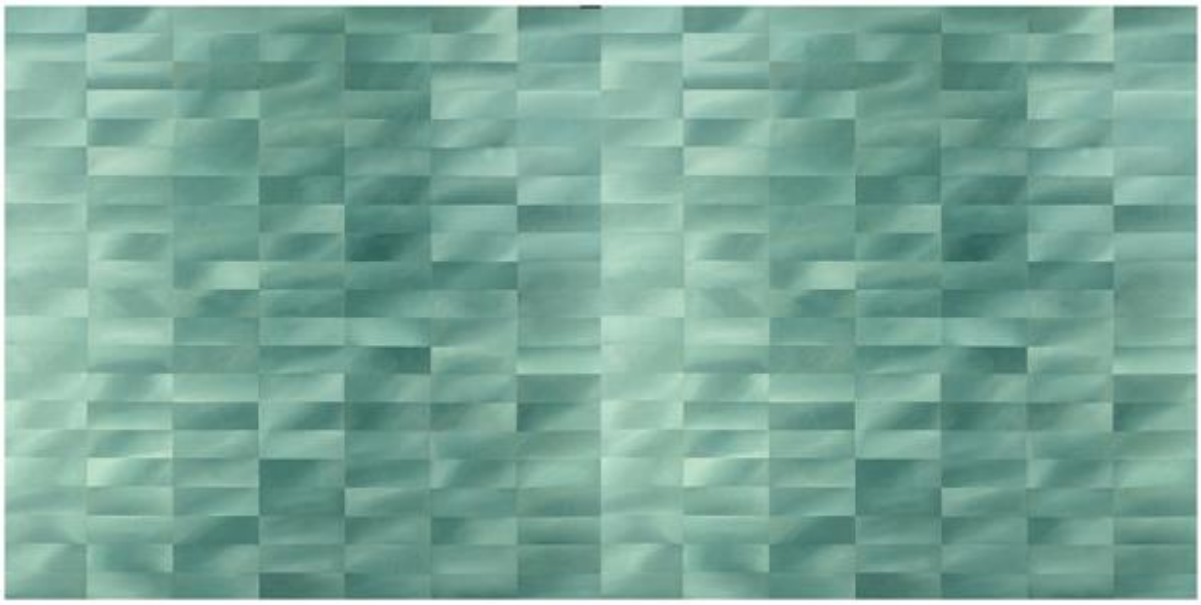

Figure 2.12: Dale Hickey, *Atlantis*, 1969.

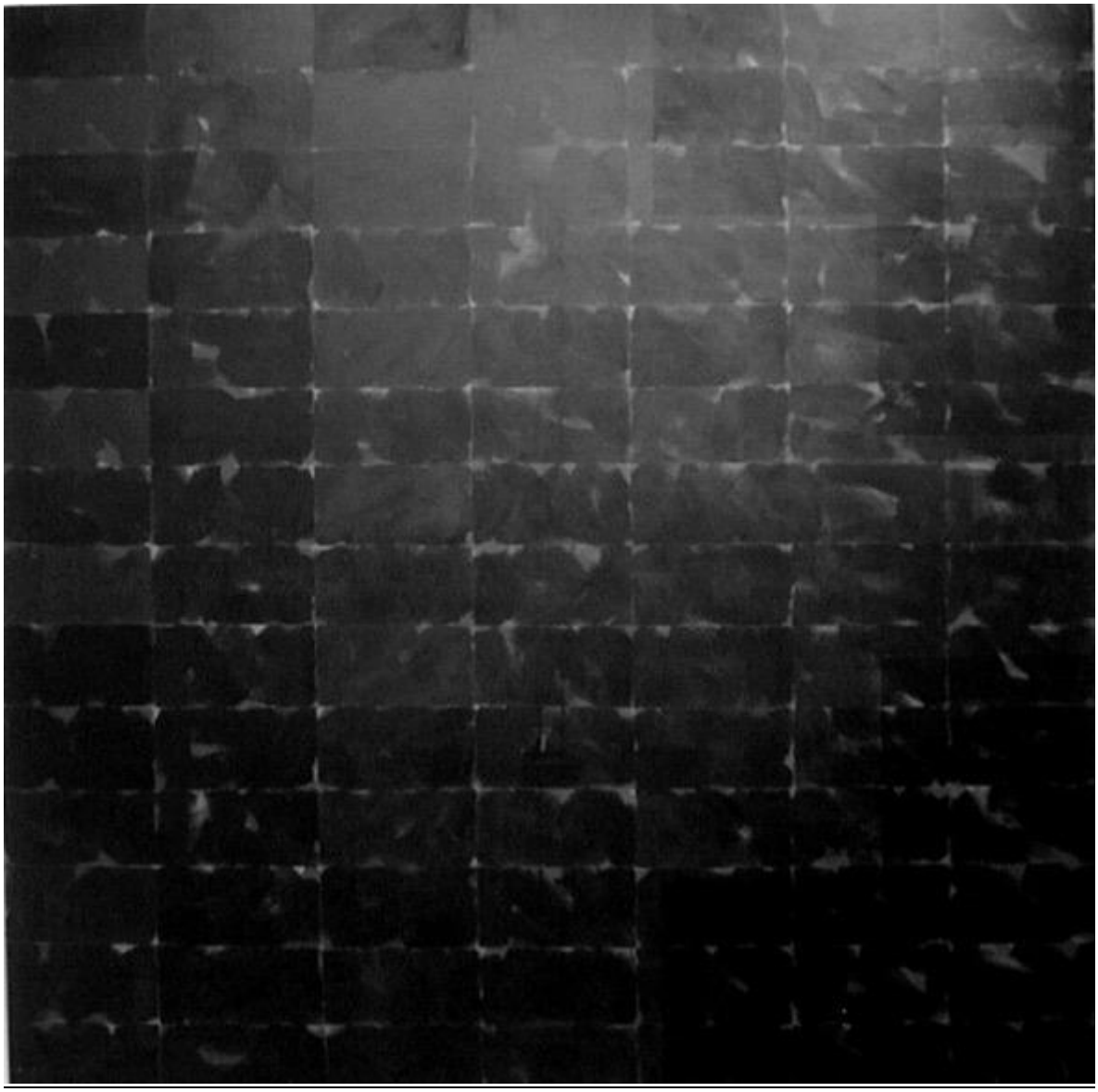

Figure 2.13: Dale Hickey, *Black Painting*, 1969.

Figure 2.14: Dale Hickey, *Black Painting* (detail), 1969.

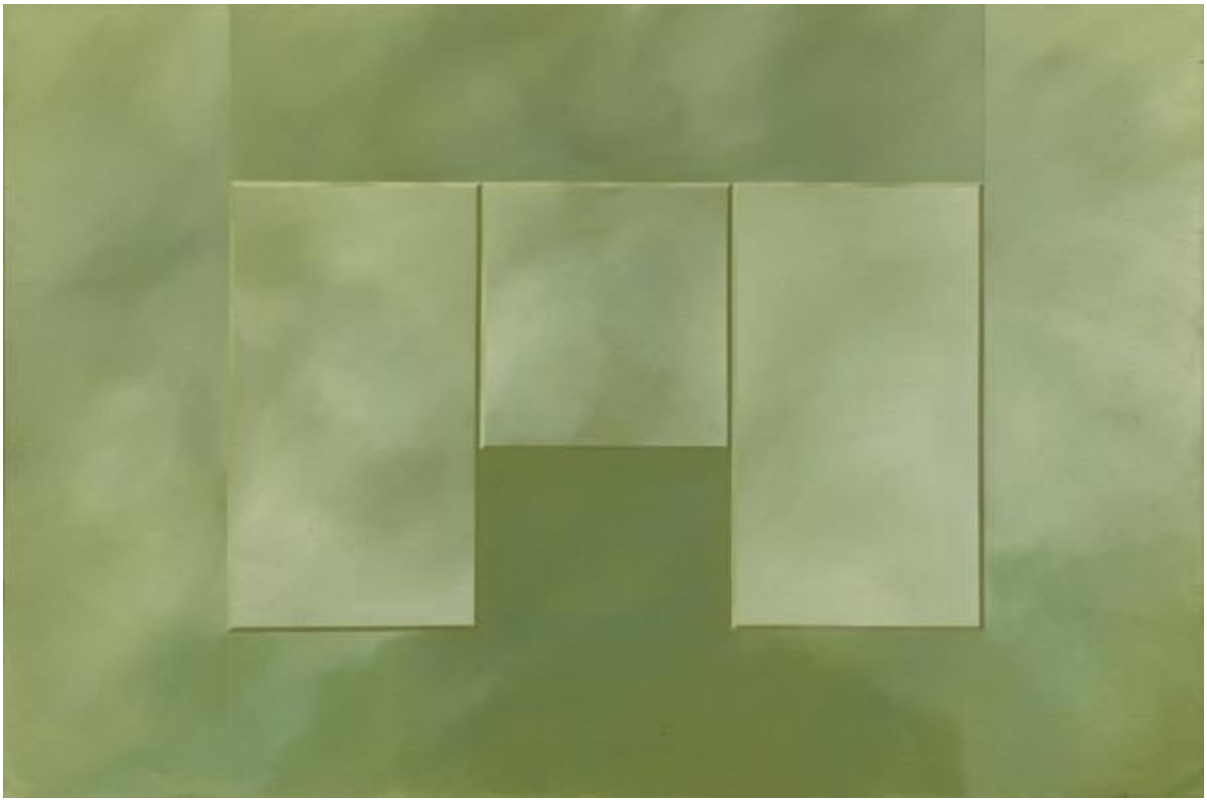

Figure 2.15: Dale Hickey, *Untitled*, 1969.

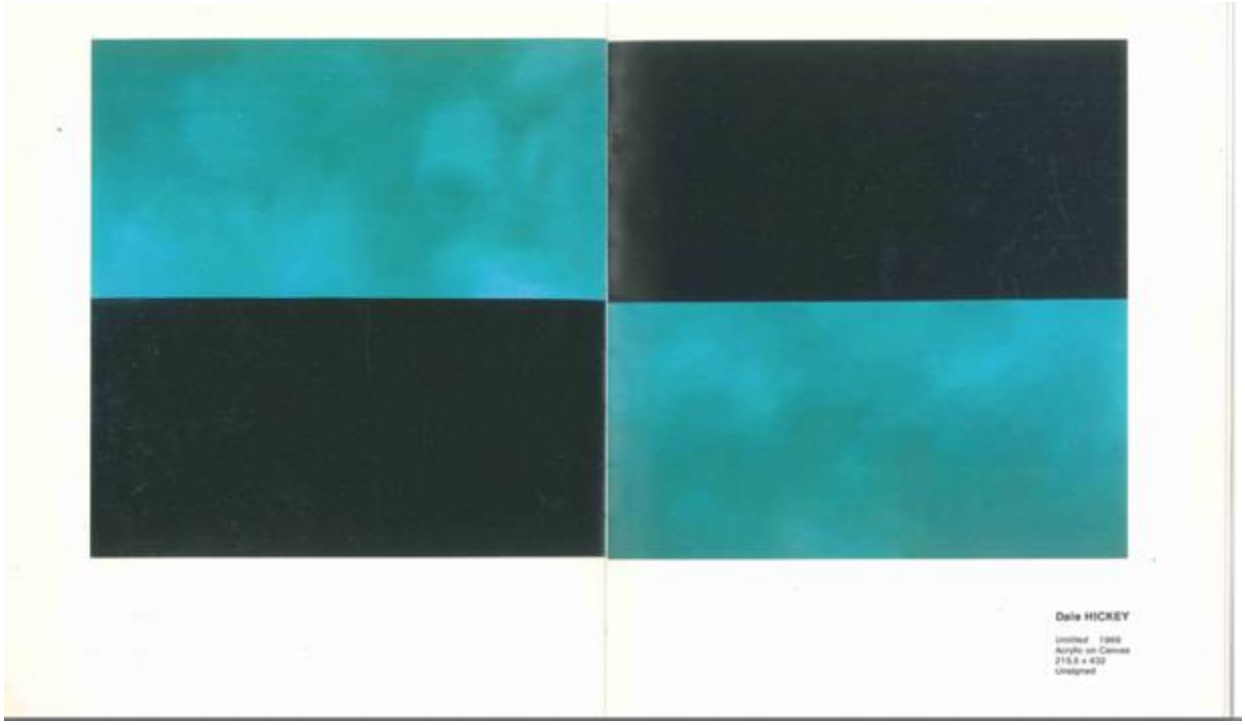

Figure 2.16: Dale Hickey, *Untitled (Garage Door Painting)*, 1969. Reproduced in *Minimal Art in Australia: A Contemplative Art* (Brisbane: M.o.C.A., 1987).

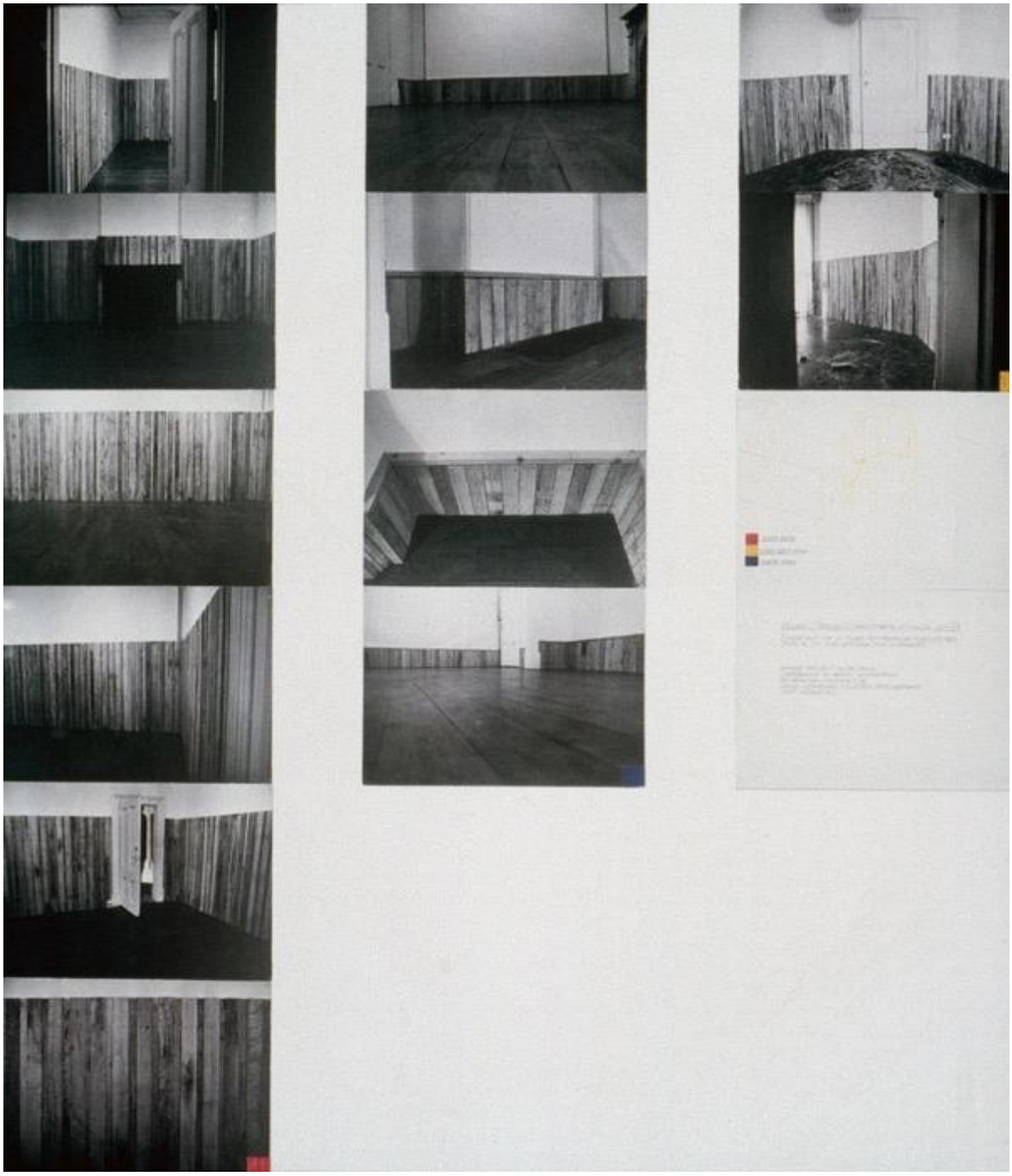

Figure 3.1: Dale Hickey, *Fences*, 1969.

Figure 3.2: Dale Hickey and fence-builder Jim Emmins, during the installation of *Fences*, 1969.

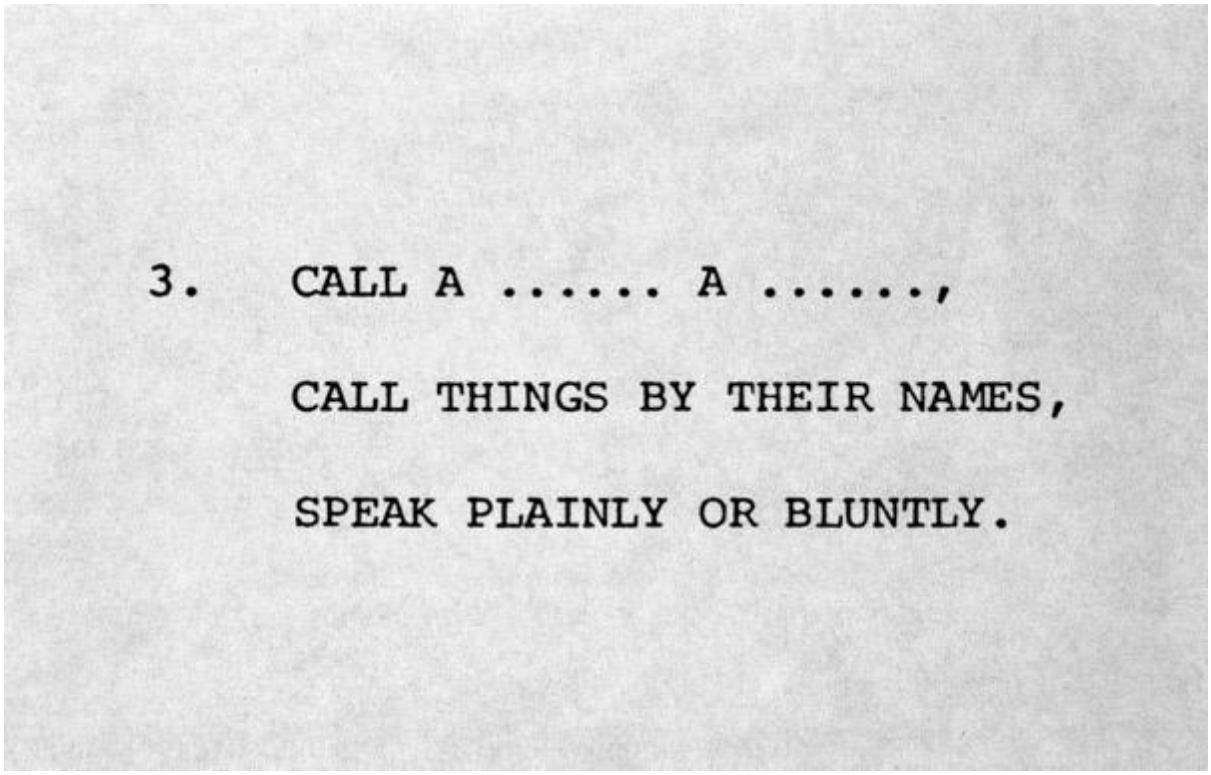

Figure 3.3: Dale Hickey, *Calling a Spade a Spade*, 1970.

Figure 3.4: Dale Hickey, *90 White Walls*, 1970.

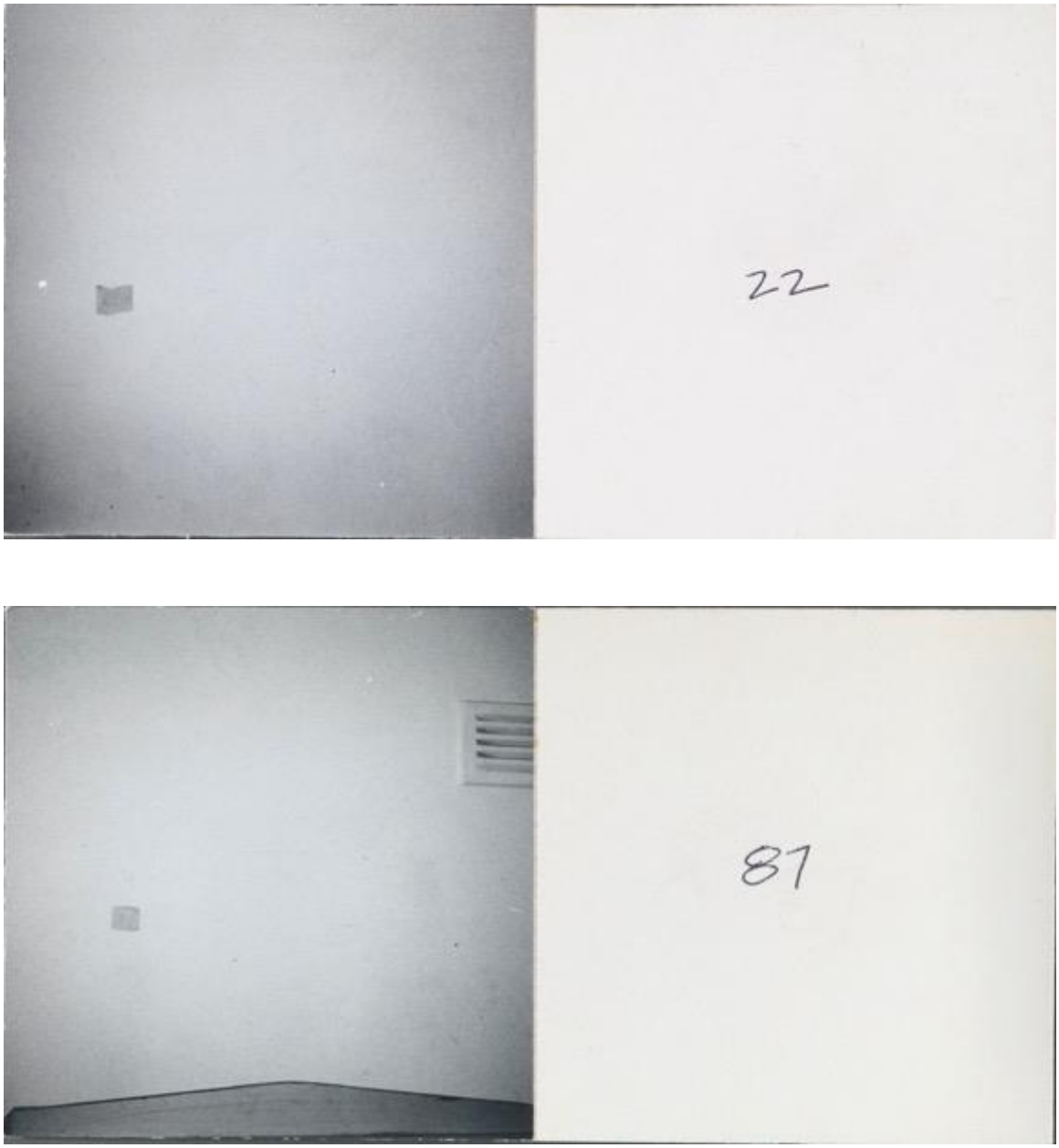

Figure 3.5: Dale Hickey, *90 White Walls* (detail), 1970.

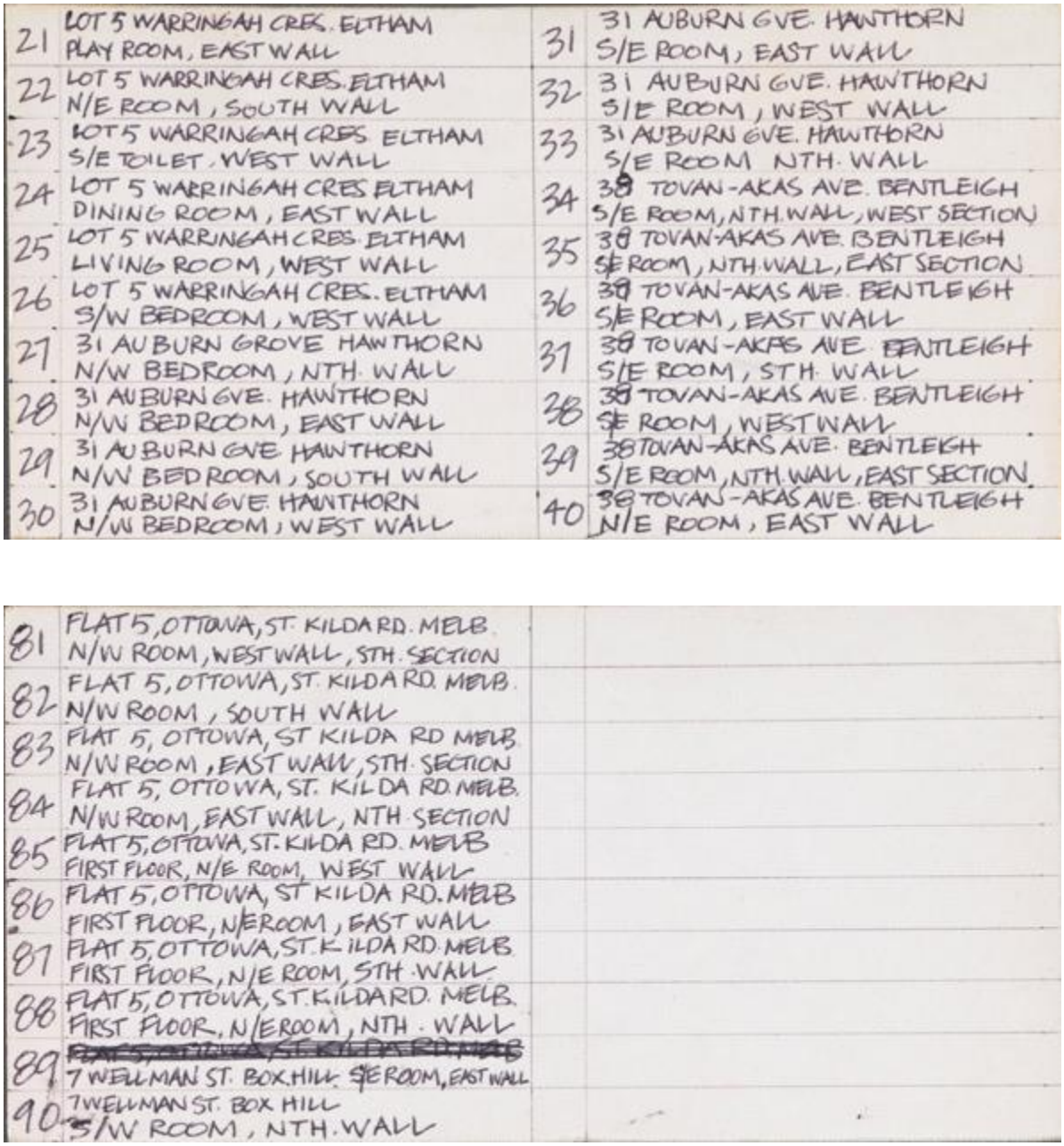

Figure 3.6: Dale Hickey, *90 White Walls* (detail), 1970.

Figure 4.1: (from left) Dale Hickey, Robert Rooney and Simon Klose at Pinacotheca, Richmond, 1973.

Figure 4.2: Dale Hickey, *Cup Painting*, 1972–73.

Figure 4.3: Dale Hickey, *Cup Paintings*, 1972–73.

Figure 4.4: Dale Hickey, *Cup Painting*, 1972–73.

Figure 4.5: Dale Hickey, *Cup Painting*, 1972–73.

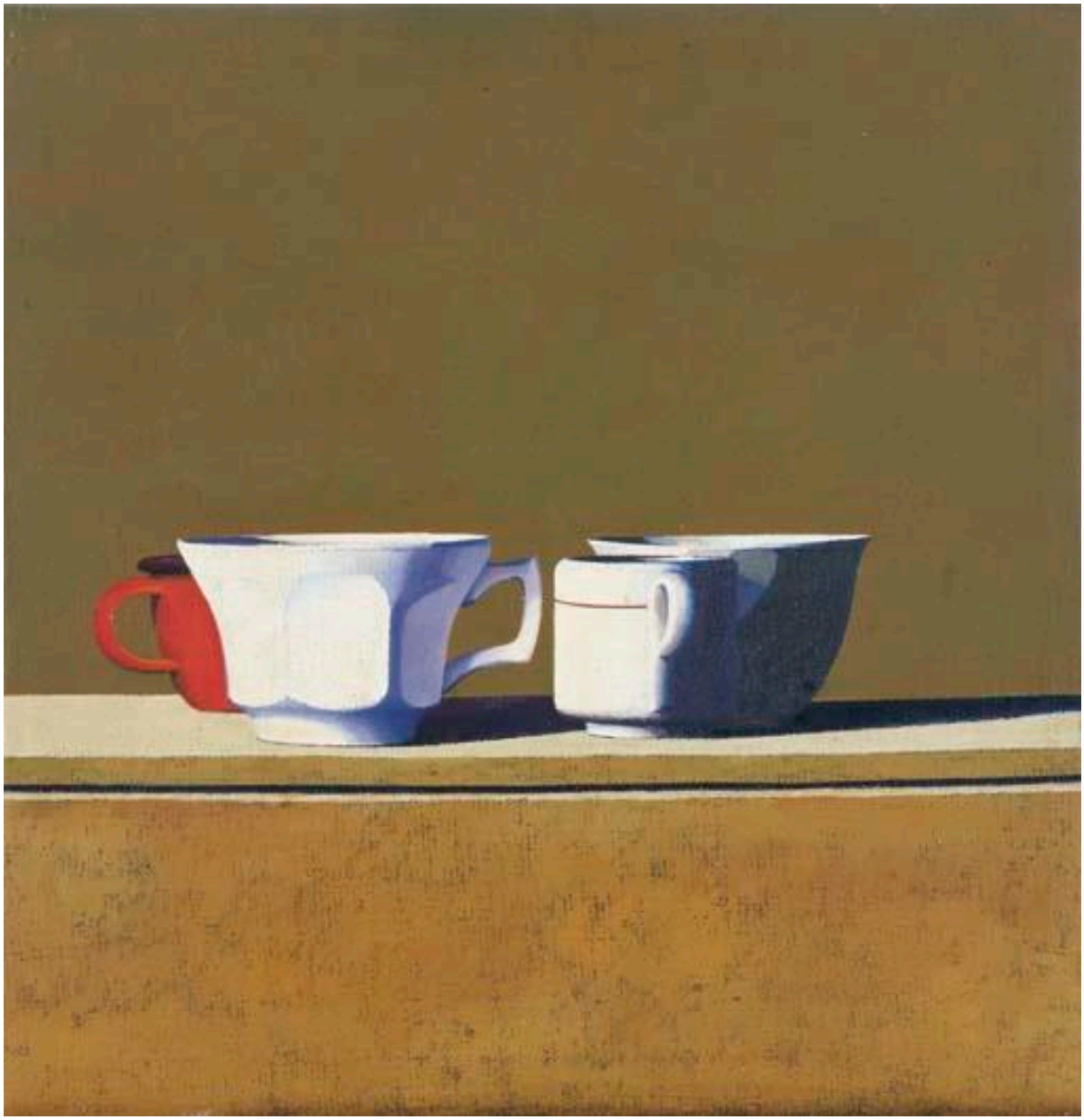

Figure 4.6: Dale Hickey, *Cup Painting*, 1972-73.

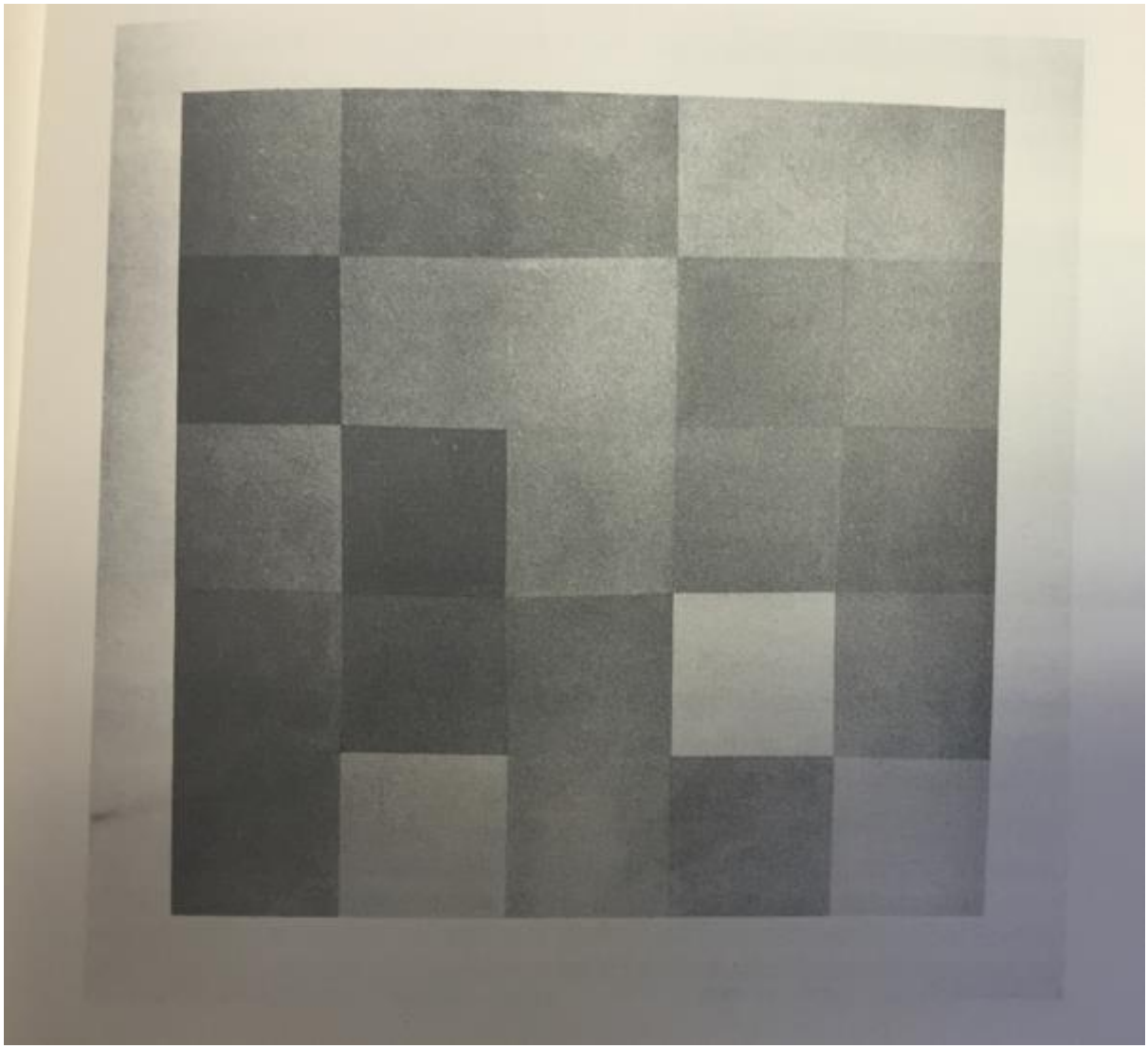

Figure 5.1: Robert Hunter, *Untitled (John Hunter)*, 1966–67.

Figure 5.2: Robert Hunter, *Untitled (Logan)*, 1966–67.

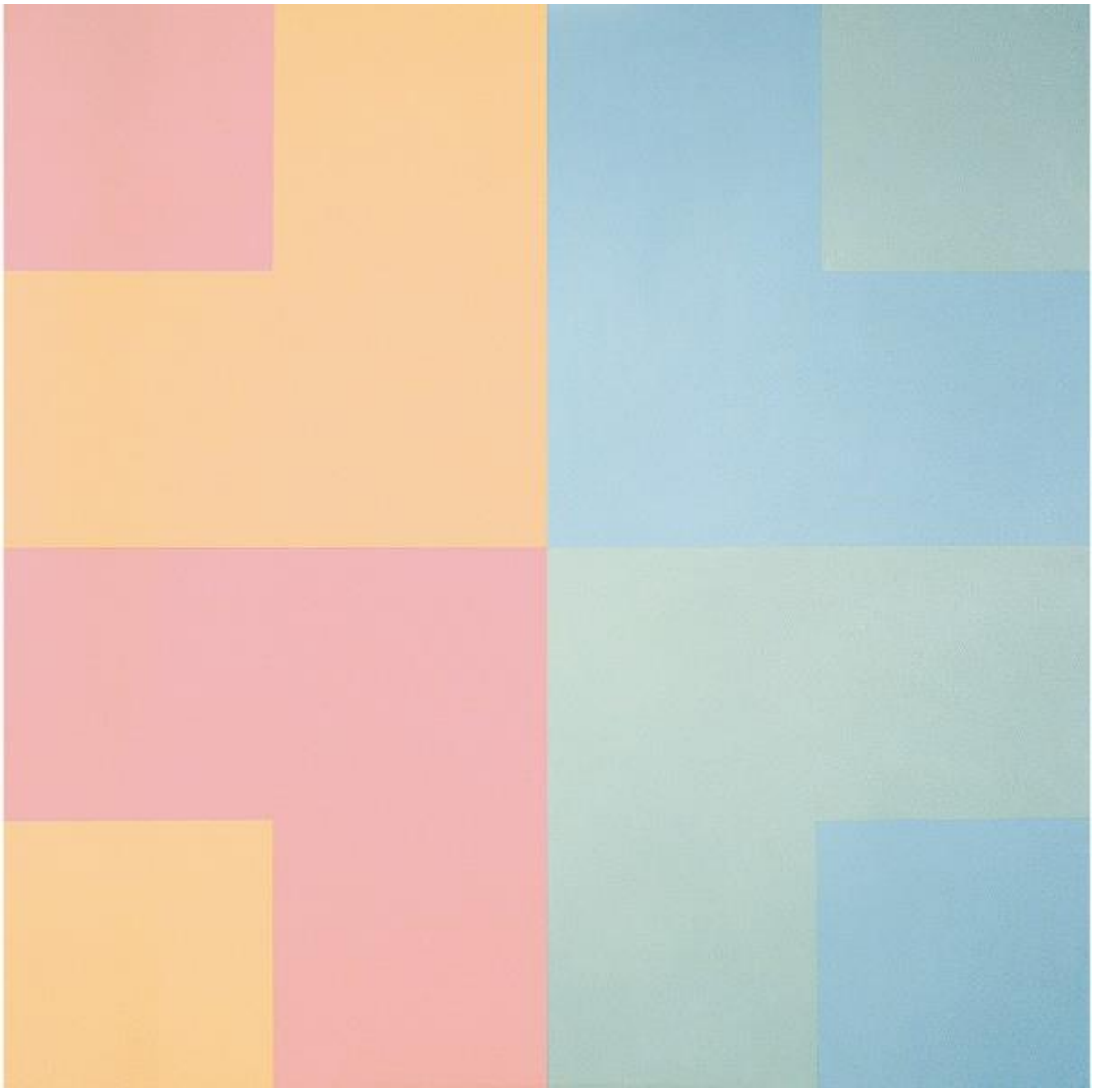

Fig. 5.3: Robert Hunter, *Untitled (Wesfarmers)*, 1966–67.

Figure 5.4: Robert Hunter, ‘white paintings’ (1968). Installation view: *Robert Hunter: Paintings 1966–2013*. N.G.V., 2018.

Figure 5.5: Robert Hunter, *Untitled No. 4*, 1968.

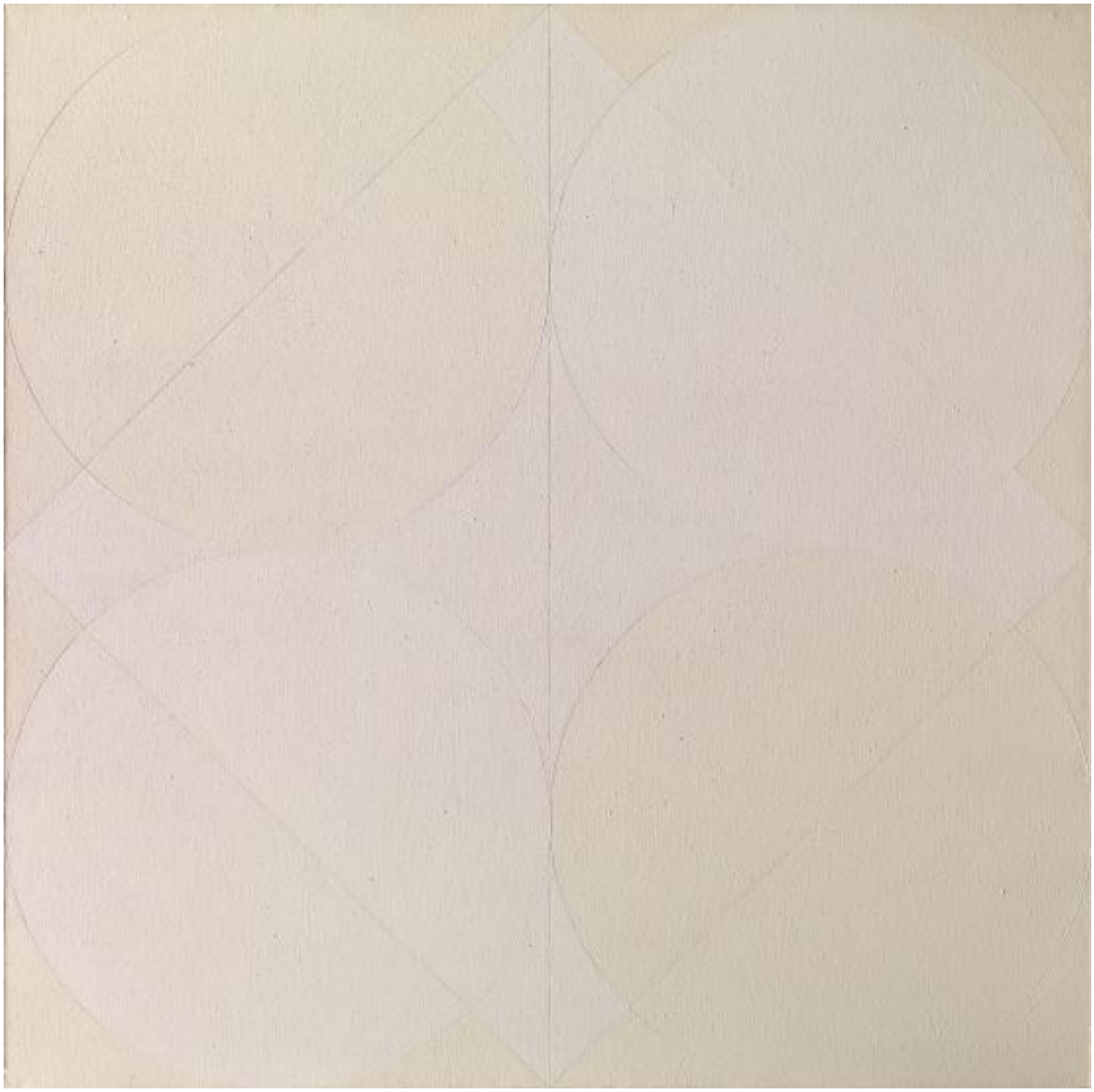

Figure 5.6: Robert Hunter, *Untitled No. 8,* 1968.

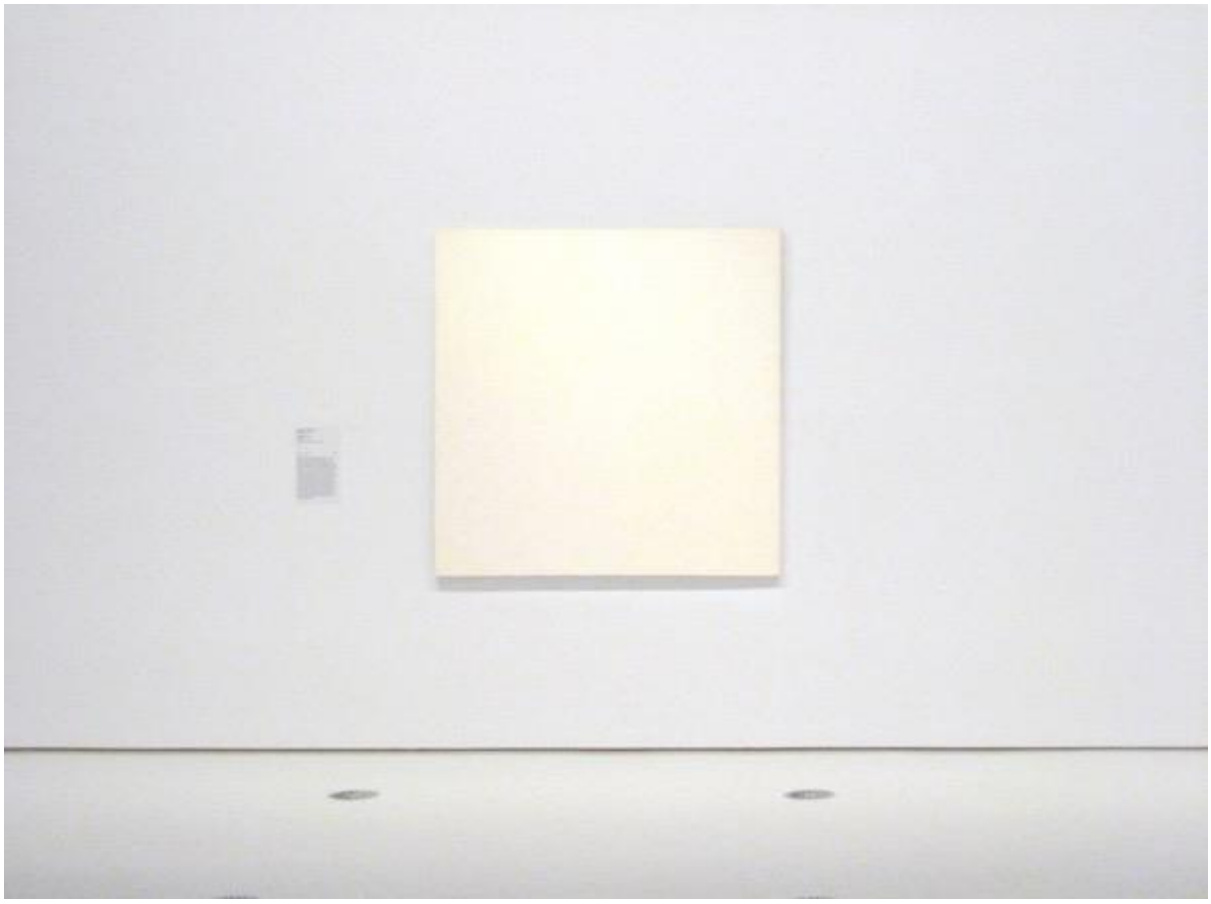

Figure 5.7: Robert Hunter, *Untitled No. 8*, 1968, National Gallery of Victoria. Photograph by Greg Neville.

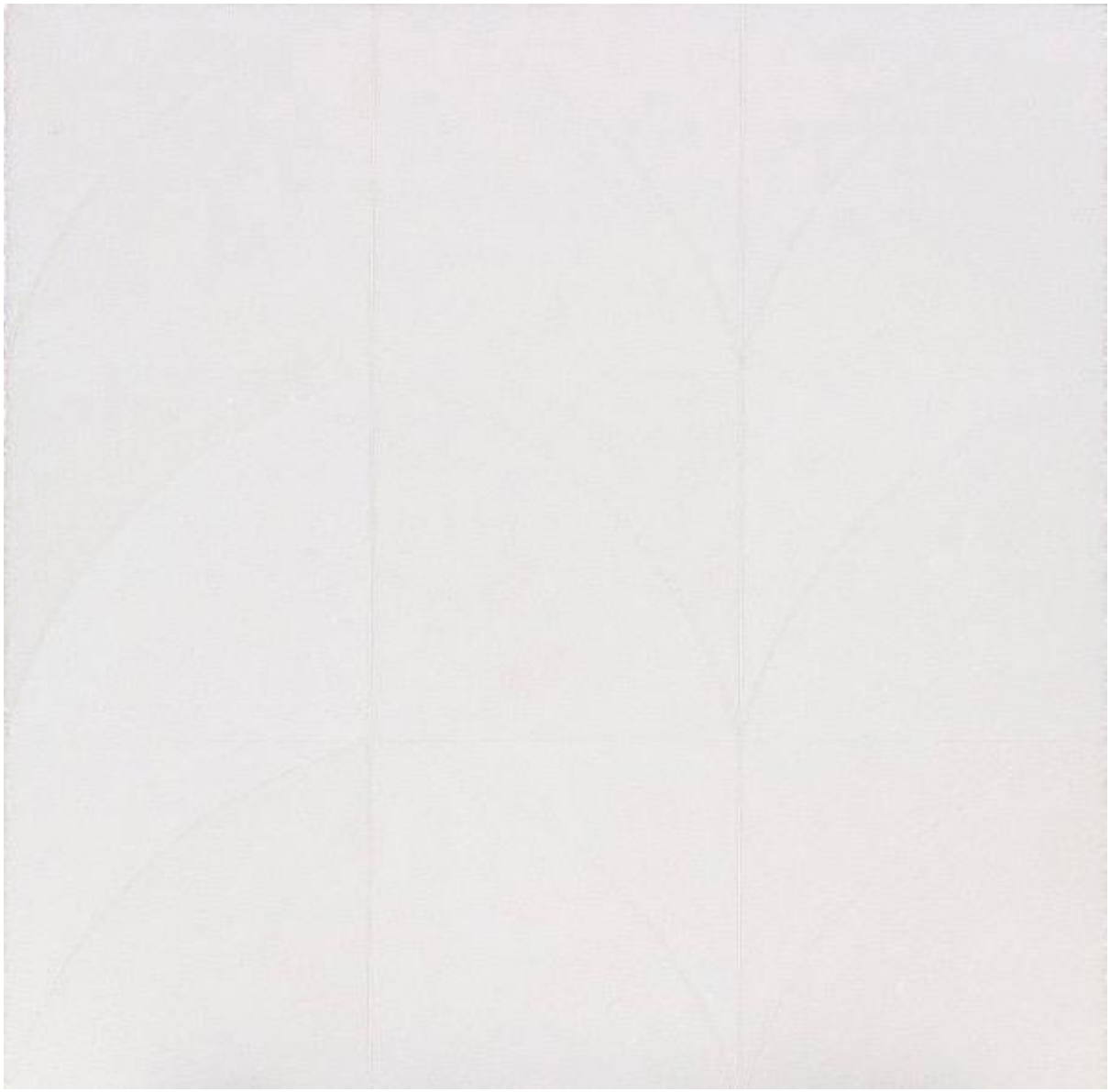

Figure 5.8: Robert Hunter, *Untitled No. 6,* 1968.

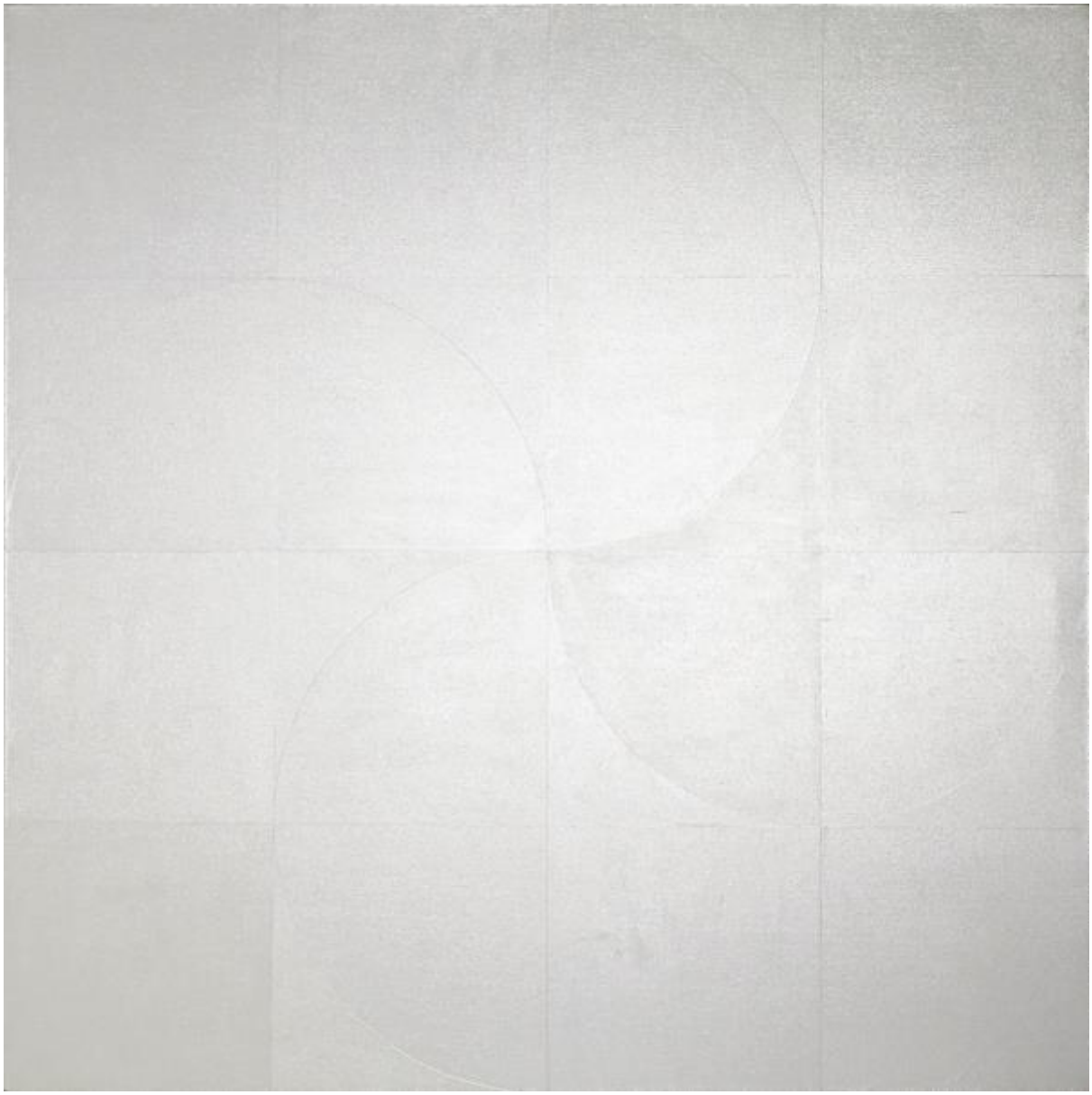

Figure 5.9: Robert Hunter, *Untitled No. 11,* 1968.

10 BALM NEWS

AN ARTIST WORKS IN SPRUCE

WORKING in a most individual style, Robert Hunter of Melbourne is producing a most eye-catching and interesting series of paintings.

Robert is 21 years old and studied industrial design and fine arts at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

The rectilinear design of the paintings uses patches of colour in regular or irregular patterns to create atmosphere and express emotion.

Robert first stretches his canvas on a frame, and covers it in DULUX 100% Acrylic Wundercoat as a base for his colours.

He mixes his own colours with artists' pigments in DULUX Spruce Vivid White.

Robert Hunter

SPRUCE AT THE

SHE WEARS A COAT

Figure 6.1: 'An Artist Works in Spruce,' *Balm News* 13, no. 3 (March 1968), 10.

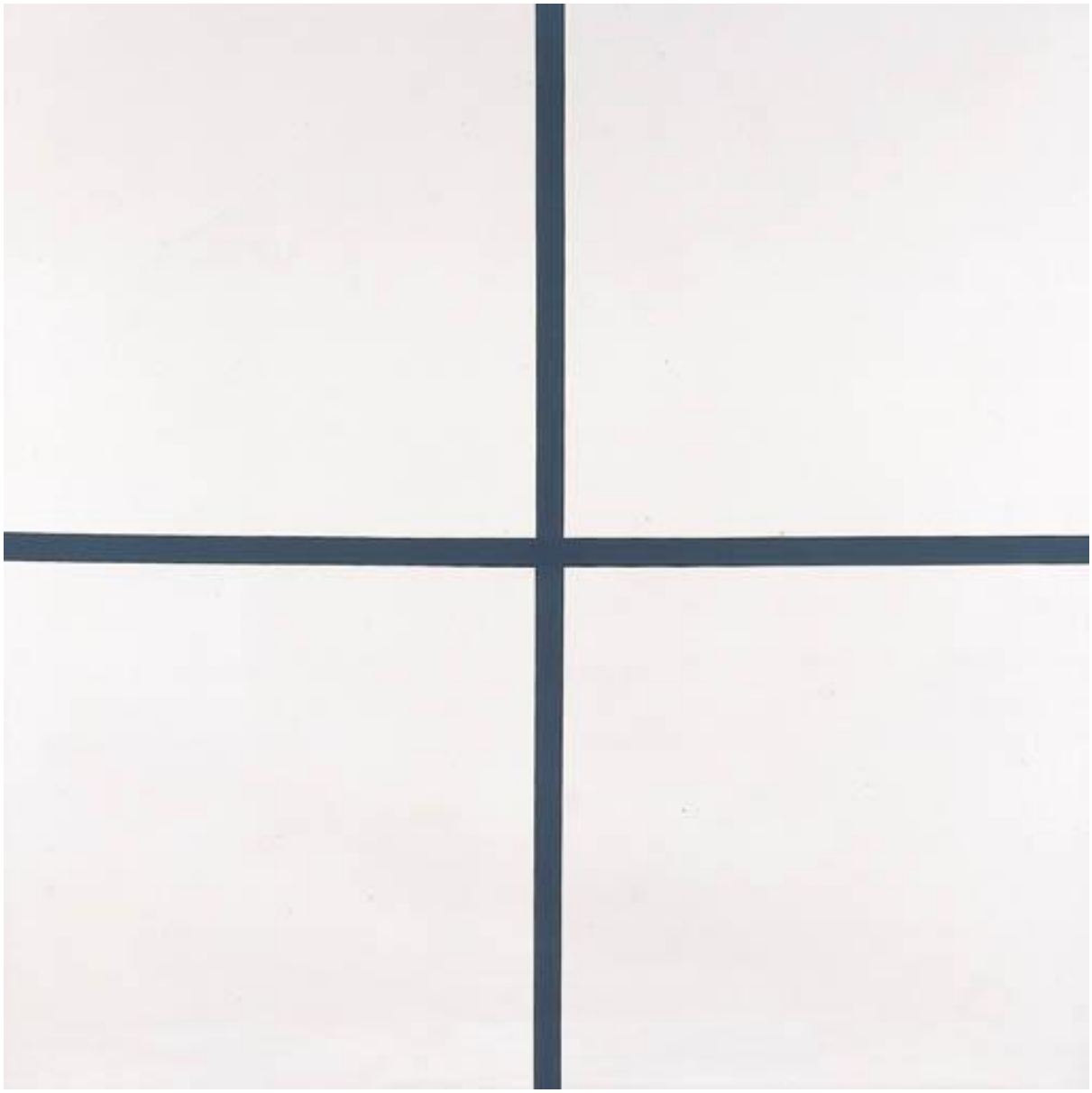

Figure 6.2: Robert Hunter, *Untitled*, 1969.

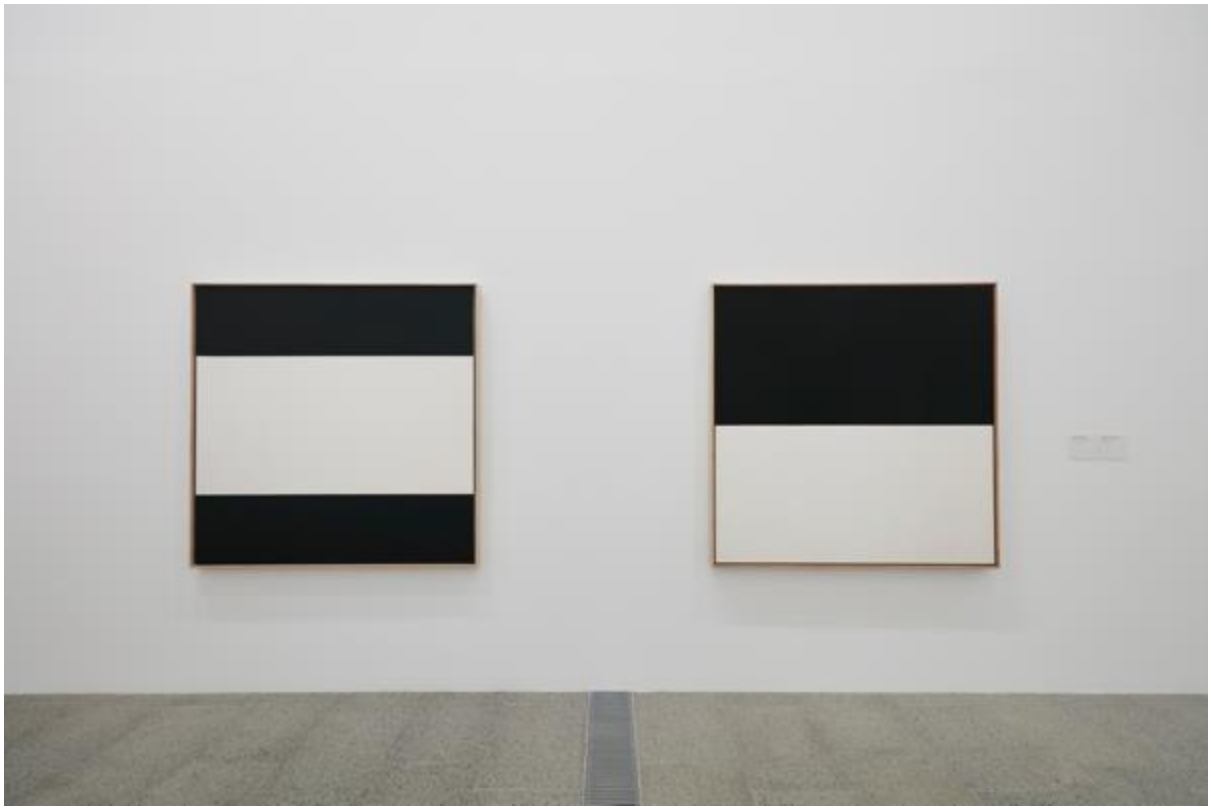

Figure 6.3: Robert Hunter, *Untitled*, 1969 and *Untitled*, 1969. Installation view: *Robert Hunter: Paintings 1966–2013*. N.G.V., 2018.

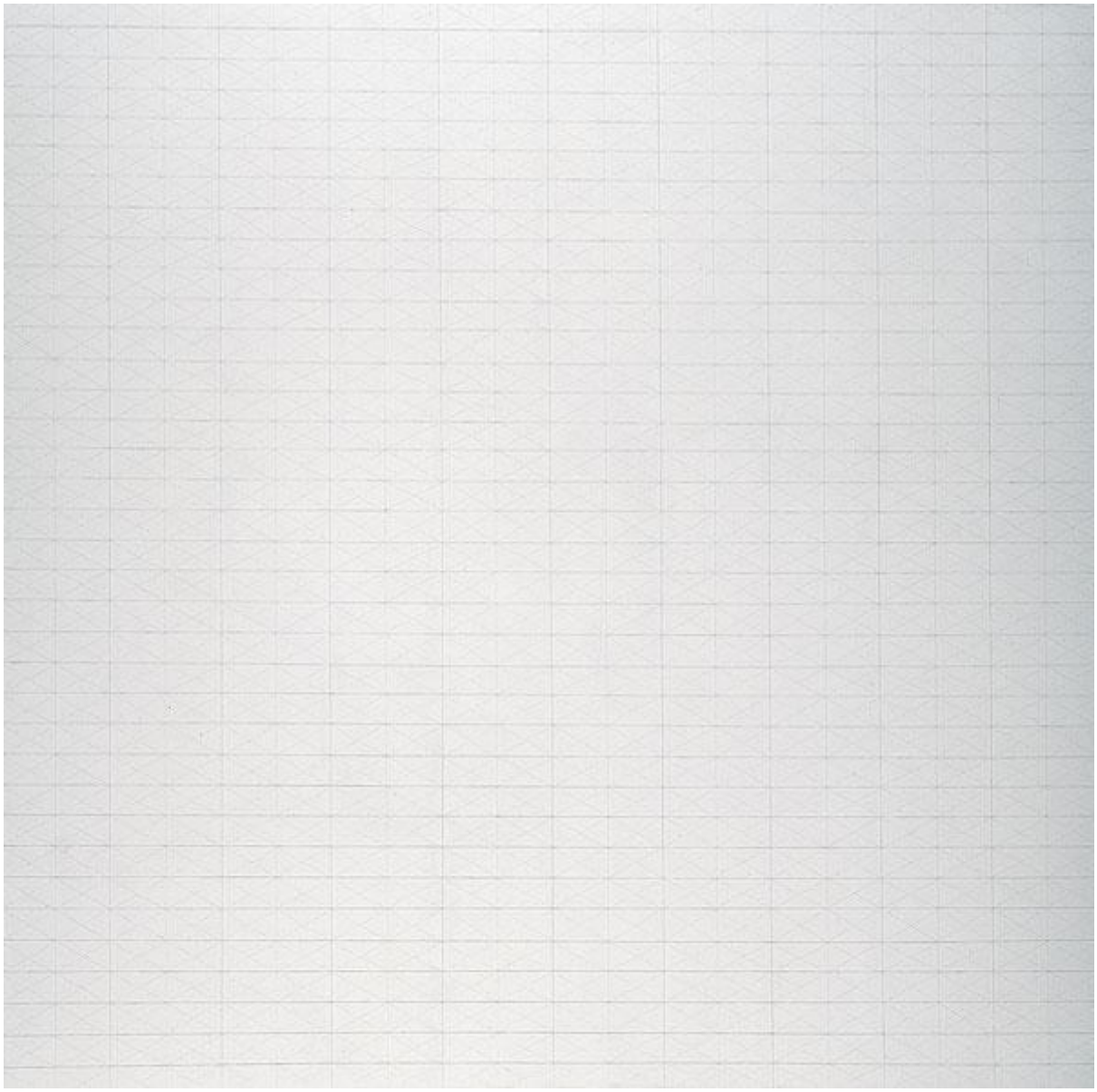

Figure 6.4: Robert Hunter, *Untitled (Thread Painting)*, 1970-76.

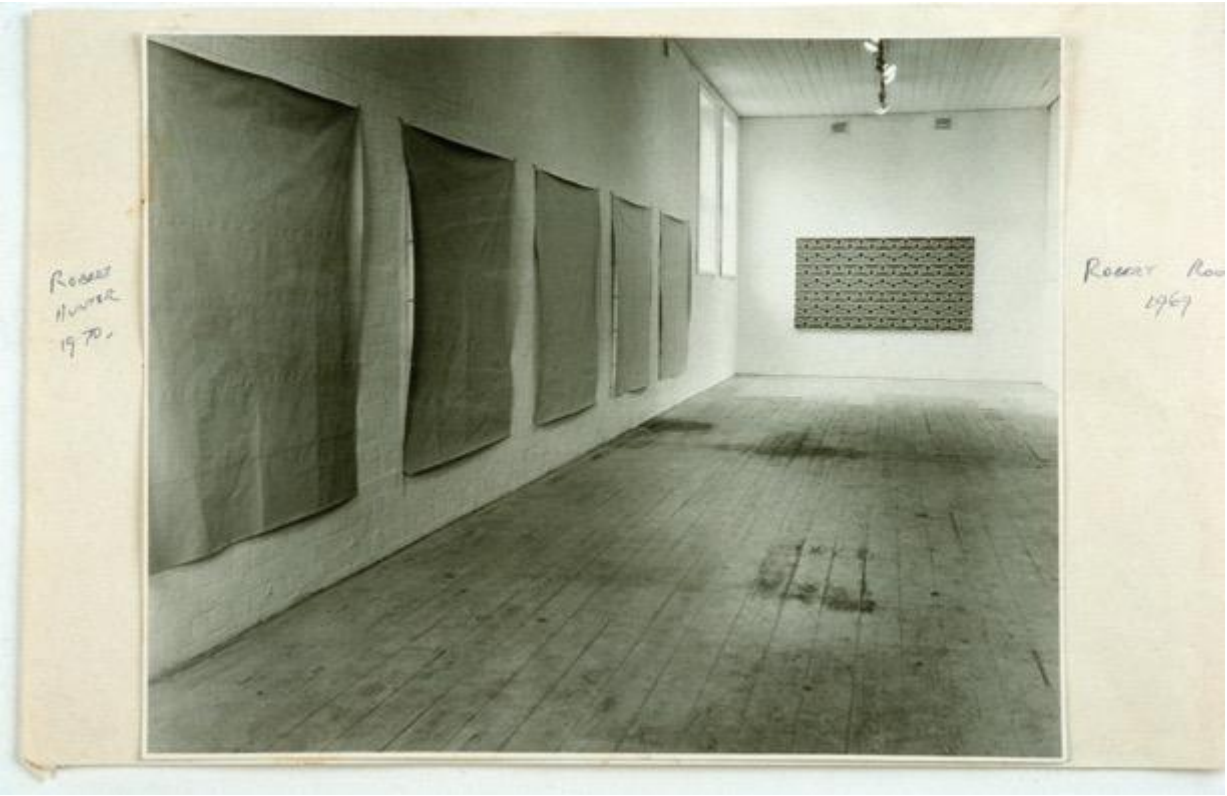

Figure 6.5: Left: Robert Hunter, *Untitled (Paper Painting)*, 1970. Right: Robert Rooney, *Superknit 1*, 1969. Installation view: Pinacotheca exhibition, June 1970.

Figure 6.6: Robert Hunter, *Untitled (Paper Painting)*, 1970. Installation view: *Minimal Art*, N.G.V., 1976.

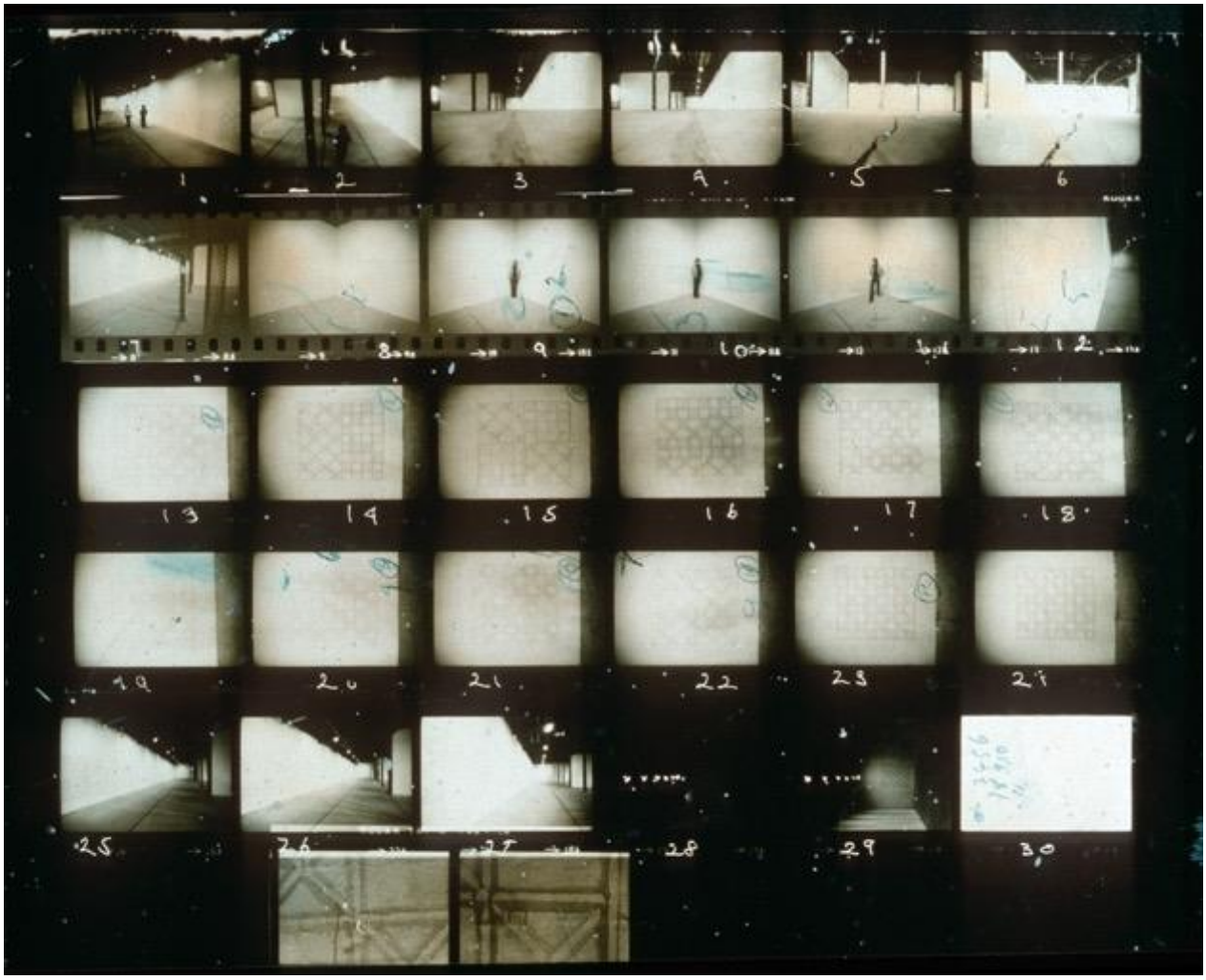

Figure 7.1: Contact sheet with documentation of Robert Hunter exhibition at Pinacotheca, July 1970.

Figure 7.2: Installation view: Mike Brown, *Planet X* (featuring Hunter's original wall painting), Pinacotheca, 1971

Figure 7.3: Robert Hunter, *Untitled*, 1971, New Delhi Triennial.

Figure 7.4: Robert Hunter, New Delhi Triennial, 1971.

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